

LE RANE

Collana di studi e testi

69

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La collana si richiama nel titolo alla celebre commedia di Aristofane e sollecita il recupero critico di capitoli dimenticati delle letterature e delle civiltà antiche. Elaborata nel dicembre 1988, in occasione dell'uscita del primo volume, la motivazione è rimasta tuttora valida, come mostrano alcuni volumi emblematici quali *Lo spettacolo delle voci* e *Studi sull'eufemismo* a cura di F. De Martino e A.H. Sommerstein (1995 e 1999). Molti dei 68 volumi pubblicati nei primi 30 anni sono di prestigiosi e riconosciuti studiosi europei, fra i quali Konrad Ziegler, Manfred Fuhrmann, Alan H. Sommerstein, John Dewar Denniston, Bernhard Zimmerman e Carmen Morenilla. Ma alla vitalità della collana hanno contribuito anche numerosi e promettenti giovani, da Massimo Pizzocaro a Filippo Argentieri, Pierre Voelke, M. Laura Gemelli Marciano, Simona Bettinetti, Damiano Ferri, di università italiane e straniere. Ad atti di importanti convegni internazionali, a Nottingham (1993 e 2003), Tolosa (1997), Foggia (2008) e Valencia (dal 1999 al 2017), si sono alternati classici della saggistica da *La mia scuola* di Manara Valgimigli con Premessa di Norberto Bobbio (1991) a *Lo stile della prosa greca* di John Dewar Denniston, con Premessa di Marcello Gigante (1993), a *Testo & palcoscenico* e *A tu per tu con gli antichi* di Umberto Albin (1998 e 2006). Di spicco anche i tre volumi della *Lirica greca* (1996), a cura di F. De Martino e O. Vox. Dopo la lunga esperienza con Levante editori, oggi in meritata quiescenza, la collana prosegue con Aracne, con inalterato impegno e con l'indipendenza critica di sempre.

Tragic Rhetoric

The Rhetorical Dimensions of Greek Tragedy

edited by

M. Carmen Encinas Reguero
Milagros Quijada Sagredo

contributions by

Giulia Maria Chesi, Francesco De Martino
M. Carmen Encinas Reguero, José Antonio Fernández Delgado
Maria Gerolemou, Ioanna Karamanou, Melissa Mueller
Elodie Paillard, Milagros Quijada Sagredo
Maria de Fátima Silva, Alan H. Sommerstein





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Introduction

M. CARMEN ENCINAS REGUERO*

There is no unanimous agreement on when rhetoric arises in Greece or under what circumstances. What is not disputed, however, is the relevance of this *technē* in Greek culture, just as the strong link between rhetoric and literature is undisputed. Theon, one of the few authors of whom *progymnasmata* has been preserved, says that “training in exercises is absolutely useful not only to those who are going to practice rhetoric but also if one wishes to undertake the function of poets or historians or any other writers”¹ (ἐστὶν ἀναγκαῖον ἢ τῶν γυμνασμάτων ἄσκησις οὐ μόνον τοῖς μέλλουσι ῥητορεύειν, ἀλλὰ καὶ εἴ τις ἢ ποιητῶν ἢ λογοποιῶν ἢ ἄλλων τινῶν λόγων δύναμιν ἐθέλει μεταχειρίζεσθαι, *Rh.Gr.* II, 70.25–28 Spengel). His work is usually located in the 1st century AD, but the idea that oratory ability is inherent to poetic composition and can improve with rhetorical practice surely already existed in classical times.

The Sophists, the great masters of that time, taught their disciples how to handle public discourse, especially in the forensic and political sphere, and therefore they were, above all, masters of rhetoric. But through their multiple teachings they also exercised a determining influence on literature, since “[t]he Sophists were part of a general convergence on to the

* Senior Lecturer in the Department of Language and Literature Didactics at the University of the Basque Country (Spain).

¹ Translation by G.A. Kennedy, *Progymnasmata. Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, Atlanta 2003.

city which certainly played a greater part than anything else in producing the unprecedented flowering of Athenian literature”².

