

Medea's Four Reasons

Marco Gemin

A CLEAR CORRESPONDENCE can be detected between Gorgias' *Encomium of Helen* and Euripides' *Medea*, which seems never to have been noted. It demonstrates once again the close connection between Euripidean text and Sophistic discourse. It also offers an opportunity for some reflections on both texts.¹

In his *Encomium*, Gorgias gives four alternative reasons for Helen abandoning home to follow her foreign love (*Hel.* 20):

εἴτ' <ὄψει> ἐρασθεῖσα εἴτε λόγῳ πεισθεῖσα εἴτε βία ἀρπασθεῖσα εἴτε ὑπὸ θείας ἀνάγκης ἀναγκασθεῖσα ἔπραξεν ἢ ἔπραξε.

She did what she did through falling in love or persuaded by speech or ravished by force or constrained by divine constraint.

In any case she is not guilty, because an overwhelming force obliged her to do it; so she had no choice, whichever was the power that overcame her. Gorgias' text consists precisely in the successive examination of the four possibilities, each time denying any responsibility to the heroine. He particularly focuses on

¹ Gorgias: text, L. Càffaro, *Gorgia, Encomio di Elena. Apologia di Palamede* (Florence 1997) 18–78; I also consulted M. Untersteiner, *Sofisti. Testimonianze e frammenti II* (Florence 1949) 88–113; F. Donadi, *Gorgia, Encomio di Elena* (Rome 1982); D. M. MacDowell, *Gorgias, Encomium of Helen* (Bristol 1982); T. Buchheim, *Gorgias von Leontinoi, Reden, Fragmente und Testimonien* (Hamburg 1989) 2–17; S. Maso and C. Franco, *Sofisti: Protagora, Gorgia, Dissoi Lógoi* (Bologna 1995) 132–143; G. Paduano, *Gorgia, Encomio di Elena* (Naples 2004). I could not see R. Ioli, *Gorgia, Testimonianze e frammenti* (Rome 2013). Transl., G. Kennedy, in R. K. Sprague (ed.), *The Older Sophists* (Columbia 1972) 50–54. *Medea*: text, D. J. Mastronarde, *Euripides, Medea* (Cambridge 2002); transl., D. Kovacs, *Euripides, Cyclops. Alcestis. Medea* (Cambridge 1994) 294–427.

the power of speech (8–14), and we may consider the whole text an encomium to *logos*, and to anyone who can so skillfully use it. Gorgias pretends that it is just a game (παίγνιον, 21), but one can legitimately suspect that it is much more than this;² indeed, it emerges as a striking example of the possibility of demonstrating any thesis, even the hardest to defend.

Helen's innocence of course had a long literary tradition; here it is enough to mention Sappho's 'apology'.³ But in Gorgias' text there is something different: not only the adherence to a mythical model, as in the case of the poetess, but a speculation on the nature of being: if Helen is to be declared innocent, against the mainstream tradition, the good speaker must be able to achieve it, appealing to any useful, carefully chosen argument.⁴ In the end, as the description of the *Encomium* as a game shows, it does not matter whether Helen is guilty or not; what matters is to demonstrate her innocence through a skillful speech. We should not forget that, in Gorgian perspective, *logos* is effective on opinion, truth being usually unreachable.⁵ So the

² M. Untersteiner, *I sofisti*² (Milan 1967) 184, speaks of "il tragico del conoscere" for Helen (who is shaped by Gorgias as a tragic character) and concludes: "L'*Elena* è, pertanto, un'opera seria, anche se egli la chiama scherzo, passatempo (παίγνιον)."

³ Fr.16 V. For an overview, Homeric precedents, and Aeschylean elaboration see Paduano, *Gorgia* 3–23.

⁴ T. Cole, "Le origini della retorica," *QUCC* 23 (1986) 7–21, at 8–12, demonstrated that Gorgias' speeches also worked as models for students of rhetoric. H. Yunis, "The Constraints of Democracy and the Rise of the Art of Rhetoric," in D. Boedeker and K. A. Raaflaub (eds.), *Democracy, Empire, and the Arts in Fifth-Century Athens* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2008) 223–240, at 235, includes Gorgias' speeches—along with texts like *Dissoi Logoi* and Antiphon's *Tetralogies*—in what he calls "antithetical argument": "In Gorgias' *Helen* and *Palamedes* the speaker advocates one side of a famous debate in which an opposite argument must be presupposed. The antithetical implications were realized when a response was provoked; Alkidamas' *Odysseus*, for example, in prosecution of Palamedes, responds to Gorgias' *Palamedes*, which defended the accused."

