

BOOK REVIEW

Greek Drama and the Invention of Rhetoric. By DAVID SANSONE. Oxford, Chichester, and Malden, Mass.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. Pp. xi + 258. Hardcover, £66.95/\$99.95. ISBN 978-1-118-35708-8.

This book argues that the art of rhetoric in Greece was inspired by fifth-century Athenian tragic drama, and that any increase in rhetorical sophistication in tragedy was due to a coherent development within the genre itself rather than to the influence of orators or rhetoricians. The present reviewer's book *The Agon in Euripides* (Oxford, 1992) is frequently cited for the "standard view" with which Sansone disagrees, that the plays of Euripides in particular can usefully be related to rhetorical developments outside the theater.

No one now suggests that Euripides relied on a lost earlier version of the fourth-century treatise known as *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, as was argued by Thomas Miller in "Euripides Rhetoricus" (diss. Göttingen, 1887), but it was in the life-and-death contexts of the assembly and the lawcourts that new and effective arguments were most essential and therefore most likely to have been developed. For example, the hypothetical syllogism (e.g. "you should have done x, if you were not bad, but you actually did y") is needed to convince a jury at Lysias 12.32–3 but is addressed to someone who already knows the truth at Euripides, *Medea* 586–7. Sansone offers an interesting and detailed discussion of *prokatalipsis*, the anticipation of potential counterarguments (180–4, 192–204), while failing to make a convincing case that it was more likely to have developed in the theater than in the courts. He repeatedly notes that rhetorical devices appear in Euripides considerably earlier than in any extant orator (e.g. 148), but the accidents of transmission have no bearing on the direction of influence. He could also have looked more closely at the speeches in Thucydides, with dramatic dates going back to the 430s BC.

Sansone overlooks the ways in which the tragedians evoke the courts for dramatic effect. This goes back at least to Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, which is full of legal imagery and culminates in a trial by jury on the Areopagus. Euripides never portrays so formal a trial, but this "poet of courtroom cant-phrases"

(Aristophanes, *Peace* 534) recognized the dramatic potential of forensic debate. Hippolytus begins his defence speech in the agon of *Hippolytus* by saying that he is unaccustomed to addressing a mob (986–9), while actually talking to his father in the presence of fifteen far-from-unruly Trozenian women. The gambit has no meaning without its lawcourt resonance, which is reinforced as Hippolytus establishes his good character, appeals to witnesses, swears an oath, and develops an elaborate argument from probability. This speech is also good example of the self-consciousness which was a hallmark of the new rhetoric, manifesting itself in reference to the act of speaking itself (990–1), explicit subdivision of the speech (991, 1007, 1021), and point-by-point refutation of the opponent (991–3, 1002, 1008). Sansone’s discussion of rhetorical self-consciousness (155–9) fails to adduce anything on a remotely comparable scale in earlier authors, and he further confuses the issue by failing to distinguish reference by dramatic characters to their own speaking (as in Hippolytus’ speech) from their comments on the utterances of others or even the poet’s own self-consciousness about his art (e.g. 7, 156–7). Hippolytus is portrayed as a character whose fluency in the latest rhetorical devices will inevitably infuriate his elders, a striking example of the generation gap which was a notable feature of Athens in the 420s (*Hippolytus* was first performed in 428 BC, a year before the famous visit of Gorgias).

Sansone’s discussion of rhetoric occupies the second half of the book. The first half, which is as absorbing as the second half is flawed, deals in an original and discursive way with no less a subject than the essential nature of drama. Its ostensible relevance to the treatment of rhetoric in the second half is that the characters on stage were granted the eloquence that was previously the prerogative of the Muse-inspired poet, and that “counterpoint” between speaker and listener in drama inspired new forms of argumentation. This counterpoint requires the audience to pay attention to the characters who are not speaking as well as to those who are. Sansone stresses the distinctive and revolutionary nature of drama, criticizing attempts by Plato and Aristotle to obscure its differences from narrative. The quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon in the first book of Homer’s *Iliad* is frequently and subtly discussed as representative of the narrative mode, and there are especially interesting discussions of complex stage

situations in Sophocles' *Electra* and Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Sansone also has sharp and amusing words about the fashionable concept of performance culture, which further erodes the distinctiveness of drama: “[i]t seems that everyone in ancient Greece was performing, and they were doing it all the time” (78). The book is elegantly and often wittily written, with a wide range of cultural reference, and can strongly be recommended to anyone interested in the drama of any period.

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