Tragedy, of course, did not escape the influence of the Sophists or the new rhetorical teachings. That the degree of rhetorical sophistication of tragedy increased throughout the 5th century BC is something generally assumed and easily perceptible with the simple reading of the plays. However, what has been less unanimously agreed upon is the explanation of the relationship between rhetoric and tragedy. For a long time the presence of rhetoric in tragedy tended to be seen as a consequence of the development of rhetorical technique and, therefore, as the result of an influence from that *techné*. However, this view has been gradually corrected in recent times, to the point of it even being reversed. Thus, for example, Sansone goes so far as to affirm that “formalized rhetoric in Ancient Greece is, in effect, largely an outgrowth of Athenian tragic poetry”³. Surely both positions are partly right, since rhetoric and tragedy developed throughout the 5th century BC in a parallel way and it is very possible that in this process they influenced each other and collaborated in the development of the conscious and persuasive use of *logos*.

But when we speak of rhetoric, what exactly do we mean? In general, it is understood that rhetoric is a set of rules that are applied rationally to discourse in order to make it effective and to achieve the desired objective. Since the first preserved rhetoric handbooks, the *Rhetoric to Alexander* and Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, both of a disputed date but located in the 4th century BC, the effort to classify the rhetorical proofs, explain them and analyze them while theorizing about how speech should be composed from a rhetorical point of view is seen. However, in the 5th century BC, when Greek tragedy was being developed, we do not know exactly what the rhetorical theory of the time was like. It seems that there were indeed already some rhetoric handbooks or treatises available then (cf., for example, Pl. *Phdr.* 266d, Arist. *SE* 184a–b, Isoc. 13.19), but little is known about their content and it is discussed whether they in-

2 Cf. J. de Romilly, *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens*, Oxford 1992, 19.

3 Cf. D. Sansone, *Greek Drama and the Invention of Rhetoric*, Chichester 2012, 5.

cluded theoretical content or maybe they were merely limited to offering speeches that could serve as a model, perhaps speeches such as those of Gorgias, specifically the *Defense of Palamedes*, which constitutes a model speech about the parts into which the ideal judicial speech is divided, and the *Encomium of Helen*, which exemplifies how to argue with logical evidence and demonstrates that by being rhetorically skilled, even the most complex causes can be defended.

Although rhetoric in the strict sense seems only to have existed from the 5th century BC onwards, long before that time the concern for the development of good eloquence appeared. As is well known, already in the *Iliad* heroes are valued when they are great speakers of words and doers of actions (*Il.* 9.443), to the point that the battlefield and the agora are similarly described as the place where men win glory (cf. *Il.* 6.124: μάχητι ἔνι κυδιανείρηι; *Il.* 1.490: εἰς ἀγορῆν ... κυδιάνειραν). And, despite being a war-themed play, the fact is that the true protagonism of the *Iliad* corresponds to persuasion, since the play revolves around successive attempts at persuasion: to Agamemnon to return Chryseis and Briseis, to Achilles to return to combat, or to this same hero to return Hector's body. And that prominence of persuasion explains the relevance of the speeches in the poem. Despite all this, there was still no theoretical reflection on the use of *logos*: its use had to be intuitive.

However, the importance of oratory in the *Iliad* already indicates that, when the *techne rhetorike* arises, as it is believed, in the 5th century BC, it is not *ex nihilo*, but there is a background that undoubtedly helps its development. So probably the first rhetorical handbooks systematized, and developed, procedures and/or arguments that had already existed to some extent in earlier and contemporary literature.

Although the first impulses must have come from outside, from Sicily, where the first rhetorical handbooks must have had a practical nature related to judicial praxis⁴, the development of rhetoric in the Athens of the

4 Cicero in *Brutus* 12.46, and citing Aristotle as his authority, places the birth of rhetoric in Syracuse and links it with the contributions of Corax and Tisias. It is not known quite what the relationship between both was, although, according to some authors, it

5th century BC was also driven by the emergence of democracy. This was the regime that was imposed at that time and that created a society based on citizen participation in public decision-making through speech, which turned *logos* into the instrument essential to that new political regime. The role of the word allowed the access to power of a new social class; hence the training offered by the Sophists was so esteemed.

Yet, although it is indisputable that the rise of rhetoric was produced in close relationship with the democratic system and political activity, the fact is that rhetoric developed in the Athenian *polis* linked, above all, to the forensic genre and thanks to the activity carried out in the courts of justice, a sphere in which decisions were made collectively and the persuasion of the audience was what determined the decision taken.

In this sense, the similarity between this field and that of theatre soon became apparent. This was above all evident in tragedy, a genre in which *logos* becomes central and that revolves around a complex issue that is approached from different points of view and is analysed from different perspectives through words and argumentation.