⁵ The impossibility of reaching the truth is stated in Gorgias' other ora-

demonstration of Helen's innocence is a matter of words, not a matter of fact; it involves opinion, not truth. Helen may be truly innocent but we shall never know it.

We do know that Gorgias demonstrated her innocence in a formally unexceptionable way. After defining four possible reasons and examining each, he ends by finding her with no responsibility, and so innocent. Gorgias may think this is true or not, but that is not the point; in any case, he created an irreproachable speech, which should therefore be convincing, at least from a formal point of view. The provocative argument makes it hardly believable, but that is part of the game (παίγνιον): the author probably amused himself by writing a speech which cannot be proved false but perhaps is. That has also philosophical implications: words and reality are two different worlds, with a few contacts; it is a tragic vision, as Untersteiner well realized. The speaker can sustain something which is not necessarily true; rather, he should be always convincing, because that is what a good speaker is required to be. It seems clear that Gorgias is not much troubled by Helen's action; on the contrary, he works hard to improve her reputation, analyzing the chief plausible reasons why she did what people usually reproach her for.⁶

tion (*Pal.* 35), but we can infer a similar view in the *Encomium* as well (*Hel.* 11); cf. Untersteiner, *I sofisti* 185, 208.

⁶ On the Sophists see W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* III.1 (Cambridge 1969; = *The Sophists* [1971]); G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement* (Cambridge 1981); on Gorgias also S. P. Consigny, *Gorgias, Sophist and Artist* (Columbia 2001). On Helen's responsibility, A. Tordesillas, "Gorgias et la question de la responsabilité d'Hélène," in F. Alesse et al., (eds.), *Anthropine sophia. Studi di filologia e storiografia filosofica in memoria di Gabriele Giannantoni (Elenchos 50 [2008])* 45–54. On the magical power of *logos*, which I cannot treat here, a good starting point is J. de Romilly, "Gorgias et le pouvoir de la poésie," *JHS* 93 (1973) 155–162. On deception, W. J. Verdenius, "Gorgias' Doctrine of Deception," in *The Sophists and their Legacy (Hermes Einzelschr. 44 [1981])* 116–128. For some different interpretations of the *Encomium*—with which I basically disagree—see G. Bona, "Λόγος e ἀλήθεια nell'Encomio di Elena di Gorgia," *RivFil* 102 (1974) 5–33; J. Poulakos, "Gor-

A similar fragmentation of reality (i.e., different interpretations of the same event, opinions ruling the world of experience, truth rarely found) can be recognized in another text, chronologically close.⁷ In Euripides' *Medea* we can find the exact four reasons provided by Gorgias for Helen. Before examining them, we should consider the general situation. Medea, like Helen, leaves her family and home to follow a foreign love; the roles are inverted, as here the barbarian woman follows Jason, the Greek hero, while the Greek Helen leaves for the Trojan Paris, but the situation is quite similar. In both cases we have a contrasted relationship between Greece and Asia, causing the disruption of the original home and disasters elsewhere.

gias' *Encomium to Helen* and the Defense of Rhetoric," *Rhetorica* 1 (1983) 1–16; M. Gagarin, "Did the Sophists Aim to Persuade?" *Rhetorica* 19 (2001) 275–291; D. G. Spatharas, "Patterns of Argumentation in Gorgias," *Mnemosyne* 54 (2001) 393–408.

⁷ *Medea* was first staged in 431. The date of *Encomium* is debated. For C. Segal, "Gorgias and the Psychology of the Logos," *HSCP* 66 (1962) 99–155, at 100, "It belongs, at any rate, in the last quarter of the fifth century"; but as he notes, the argument depends on connections with some Euripidean dramas, specifically *Troades* (415) and *Helen* (413). Cf. M. L. Orsini, "La cronologia dell'*Encomio di Elena* di Gorgia e le *Troiane* di Euripide," *Dioniso* 19 (1956) 82–88; G. Basta Donzelli, "La colpa di Elena: Gorgia ed Euripide a confronto," in L. Montoneri and F. Romano (eds.), *Gorgia e la sofistica* (*SicGymn* 38 [1985]) 389–409, with an appendix on chronology; G. Mazzara, *Gorgia. La retorica del verosimile* (Sankt Augustin 1999) 162–189. It has also been connected to a presumed Aeschylean production: F. Donadi, "Gorgia, Elena 16 (Quel quattrocentocinque)," *BIFG* 4 (1977/8) 48–77. But, as I show here, *Medea* is related to the Gorgian text more closely than any other drama here mentioned. So if this is accepted as a method for dating, the date of *Encomium* could be earlier, even in the 430s. As noted by Segal (99 n.6), Diels also dated—with different arguments—Gorgias' strictly rhetorical production to the 430s: H. Diels, "Gorgias und Empedokles," *SBBerl* (1884) 343–368, at 359–360 (repr. C. J. Classen [ed.], *Sophistik* [Darmstadt 1976] 351–383, at 371–373). But we should be very cautious about deducing a chronology from textual similarities; they could simply testify to a thematic connection.

