

Landmark Essays

on
Classical Greek
Rhetoric

Edited by
Edward Schiappa

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About the Editor

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Introduction

by Edward Schiappa and Omar Swartz

The purpose of this collection is to provide students and scholars of classical rhetoric with a set of exemplary works in the area of Greek rhetorical theory. Many of the articles included here are not easily accessible and have been selected with the intent of providing graduate and undergraduate students with a useful collection of secondary source materials. This book is also envisioned as a useful volume for scholars who will benefit from having these sources more readily available.

Scholarship in classical Greek rhetorical theory typically is aimed at one of two goals: *Historical reconstruction* is work that attempts to understand the contributions of past theorists or practitioners. Scholars involved in the historical reconstruction of Greek rhetorical theories attempt to understand the cultural context in which these theories originally appear. A scholar involved in historical reconstruction may try to answer questions such as: What did Homer think about language and persuasion? How did Isocrates describe the purpose of education? What did Aristotle mean by “enthymeme”? What theory of style did Theophrastus articulate?

Contemporary appropriation is work that attempts to utilize the insights of past theorists or practitioners in order to inform current theory or criticism. Rather than describe rhetorical theory as it evolved through the contingencies of the past, scholars who attempt the contemporary appropriation of classical texts do so in order to shed insight on rhetorical concerns as they are manifested in today’s environment. A scholar involved in contemporary appropriation tries to answer questions such as: In relationship to modern-day compositional and literary practices, what can be learned from the efforts of persuasion found in Homer? Can Isocrates’ vision of higher education serve as a useful model today? How might we use the notion of “enthymeme” in contemporary public speaking classes? Is stasis theory an adequate invention-al device for nonjudicial discourse, such as composition and presentational speeches? Are the categories of style that Theophrastus identified still useful today? Such questions function to direct and develop the concerns of classical authors in a way perhaps never anticipated by those theorists. Rather than being a response to the conditions of ancient Greece, these theorists’ ideas are appropriated as a way of addressing and edifying contemporary concerns.

As can be seen in the following articles, historical reconstruction and contemporary appropriation differ in terms of *goals* and *methods*. Since the goal of historical reconstruction is to capture the past, insofar as possible, on its own terms, the methods of the historian and, in classical work, the philologist, are appropriate. As a result, many of the essays in this collection draw heavily on the original Greek terminology to describe a given theorist’s

contributions. All Greek words have been transliterated in this edition in order to improve readability. In addition, where the meanings of the Greek words are not explicitly discussed, a bracketed translation has been added to make the text more accessible for non-Greek reading audiences.

The careful reader will notice that, in the articles that attempt a contemporary appropriation of classical Greek theory, philological precision and fidelity to the original Greek text is a less central concern. Since the goal of contemporary appropriation is to provide critical insight to contemporary theorists and teachers, the needs and values of current audiences justify less rigidity and more creativity in the process of interpreting how long-dead authors through their texts "speak" to the needs and interests of contemporary audiences. *Both* sorts of scholarship—historical reconstruction and contemporary appropriation—are useful and important. Both sorts of scholarship are found in this collection, sometimes even within the same essay.

The essays that follow have been arranged into six sections that focus on some of the major trends in the theorizing of Greek rhetoric. The three essays included in the first section, *Earliest Greek Rhetoric*, discuss some of the earliest notions of rhetorical practice and persuasion in Western history. John T. Kirby identifies the earliest concepts we would now call "rhetorical" in the constellation of three key ideas that permeate early Greek literature: persuasion, force, and love. His study suggests that a thorough account of early Greek rhetoric requires a historical understanding of the relationships among these three terms. The earliest Greek texts that survive today are the poems by Homer that were originally composed and performed orally. Homer created his epics in a mostly nonliterate society and, as K. E. Wilkerson and Andrew J. Karp note, an incipient rhetorical theory can be seen in the social tensions found within the mythic, oral tradition. While both Wilkerson and Karp explore the notion of Homeric rhetoric, they come to very different conclusions. In the process of exploring the points of agreement and disagreement between these two essays, readers may want to explore such questions as: What is meant by the word "rhetoric"? Is there a necessary connection between rhetorical *practice* and rhetorical *theory*? Is it useful to distinguish between *explicit* and *implicit* rhetorical theories?

In the second section the reader is provided with two award-winning articles that construct a dialogue about the notion of a discrete *Sophistic Rhetorical Theory*. John Poulakos provides what he believes to be a distinct and useful "sophistic definition of rhetoric" while Edward Schiappa questions the historical basis of any notion of a distinct "sophistic rhetoric." One possible way to resolve the differences between these two essays is to see each as answering different questions that reflect the differences between historical reconstruction and contemporary appropriation. The articles represent key positions in the recent renaissance in scholarship about the Sophists that has taken place in the disciplines of Speech Communication and English. Questions raised by this material include: To what extent might we view the Sophists' theorizing about *logos* as constituting an incipient rhetorical theory? To what degree is "sophistic rhetoric" a historically valid

concept? What notions of "sophistic rhetoric" might be usefully appropriated for contemporary theories of rhetoric?