Within this genre, the highest level of rhetorical development is found, as is generally admitted, in the tragedies of the late period and especially in those of Euripides, one of the three playwrights from whom complete tragedies have survived. He is unanimously considered as the one who most evidenced in his work the use of rhetoric (just as he was, in fact, because of his age, his character and surely because of his education, the most permeable to all the innovations of the time).

And yet, the truth is that, although less valued from a rhetorical perspective, the early tragedies of Sophocles and all of Aeschylus also contain examples of elaborate rhetorical uses, which affect not only the type of arguments used, but also the reflection on the problems inherent to communication. Thus, for example, the *Oresteia*, represented for the first time in 458 BC, shows a deep rhetorical imprint. Specifically, *Eumenides* reproduces a trial in which conflicting positions are faced whose arguments

seems that Tisias was a disciple of Corax and that it was he who collected the verbal doctrines of his teacher in writing.

already foreshadow the division between technical and non-technical evidence, and *Agamemnon*, which begins with the signal of a beacon in the middle of the night, turns largely around the complexity of communication.

Rhetoric in Classical times encompassed three elements, namely, εὔρεσις or *inventio*, τάξις or *dispositio* and λέξις or *elocutio*. In fact, consistent with this, Aristotle's *Rhetoric* essentially contemplates three functions, which are the compilation of persuasive arguments, their arrangement in discourse, and the style in which they are made (*Rh.* 3.1, 1403b5–7). And although in *Rh.* 3.1, 1403b20 ff. the Stagirite also refers to *actio* and recognizes its great importance, it is not until Hellenistic time when rhetoric definitely includes μνήμη or *memoria* and ὑπόκρισις or *actio*, and is thus formed by five elements.

However, although in Classical times those indicated are the three elements that make up rhetoric, this *technē* can be understood in a broad sense as meaning everything that implies a conscious use of the word to achieve persuasion. And when the study of rhetoric in tragedy is approached from a broad perspective, it can be seen in greater depth to what extent the Greek tragic poets were able to handle the word and reflect on its potential.

At the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), and thanks to various research projects funded by the State Research Agency or by the University itself, we have been studying the interaction between rhetoric and Greek theatre for a long time, in collaboration with scholars from different universities and countries. At first, our research focused mainly on late plays, since, as has been said, this is where rhetorical uses reach a more complex and elaborate development. Gradually, however, attention has also been directed, on the one hand, towards early authors and plays, and, on the other hand, to issues less present in rhetorical handbooks or less common in rhetoric studies, but nevertheless, closely related to the use of the word.

As a result of the work carried out in the last three years within a research project financed by the Ministry of Science and Innovation and

by ERDF funds, we have decided to publish this book, in which we delve into the study of the interaction between rhetoric and Greek theatre, but focusing exclusively on tragedy. Within this genre, we pay special attention to early authors and plays, as well as to less frequently studied themes or aspects. The result shows how this perspective continues to be enormously productive, because it not only allows us to see to what extent rhetoric is essential within the tragedy from the earliest preserved plays, which contributes to emphasize the role that this genre had in the development of the *techne*, but also, by focusing attention on the use of rhetoric, we penetrate the reflections of the tragic poet on the word and how it communicates, and this, ultimately, helps to better understand the mode of composition proper to the dramatic author, but, above all, it helps to deepen the understanding of each play.

Of the eleven chapters included in this book, there are three that focus exclusively on tragedies by Aeschylus. Specifically, two works analyze the rhetoric in *Suppliants*, the only surviving tragedy of the *Danaid* trilogy, which largely revolves around the opposition between force and persuasion, or, in other words, between *bia* and *peitho*. This is what A.H. Sommerstein points out in the article entitled “Persuadere parlando nelle *Supplici* di Eschilo” which highlights the way in which *Suppliants* focuses on the need for marriage to be based on consent and persuasion, and not on the exercise of power and force on the part of one sex over the other. On that basis, Sommerstein analyzes twenty-two attempts at persuasion in *Suppliants*, most of which turn out to be dishonest and ineffective. The comparison with the *Oresteia* leads him to suppose that perhaps persuasion (*peitho*) also underwent an evolution in the *Danaid* trilogy in which its effectiveness in the service of honest ends was progressively consolidated.