Now we can examine what reasons are adduced in Euripides' drama to explain and/or justify why Medea "did what she did," to put it in Gorgian terms—why she left home and betrayed her family to follow Jason. It is all about love, the Nurse says. At the very beginning of the play, she comes on stage and explains the situation to the audience (*Med.* 6–8):

- 1) οὐ γὰρ ἂν δέσποιν' ἐμῆ
Μήδεια πύργους γῆς ἔπλευσ' Ἰωλκίας
ἔρωτι θυμὸν ἐκπλαγεῖσ' Ἰάσονος

For then my lady Medea would not have sailed to the towers of Iolcus, her heart smitten with love for Jason.

She regrets the past events, which started the present tragedy. If Jason with his Argonauts has not reached the Colchian land, Medea would not have fallen in love with him. She was θυμὸν ἐκπλαγεῖσ', "smitten in the soul" (translation mine) the place affected by the phenomenon of ἐκπληξις, a physical transformation which can determine a change of state and opinion.⁸ This incidentally recurs in the *Encomium of Helen* (ἐκπλαγέντες, 16), where Gorgias describes the effects of an impressive view; the phenomenon would be worth exploring in both Euripidean and Gorgian texts, but discussion would take us too far afield.⁹ I focus on this first reason of Medea and its relation to Helen's first reason. They are clearly the same, if we consider that the ἐκπληξις suffered by Medea is not generic but is specifically related to love; accordingly, we can (simplifying) translate ἔρωτι θυμὸν ἐκπλαγεῖσ' as "falling in love." In the Gorgian text we find the simple ἐρασθεῖσα, so the match is complete.¹⁰

⁸ Segal, *HSCP* 66 (1962) 99–155, and Verdenius, in *The Sophists* 116–128.

⁹ It should be included in a broader reflection on persuasion in *Medea* (and possibly other Euripidean works), which would require a different paper. Here I selected the passages which can be immediately related to Gorgias' four reasons.

¹⁰ The conjecture ὄψει, proposed by Immisch in his 1927 edition and accepted by MacDowell, keeps the parallelism in Helen's different reasons, each defined by a participle and an instrumental dative; the only exception

Next in the series: in Euripides' drama, Medea comes on stage and portrays her situation to the Chorus of Corinthian women. So far from home, Jason has left her for a young girl, the princess of Corinth. Being abandoned now is even worse, considering that she was forced to follow him (255–256):

2) ἐγὼ δ' ἔρημος ἄπολις οὐδ' ὑβρίζομαι
πρὸς ἀνδρός, ἐκ γῆς βαρβάρου λελησμένη.

I, without relatives or city, am suffering outrage from my husband. I was carried off as booty from a foreign land.

The verb λήζομαι stresses the idea of violent conquest in Jason's action. According to this version, Medea has been roughly taken from home by a foreigner's fierce hands.¹¹ It is

is the last, wider divine reason, which breaks the predictable series by a magnifying superhuman extension. This parallelism is significant not only for style but more for substance: the different reasons are equivalent, if we look at the results, so they are mentioned with equivalent expressions, culminating in proper insistence on the all-inclusive concept of *ananke*. But if we do not accept the conjecture (so Untersteiner, Donadi, Buchheim, Maso/Franco, and Paduano), we can imagine the sole participle as a balancing element in the series of four, the first shorter and the last longer than the two in the middle, together shaping a chiasm with a climax. In this case, there may be a gradation from the least binding element to the most (*eros, logos, bia, theos*): although they seem to have equal effectiveness on Helen, they require a decreasing degree of participation from her in order to work. The opposite order appears in the parallel passage *Hel.* 6, also with textual uncertainty. I cannot address here the importance of ὄψις in this context. On the whole problem see F. Donadi, "Considerazioni in margine all' Encomio di Elena," in *Gorgia e la sofistica* 479–490.