The third section of this volume, *Platonic Rhetorical Theory*, introduces the reader to conflicts over Plato's treatment of rhetoric that have spurred debate for over two thousand years. The two essays included in this collection review the dominant themes within contemporary interpretations of Plato in an effort to further delineate his position on rhetoric. Edwin Black argues that Plato presents a consistent and coherent view of rhetoric in the *Gorgias* and the *Phaedrus*. Black's interpretation of Plato presents a view that appropriates Plato as a critical ally of rhetoric. Black's view is contrasted with Charles Kauffman's cautionary note that such enthusiastic receptions of Plato's "philosophical rhetoric" may be unwarranted and undesirable. Though both Black and Kauffman are interested in understanding Plato's texts historically, they also want to inform contemporary theorizing about rhetoric. Readers may want to consider such questions as: What counts as *evidence* for a particular reading of an ancient theorist's texts? How does Plato's ideological doctrines become emphasized and deemphasized in both Black's and Kauffman's interpretations? To what extent do all rhetorical theories contain an implicit or explicit theory of politics?

In the fourth section of this text, *Isocratean Rhetoric*, the reader is presented with two historical reconstructions of Isocrates' texts. Classicists Werner Jaeger and Erika Rummel explore Isocrates' cultural theory of rhetoric and philosophy in relationship to the intellectual milieu of his time. Ironically, Isocrates' texts never use the Greek word for rhetoric (*rhêtorikê*). Nonetheless, both Jaeger and Rummel demonstrate the usefulness of analyzing Isocrates' texts as contributions to ancient Greek rhetorical theory. Questions readers may want to consider while reading these essays include: To what extent can a theory of rhetoric inform a complete theory of pedagogy? Can Isocrates' vision of higher education serve as a useful model today? Can past theorists' ideals of rhetoric provide criteria for evaluating contemporary discourse?

It is arguably the case that Aristotle's writings about rhetoric have influenced twentieth-century rhetorical theory more than any other Greek author. The fifth section of this collection, *Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory*, provides three of many possible important and influential examples of modern scholarship about Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. The essay by Carnes Lord provides a historically-grounded argument about a point typically assumed rather than proven: Why did Aristotle write the *Rhetoric*? James H. McBurney and Richard C. Huseman offer historical reconstructions of Aristotelian contributions to rhetorical theory, the enthymeme and Aristotle's topics, that also aim to inform contemporary theory and criticism. The most fruitful area of discussion students may want to consider while reading these essays is how Aristotle's ideas might be most profitably used in the contemporary teaching of writing and speaking.

In the sixth and final section of this collection, *Post-Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory*, the pair of articles included attempt to reflect two of the

dominant approaches to rhetoric presented by the Hellenistic world. Following the time of Aristotle, the Greek rhetorical theory of the Hellenistic period often focused on invention and style (both of which became emphasized in Roman rhetorical theory). Both articles reflect these emphases and serve as bridges from Greek to Roman theory. George A. Kennedy's discussion of Theophrastus provides readers with a sense of how Greek rhetorical theory became transformed through an emphasis on style and delivery. Theophrastus' writings on style are an excellent example of how one hallmark of increasing specialization or the "disciplinizing" of rhetoric is a proliferation of concepts and terminology. In addition, Kennedy's article serves the purpose of tracing clearly the diffusion of Aristotelian perspectives on style into the Latin arena. Otto Dieter's discussion of stasis takes as its starting point Hermagoras' heuristic system of inventing arguments and explicitly develops the theory of stasis in light of prior Greek and later Roman theoreticians. Readers may want to consider such questions as: Was the development of stasis theory and theories of style the inevitable evolution of previous theories? What needs and interests did such theories serve for the teachers of rhetoric of the time? What aspects of stasis theory are useful today? Are the categories of style that Theophrastus identified still useful today?

As a last note, this collection was not designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the development of Greek rhetorical theory and practice. Readers interested in such an overview should consult one or more of the following sources: James J. Murphy, *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric* (New York: Random House, 1972); Davis: Hermagoras, 1983); Thomas Cole, *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991); Thomas Conley, *Rhetoric in the European Tradition* (New York: Longman, 1990); George A. Kennedy *Art of Persuasion in Greece* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1963); and Kennedy *Classical Rhetoric and Its Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

Table of Contents

Introduction

<i>Edward Schiappa and Omar Swartz</i>	xi
(1994)	

Essays

Section 1: Earliest Greek Rhetoric

1. <i>John T. Kirby</i> The "Great Triangle" in Early Greek Rhetoric and Poetics	3
(1990)	
2. <i>K. E. Wilkerson</i> From Hero to Citizen: Persuasion in Early Greece	17
(1982)	
3. <i>Andrew J. Karp</i> Homeric Origins of Ancient Rhetoric	35
(1977)	

Section 2: Sophistic Rhetorical Theory

4. <i>John Poulakos</i> Toward a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric	55
(1983)	
5. <i>Edward Schiappa</i> Sophistic Rhetoric: Oasis or Mirage?	67
(1991)	