Like Sommerstein, G.M. Chesi (“Fe/male Rhetoric of Violence against the Woman’s Body in Aeschylus’ *Supplices*”) also takes stock of that opposition that occurs in the play between *bia* and *peitho*, but in her case the analysis carried out mainly emphasizes the way in which the sexual *bia* exerted on the Danaids through a forced marriage is presented as equivalent to rape. In this way, the play condemns violence in marriage and, by

reaffirming the authority of the Danaids over their own bodies, gradually defends the position that the principle that regulates the relationship between the sexes is *peitho*.

The third chapter devoted to the Aeschylean tragedies pays attention to two different tragedies — *Persians* and *Agamemnon* — and particularly to a very specific topic, the evolution of the messenger's character. Greek tragedy involves a strong clash of different points of view, in which the characters resort to rhetoric to defend partial positions. However, the characteristics of the messenger's speech, considered as being objective and impartial, as well as the narrative voice of the messenger, considered as being similar to that of the epic, seem to distance this character and his speech from rhetoric. However, these features are also used in the service of persuasion and reflection on the discourse. M.F. Silva ("The Art of creating a Messenger. Aeschylus, *Persians* and *Agamemnon*") points out the importance in tragedy of the messenger, in charge of transmitting events that occurred outside the scene and known to him from having witnessed them. It is precisely this condition of an eyewitness that explains the evolution of this character, who gradually increases his involvement in the emotional interpretation of the events. Thus, despite his anonymity, he becomes much more than a secondary character and, above all, moves away from his impartial role to accentuate his role as a focalizer of the events narrated.

Another of the early tragedies (although of a disputed date) that are the object of analysis in this book is Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. This tragedy is exceptional for different reasons, such as its diptych structure in which the main characters (Deianira and Heracles) never meet on stage, or Deianira's own character, who acts largely according to her emotions. The analysis of the play proposed by M. Mueller ("Bodily Rhetoric in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*") focuses precisely on this affective communication and on the way in which an emotion, specifically fear, affects decision-making. But, in addition, Mueller also highlights a very important issue, namely, the relevance of emotions transmitted in a bodily way and without the need for words.

The study of rhetoric in tragedies that are only preserved in a fragmentary way is also an interesting field of study, although enormously complex. I. Karamanou (“Shards from Tragic Rhetoric: The Agon Scenes in the *Alexandros*”) glimpses the use of rhetoric in *Alexandros*, a tragedy produced in 415 BC along with *Palamedes*, *Trojan Women* and the satyr-play *Sisyphus*. Specifically, the author, who in the past has defended the existence of two agon scenes in that lost tragedy, now analyzes their role and dramatic implications. According to her interpretation, both agon scenes took place before a third character, who acted as a judge, whose identity (Priam in the first agon, Hecuba in the second) emphasized the public or private dimension of the debate, although both areas are interrelated.

In addition to these chapters which are focused on specific plays, the book also includes contributions of a more general nature looking at relevant aspects related to rhetoric. Thus, E. Paillard (“Secondary Characters’ Rhetorical Skills in Fifth-Century Athenian Tragedy”) analyzes the rhetorical abilities of the secondary characters in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Euripides, paying attention to three questions: their qualification as speakers, success or failure of these persuasive attempts, and the use of deception. The author thus perceives an evolution according to which secondary characters tend to be more involved in the debates in late tragedies and their rhetoric thus being generally more effective, which may be due to dramatic issues, but may also have a cultural and historical explanation.

Rhetoric is based on the use of *logos*, so that the absence of the word, that is, silence, has traditionally received much less attention. However, in recent times, and especially since the monograph by S. Montiglio (*Silence in the Land of Logos*, New Jersey 2000), the analysis of silence has been gaining a deserved prominence. M.C. Encinas (“The Rhetoric of Silence in Greek Tragedy”) studies the use and value of silence in Greek tragedy and subsequently analyzes two outstanding examples in detail. On the one hand, the silence of Cassandra in *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, which is part of a key scene in the understanding of the play and the dramatic intentions of its author; on the other hand, Iole’s silence in Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*, which re-elaborates that of Cassandra, in a tragedy that, as

shown, rewrites and reinterprets the tragedy of Aeschylus to a great extent.

Cassandra and Iole are female characters who express themselves through silence. In fact, silence and the private or domestic sphere are associated in Greece with women, while rhetoric, since it is linked to the public sphere, is traditionally related to men. However, in the preserved Greek tragedy, there are many female characters who speak (it is estimated that around a third of the talking characters are women) and the studies carried out indicate that the speech of these characters is characterized, among other things, by a higher degree of emotionality. M. Gerolemou (“The Rhetoric of *Elpis* in Greek Tragedy: The Gender Dimension”) focuses his research on the rhetoric of hope (*elpis*) and the different way in which female and male characters use it. Specifically, female characters experience *elpis* as a wish and passively, while male characters exhibit a more pragmatic and fulfilling kind of hope. However, in the surviving tragedies there are examples of female characters who, disregarding the limitations imposed by their gender, display a “male” hope.

