

## Dancing with Ambivalence: Rhetorical Magic and Ambiguity in Greek Drama

Ancient Greek ambivalence towards rhetoric mirrors a similar ambivalence towards the gods of rhetoric, e.g., Hermes, Eros, and *Peitho*. Ancient Greek tragic and comic playwrights, moreover, have ever delighted in capitalizing on divine ambiguity (Mikalson 1991, Padel 1992, Mastronarde 2002) and on audience ambivalence towards ambiguity more generally (Stanford 1939, Dobrov 2001). This paper, then, examines how some Greek playwrights exploit the common ambivalence towards rhetoric through dramatic use of *Peitho*, the goddess of inducement. In particular, I analyze the ambiguous invocations and references to *Peitho* found in Aeschylus' *Suppliants*, Euripides' *Hecuba*, and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* in order to reveal the common patterns and effects that such references produce. Scholars have discussed the implications of *Peitho* and rhetoric in these individual dramas (Buxton 1982, Paduano 2005, Karanasiou 2015, Sommerstein 2019), but a comparative study has not been done. By bringing these dramas together, I argue that, across these three dramas, different interactions with the ambiguity of *Peitho* tend to spin the action of the plot towards uncertainty and complexity, rather than simple rhetorical success.

Greek drama fully acknowledges the multifaceted nature of the goddess *Peitho*, as also with rhetoric itself. A goddess of rhetoric, *Peitho* embodied a form of inducement rooted in traditions of erotic enchantment (Hes. *WD* 73-4, Pind. *Pyth.* 4.216-9, Faraone 1999, Li Vigni 2016). As such, Eupolis associates *Peitho* with Pericles' stinging spells (Eup. fr. 94.), Sophocles, with Deianeira's magical destructive robe (Soph. *Trach.* 660-2), and Aeschylus (?), with the forceful charms of a tyrannical Zeus (Aesch. *PV* 172-7). At the same time, dramatists at times align *Peitho* with seemingly upright democratic rhetorical endeavors (Aesch. *Eum.* 885, 970) or

dismiss her as a purely human and harmless dimension of ordinary speech (E. fr.170.; Ar. *Ran.* 1391-6). The dramas discussed in this paper take a middle path in their depiction of *Peitho*, associating her both with seemingly noble projects of civic persuasion and with the threatening uncertainty linked to her magic and coercive roots. I especially focus on moments when King Pelasgus and the Danaids (Aesch. *Suppl.* 523, 1039-40), Hecuba (E. *Hec.* 814-9), and Lysistrata (A. *Lys.* 203-4) invoke this goddess in order to seek personal and/or political empowerment for various persuasive ends. As shall be seen, after each moment of engagement, *Peitho* accords with the character's request but in ways which unexpectedly complicate the plot, create suspense, and problematize any potential resolution. Ultimately, therefore, these playwrights take advantage of the ambiguity inherent within *Peitho* and rhetoric for their own dramatic ends. By dancing with ambivalence, they further the meta-rhetorical complexity of their own dramatic art.

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