¹¹ It is unlikely that Medea is speaking metaphorically, not only because of the context but also because of some parallel passages in Euripidean works. For the context: Jason came as a foreign conqueror, who in fact "carried off as booty" (the primary sense of the verb, according to LSJ) the most precious possession in Colchis' kingdom, the Golden Fleece. For other passages: the same verbal form occurs two more times, always in the sense of physical force (*Tro.* 373, *Hel.* 475). Both, moreover, refer to Helen: it confirms the connection between the two characters in Euripides. There is a problem of responsibility as to Helen as well: "And she was willing and not taken by force," Cassandra says (καὶ ταῦθ' ἐκούσης καὶ βία λελησμένης,

worth noting the Greek perspective in Medea's words: she speaks about her homeland as a "barbarian land"; talking to Greek women, she tries to assume their point of view. That is consistent with her general goal in this speech; she wants to win their favour, as she most needs their silence to accomplish her revenge, whatever it will be. It would have been harder to gain the Chorus' complicity if she said she willingly followed her beloved Jason. Far more pathetic is her self-representation as a victim of circumstances and of the violent world of men. So we can say that here Medea affirms that she was "ravished by force," like Helen in the third Gorgian reason (βία ἀρπασθεῖσα). In both cases the idea of rape through physical force is dominant.

Thus we see two reasons for Medea's action contrasting with each other: from the Nurse (1) we hear that Medea was in love with Jason and therefore fled with him; from Medea herself (2) we learn that she unwillingly left her homeland, raped by him. If we compare these two with the third, we find another possible interpretation of the same event. This time it is Jason's opinion: rejecting his debt to Medea (who effectively helped him acquire the Golden Fleece), the glorious hero declares that he must be grateful to Aphrodite and Eros only. The god forced Medea to fall in love with Jason, and consequently to do what she did for him, so she has no credit to claim from Jason, and he has no debt to pay, except to the god (526–531):

3) ἐγὼ δ', ἐπειδὴ καὶ λῖαν πυργοῖς χάριν,
Κύπριν νομίζω τῆς ἐμῆς ναυκληρίας

Tro. 373, transl. Coleridge). And when Menelaus learns that Helen is no longer where he left her, he wonders: "Surely I have not been robbed of my wife from the cave" (πότ'; οὐ τί που λελήσμεθ' ἐξ ἄντρων λέχος; *Hel.* 475, transl. Coleridge). In the first passage the verb is enriched with an emphatic βία, omitted in the second and in Medea's account (*Med.* 256). The sense of violence is always present, suggested by the action itself. Also Gorgias' expression (βία ἀρπασθεῖσα, *Hel.* 21) is emphatic; the verb would be enough. Formal reasons, metric or prosodic, may have had an influence on both authors for different choices in this case.

σώτειραν εἶναι θεῶν τε κἀνθρώπων μόνην.
 σοὶ δ' ἔστι μὲν νοῦς λεπτός· ἀλλ' ἐπίφθονος
 λόγος διελθεῖν ὡς Ἴερος σ' ἠνάγκασεν
 τόξοις ἀφύκτοις τοῦμόν ἐκσῶσαι δέμας.

Since you so exaggerate your kindness to me, I for my part think that Aphrodite alone of gods and mortals was the savior of my expedition. As for you, I grant you have a clever mind—but but to tell how Eros forced you with his ineluctable arrows to save me would expose me to ill-will.

Jason does not deny Medea's passion; he implicitly admits that it has been decisive for his own success and safety, but he refuses to ascribe it to Medea's credit, because the god is the only one responsible for her actions.¹² Like Helen according to Gorgias' fourth reason, she has been "constrained by divine constraint" (ὑπὸ θείας ἀνάγκης ἀναγκασθεῖσα). In this case the match is perfect, the verb ἀναγκάζω appearing in both texts.¹³