This chapter, like that of M. Mueller previously, focuses on rhetoric linked to emotions, and consequently in relation to gender. It is important to note that the Greek tragedies were written by men and therefore largely reflect the male view. From this masculine point of view, priority has generally been given to rational and public discourse, associated with men; however, changing the perspective and studying the emotional or affect rhetoric present in tragedy and linked to women is also of enormous interest, as these two chapters show.

In addition to silence or emotions, another area strongly linked to tragedy but scarcely studied from a rhetorical point of view is that of vision and the visual. There are two chapters that focus on this subject, albeit from very different points of view. Compared to the rest of literary genres, whether they were recited or sung before an audience, the theatre was performed, so that the public not only listened to the play, but also saw the development of the actions. The events took place in front of a large audience, which provided a different and novel way of experiencing the literary play.

But the “vision” of the events did not come only through the eyes, but could also come through the mind when the author was able to present something so clearly and vividly that the audience believed they saw it. In Greek this was designated with the concept of ἐνάργεια, a concept that gradually gained ground within rhetorical theory and that, as Nicolaus of Myra 68–70 says, sought to make listeners spectators. M. Quijada Sagredo (“The Concept of *enargeia* and the Terminology related to *enarges* in Greek Tragedy”) focuses her attention on the concept of ἐνάργεια in poetic and rhetorical theory, as well as on the antecedents of this concept in Greek theatre. For the author, the development of theatre, like the praxis of the courts, contributed to the evolution of the concept of *enarges* towards a more technical sense and to an extension of it to also encompass the notion of the obvious as something proven.

For his part, F. De Martino, in an original and extensive study (“To see or not to see: Eufemismi visivi e tragedia greca”), also starts from the relevance of visual communication in tragedy, to focus specifically on visual euphemisms, that is, what should not be seen within a genre characterized precisely by vision. Thus, the author starts from the relevance of the visual in poetry, to later analyze in detail the different ways in which tragedy, and specifically each of the tragic authors, could create these visual euphemisms.

Finally, attention is paid to the relationship between Greek tragedy and the late handbooks of rhetorical theory. Specifically, J.A. Fernández Delgado (“Euripides in the Rhetoric Classroom”) starts from the indisputable fact that Euripides was one of the most present authors in the Greek School to later show the way in which some of the *progymnasmata*, rhetorical exercises used in the school and documented from 1st century AD, already appear prefigured in the tragedies of Euripides. Specifically, the author compares the traits of various *progymnasmata* in the conserved theory and in various Euripidean passages to demonstrate the existence of a significant similarity. The reason for this, according to the author, is not only that Euripides has been taken as a model, but probably the fact that the origin of the *progymnasmata* goes

back to Sophistic rhetoric and Euripides had already been influenced to some extent by these teachings.

These eleven chapters form a book that, as has been said, is the result of a research project (FFI2016–79533–P) co–financed by the Ministry of Science and Innovation and by ERDF funds. We thank these institutions for the financial support which they have provided during these years. But above all, the editors (M. Carmen Encinas Reguero and Milagros Quijada Sagredo, both from the University of the Basque Country) are grateful to those who have accompanied us as members of the research team during this time: Fátima Silva (University of Coimbra) and Ioanna Karamanou (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki).

We would also like to specially thank those who generously accepted our invitation and contributed to making this book a reality: Giulia Maria Chesi (Humboldt–Universität zu Berlin), Francesco De Martino (Università di Foggia), José Antonio Fernández Delgado (Universidad de Salamanca), Maria Gerolemou (University of Exeter), Melissa Mueller (University of Massachusetts Amherst), Elodie Paillard (University of Sydney / University of Basel) and Alan H. Sommerstein (University of Nottingham). In the case of the latter, we are especially grateful that he allowed us to publish in Italian a chapter destined to appear later in English in another volume; likewise, we thank F. De Martino for the translation.

For the editors it has been very satisfying and a great pleasure to have been able to count on the collaboration of so many good colleagues. It is thanks to them that this book came to see the light of day.