¹² Since the operation of Eros is love, this case might appear to fall in (1). The ambiguity is also in Gorgias, where Helen may be forced by a divine power (*Hel.* 6) or by erotic desire (15–19). Eros as god is not mentioned in the *Encomium* but which god would be more appropriate than Eros (and his mother Aphrodite, as already in Homer, cf. *Il.* 3.385–420) to force Helen? When Gorgias speaks of a divine power, we should think of Eros and/or Aphrodite first of all. In *Hel.* 19 we also find the hypothesis that Eros may be a god (or a human disease). The author has no interest in the explication of the partial overlap, i.e. the elaboration of the two aspects of Eros, divine force and human feeling. He quickly reports the possibility of a divine constraint (6), on which there is nothing to add; then he reflects widely on the human phenomenon (15–19), which is part of his main argument. The crucial difference with Euripides is the literary genre. In any drama, several characters speak. The nurse speaks of Medea's love in (1). Jason stresses the divine level in (3), mentioning not only Eros but also Aphrodite (Κύπριν) as the real maker of his fortune. Here in (3) the reason is Eros as god; it is *eros* as desire in (1). So in *Medea* the double aspect of Eros, divine power and human feeling, recognizable although not developed in the *Encomium*, is more clearly expressed, at different times, also thanks to the resources of stage drama.

¹³ Gagarin, *Rhetorica* 19 (2001) 281, also caught the resemblance between *Med.* 527–528 and the corresponding Gorgian reason.

A similar correspondence is also found in the last case, illustrating the power of *logos*. Later in the drama, Medea regrets the time when she paid attention to the deceiving words of a Greek man (800–802):

- 4) ἡμάρτανον τόθ' ἠνίκ' ἐξελίμπανον
 δόμους πατρώους, ἀνδρὸς Ἑλληνηος λόγοις
 πεισθεῖσ'.

My mistake was when I left my father's house, persuaded by the words of a Greek.

The correspondence is again perfect (*λόγῳ πεισθεῖσα*, *Hel.* 20). Medea's and Helen's four reasons match.

In this last passage we find something more. Medea is speaking to the Chorus once again, as earlier (*Med.* 255–256, (2) above). This time she is apparently saying something contradictory, compared with her previous version: in (2) she said she was physically forced, in (4) she says she has been deceived by Jason's speech. But if we follow the whole argument, especially keeping in mind the Gorgian parallel, there is no real contradiction. Being “persuaded by speech,” as both Helen and Medea say, is in effect like being “ravished by force” (or like any other reason mentioned above). The *logos*, as Gorgias himself affirms (*Hel.* 8), is “a powerful lord” (*δυνάστης μέγας*) who effects “the divinest works” (*θειότατα ἔργα*); it can transform the state of soul, introducing different feelings and therefore changing opinions. So we should not be surprised if Medea says to the same Corinthian women first that she was raped, then that she was persuaded by the same man. She may seem to be giving two opposite reasons, but she is not. Persuasion and violence were traditionally opposites; but Gorgias' provocative text made them equivalent.¹⁴ In the same decades,

¹⁴ “Now Gorgias maintains that she was irresistibly compelled, and therefore deprived of any αἰτία, even if the compulsion was only enacted through πειθώ, persuasion: and this despite the fact that βία and πειθώ were for his contemporaries the precise technical terms used to express the opposition between coercive and non-coercive behaviour, as the distinguishing char-

Euripides' Medea can legitimately affirm to the Chorus—and to the audience—that she has been ravished *and* persuaded at the same time. Of course in her last version (4) she no longer needs to gain the Chorus' favour, and so she can freely regret that she allowed Jason's words to affect her, to enter her soul. Perhaps this last version is more honest, but her earlier one (2) cannot be defined as false. It is only a different point of view on the same event, with different stress, according to the speech's goal, and to what we could call *καῖρός*, in sophistic terms.¹⁵

For Medea's other reasons, the situation is quite similar: Medea certainly fell in love, as the Nurse says (1), and Aphrodite and Eros probably worked on her to make it happen (if there is still a place for gods in the Euripidean world), as Jason declares (3). Jason also has a personal goal in his speech, to reject Medea's claim by removing from her the responsibility for her actions. In this sense he affirms something that he cannot directly know.¹⁶ Nonetheless he confidently proclaims that the

acters of tyranny and democracy, of slavery and freedom": G. Calogero, "Gorgias and the Socratic Principle *nemo sua sponte peccat*," *JHS* 77 (1957) 12–17, at 13.

¹⁵ G. Tortora, "Il senso del *καῖρός* in Gorgia," in *Gorgia e la sofistica* 537–553; A. Tordesillas, "L'instance temporelle dans l'argumentation de la première et de la seconde sophistique: la notion de *kairos*," in B. Cassin (ed.), *Le plaisir de parler. Etudes de sophistique comparée* (Paris 1986) 31–61. For a reconsideration of *καῖρός* in Gorgias see M.-P. Noël, "*Kairos* sophistique et mises en forme du *logos* chez Gorgias," *RPhil* 72 (1998) 233–245; for a different meaning in *Med.* 128 see J. R. Wilson, "KAIROS as 'Due Measure'," *Glotta* 58 (1980) 177–204.

¹⁶ It is usually a poem's narrator, not a character, who can show such knowledge, cf. Pindar *Pyth.* 4.213–217 on the Argonauts' adventure in Colchis: the intervention of Aphrodite in favour of Jason is objective, reported by the narrator as a matter of fact. I owe this observation to Prof. Mastro-narde. On the Pindar passage see P. Giannini, "Interpretazione della *Pitica* 4 di Pindaro," *QUCC* 2 (1979) 35–63, at 57–60; C. A. Faraone, "The Wheel, the Whip and Other Implements of Torture: Erotic Magic in Pindar *Pythian* 4.213–19," *CJ* 89 (1993) 1–19; S. I. Johnston, "The Song of the *inyx*: Magic and Rhetoric in *Pythian* 4," *TAPA* 125 (1995) 177–206; C. Brillante, "*Charis, bia* e il tema della reciprocità amorosa," *QUCC* 59 (1998) 7–34, at

god accomplished what Medea attributes to herself. Jason probably does not care at all if this is true or not; it is merely a good argument for him to use against Medea's position. As the good speaker that he is, in a sophistic sense,¹⁷ he pays attention not so much to truth as to persuasion. And he was persuasive, at least at the beginning, in Colchis, as Medea in fact reminds us (4).

In both of Medea's versions there is a stress on the ethnic element. Earlier (2) she defines her homeland as a "barbarian land" (γῆς βαρβάρου, 256), then (4) regrets having been persuaded by "a Greek man" (ἄνδρὸς Ἑλλήνοιο, 801). The first passage was discussed above. In the second, she may be referring ironically to Jason's previous declaration about the Greek world as the land of justice and laws. Moreover, Jason specifically opposes this Greek world to the "barbarian land" (Ἑλλάδ' ἀντὶ βαρβάρου χθονός, 536). Medea, speaking from the Greek point of view, as we have seen, stresses the contradiction between the civilized land and the deceiving *logos*, of which she was a victim. Nonetheless, once in Greece she reveals herself as mistress of such a deceiving *logos*, far more than Jason. Indeed she also deceives each character she speaks to, Jason included, with no exception. So in some sense she does share the Greek point of view. The same *logos* used by Jason with her in Colchis she uses with everyone in Greece.¹⁸

¹⁶ 10–16; on the poem, C. Segal, *Pindar's Mythmaking: The Fourth Pythian Ode* (Princeton 1986).

¹⁷ H. Rohdich, *Die Euripideische Tragödie. Untersuchungen zu ihrer Tragik* (Heidelberg 1968) 44–70, esp. 55–59, particularly emphasizes the sophistic aspect of Jason's speech; cf. D. J. Conacher, *Euripidean Drama. Myth, Theme and Structure* (Toronto 1967) 189. On Rohdich's interpretation as undervaluing the sophistic elements in his opponent Medea see A. N. Michelini, *Euripides and the Tragic Tradition* (Madison 1987) 41.

¹⁸ F. Solmsen, *Intellectual Experiments of the Greek Enlightenment* (Princeton 1975) 49–53, analyzes Medea's dialogues with Creon, Aegeus, and Jason as examples of *psychagogia*, "the conscious guidance of another person's soul" (47), or better "the cleverly calculated guidance of another mind toward the

We have an example here in the double version to the Chorus. Has Medea been ravished (2) or persuaded (4)? Both, we have seen. Does Medea lie while affirming at different times these versions? Not exactly—she is just presenting an event according to her own advantage. Is the Chorus deceived by her behaviour? Probably yes, if Medea's first version (2) had an influence on the Chorus' according her favour. Furthermore, while revealing (4) the contradictions of Greek civilization, divided between pretended respect for justice and ethically disputable behaviour, she also reveals part of herself. For she asks for respect from Jason, even while working to kill all the people around him (not to mention what she does with Creon, or Aegeus).

Jason keeps using the same deceptive *logos*, of course, as he successfully did in Colchis; now (3) he denies any responsibility to Medea, assigning it to the divine level, not necessarily because he thinks it is true, but because that is the best argument for him to prevail over Medea at the time. The Nurse's version (1) is probably the most simple and direct, introductory to the whole drama, but it invites the audience to enter a world of deception. We have three characters in four different situations, who report the same event in four different ways. Each time, the speaker, the listener(s), and the situation make the difference in the content; the message changes according to the persons and the situation involved, although the narrated event is the same.¹⁹

objective that the speaker desires but may not see fit to disclose" (55); as he notes, Medea herself reveals to the Chorus this practise when she admits that she is deceiving Creon (368–370). We are certainly in a 'Gorgian' context; for Gorgias and psychagogy see de Romilly, *JHS* 93 (1973) 161 n.41.

¹⁹ The four reasons are *equivalent*, in the sense that they are all irresistibly compelling, but they are certainly not *equal*. Their effectiveness is the same, although there may be a gradation (cf. n.10 above), but their nature remains distinct. Their distinction, precisely, makes them persuasive in different situations: each works in a specific context.

All this was possible, in an age when Gorgias could explain/justify Helen's ethically disputable action through four different reasons, all equally sustainable and completely exonerating. Helen's reasons are alternative—one is enough to demonstrate her innocence; the eventual truth of one of them automatically excludes the others, or at least makes them unuseful if not false. But “it *is* possible to imagine a scenario in which all four causative factors were co-present, all impinging, either in turn or at once, upon Helen”; and “The four ‘explanations’ may be reducible to four different, if comparable, perspectives on a single ‘event’.”²⁰

That in my view is exactly what Euripides did. The “scenario” imagined by Porter is in fact staged in *Medea*; Euripides dramatized a view also present in Gorgias' work, a fragmentation of reality, as I called it above, i.e. the possibility of interpreting the same event in different ways, so much that it becomes hard to recognize the one and only fact behind the many words.²¹ The theatrical medium is perfect for that: the author distributes the different opinions among various characters, each of them observing and reporting the same event from a different perspective, proper of him/herself.²²

So we can be sure that Medea followed Jason (also because we can see her on stage with him) but we cannot truly say why or how it happened. We can only listen to the various charac-

²⁰ J. I. Porter, “The Seductions of Gorgias,” *CLAnt* 12 (1993) 267–299, at 274, 276.

²¹ The mention of ἄμιλλα λόγων in both texts (*Med.* 546, *Hel.* 13) is also a remarkable correspondence in this context. For the *agôn* in Euripides see M. Lloyd, *The Agon in Euripides* (Oxford 1992); M. Dubischar, *Die Agonszenen bei Euripides* (Stuttgart 2001).

²² Pushing it further, we could say with Nietzsche there are no facts, only interpretations (“Gerade Thatsachen giebt es nicht, nur Interpretationen,” *Kritische Studienausgabe* XII 315). One of the main scholars of Gorgias also considered it worthwhile to deepen the connections between Nietzsche and the Sophists: S. P. Consigny, “Nietzsche's Reading of the Sophists,” *RhetR* 13 (1994) 5–26.

ters' opinions, often instrumental for their own purposes. They may all be true, at least in part.²³ By putting them together, we can have a kind of picture of the whole situation, approximately close to truth. In a similar way, we can only be sure that Helen "did what she did," but we do not know exactly why or how, do not even know if she is guilty or not, despite Gorgias' efforts to persuade us that she is not. As for Gorgias' Helen, so for Euripides' Medea, we can say she "did what she did through falling in love or persuaded by speech or ravished by force or constrained by divine constraint." Or better, all of them at the same time, depending on opinions.²⁴

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Rome
marcoggemin@gmail.com

²³ This may recall Protagoras' doctrine, as expressed in Plato's *Theaetetus* (167A), according to which all opinions are true. On the possible connections between Protagoras and Gorgias, regarding this aspect, S. Zeppi, "Il protagorismo gnoseologico di Gorgia," in *Gorgia e la sofistica* 491–500 (with which I partly disagree); and more generally in *Protagora e la filosofia del suo tempo* (Florence 1961) 95–125. On the *Encomium* as part of an antilogy see n.4 above.

²⁴ I wish to express my gratitude to Prof. Mastronarde for valuable suggestions and to the anonymous referee for challenging observations.