Section 3: Platonic Rhetorical Theory

6. <i>Edwin Black</i> Plato's View of Rhetoric	83
(1958)	
7. <i>Charles Kauffman</i> The Axiological Foundations of Plato's Theory of Rhetoric	101
(1982)	

Section 4: Isocratean Rhetoric

8. <i>Werner Jaeger</i> The Rhetoric of Isocrates and Its Cultural Ideal	119
(1943)	
9. <i>Erika Rummel</i> Isocrates' Ideal of Rhetoric: Criteria of Evaluation	143
(1979)	

Section 5: Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory

10. <i>Carnes Lord</i> The Intention of Aristotle's 'Rhetoric'	157
(1981)	

11. *James H. McBurney* The Place of the Enthymeme in
Rhetorical Theory 169
(1936)

12. *Richard C. Huseman* Aristotle's System of Topics 191
(1965)

Section 6: Post-Aristotelian Rhetorical Theory

13. *George A. Kennedy* Theophrastus 203
(1963)

14. *Otto Alvin Loeb Dieter* Stasis 211
(1950)

Bibliography 243

Index 249

Section 1:
Earliest Greek Rhetoric

The “Great Triangle” in Early Greek Rhetoric and Poetics

for CDS

by John T. Kirby

In speaking of a “Triangle,” I have in mind a particular constellation of three concepts—one might call them psychosocial phenomena—that recur in Greek literature from its very earliest stages on: namely, *peitho*, *bia*, and *eros*.¹ “*Peitho*,” which originally drew me to this study, is the word for persuasive communication, both as a process and as the state resulting from that process; it was early hypostatized as the goddess *Peitho*, persuasion personified.² “*Bia*” means force, physical strength, and (most especially) violence; the goddess *Bia* is mentioned in tandem with a kindred deity, *Kratos* (“Strength” or “Power”).³ “*Eros*” refers to any strong desire, but particularly sexual passion, and is itself hypostatized as the god of Love. In the Hesiodic canon he is a mighty and fearsome power, at once beautiful and terrible; a god who can create, a source of life and growth, but also a source of potential devastation.⁴

If the treatment of *peitho* in ancient Greek literature is taken as a whole, certain patterns of thought emerge. It is not simply that Greek writers persist in addressing the topic of *peitho* (which they do): what we find is that *peitho*

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¹ *Peithō*, *bia*, and *erōs* are—like all significant words—polysemous; and they will occur frequently in my discussion. Because of their polysemy, I have decided not to entrap any of them in a single translation, but instead to transliterate them (and to elaborate their variable meanings as appropriate). Because of their frequency, I print them in roman type, without marking long vowels: *peitho*, *bia*, *eros*.

² See, e.g., Hesiod *Theogony* 349, *Works and Days* 73; the scholiast on this latter passage of Hesiod reports that Sappho called *Peitho* the daughter of Aphrodite (Sappho fr. 200 [Lobel-Page]). See too Sappho frs. 1.18, 90.8, and 96.26-29 (L-P); Ibycus 288 (Page); Pindar *Pythian* 4.219 and 9.39; Aeschylus *Suppliant Women* 1040; Herodotus 8.111.

³ *Theogony* 385; [Aeschylus?] *Prometheus Bound* 12. Homer uses “*bia*” + genitive as a periphrasis for a strong man (*Iliad* 2.658, 4.386, *et passim*).

There is a tremendous amount to be learned about certain aspects of *bia* from René Girard's *La Violence et le sacré* (Paris 1972), translated as *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977).

⁴ *Theogony* 120-22. M. L. West, *Hesiod: Theogony* (Oxford 1966), 195, writes: “The position of *Eros* here in the very first generation of created powers strongly suggests a quasi-demiurgic function.”

A profound book on the topic of *eros* is Anne Carson's *Eros the Bittersweet: An Essay* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1986).

is diagnosed, again and again, in parallel with eros or with bia.⁵ Given such striking juxtapositions, it is only a small step to the realization that eros and bia are themselves strongly associated as well. So the three concepts enter into a relationship that we may usefully consider as triangular. I will not say that the Triangle as a whole is consciously recognized in all periods, or by all writers, but there seems to be an evolution toward the formulation of this triad as such.

And we will find repeatedly that a story focuses on not just one or another of these three concepts—peitho itself, bia itself, eros itself—but on the *dyads* constituted by virtue of their juxtaposition: peitho/bia, peitho/eros, eros/bia. That is, it is the sides of this Triangle, as much as the vertices themselves, that become the matter, the issues, treated in the great works of classical Greek literature. One might think of the Greek mind as running along recognized axes of thought. I like the image of an *axis* because, on any given line, there is an infinite number of points: so too the juxtaposition of A and B is not merely a (single) new fixed *topos*; rather it allows for infinite considerations of the relationship between A and B.

When peitho, bia, eros, and their various combinations are traced through the Greek corpus, it becomes clear that they function as governing principles of both rhetoric and poetics, from Homer to Plato. In this respect they conspire, in fact, to unite rhetoric and poetics as disciplines. While Plato shows signs of dissatisfaction with the poetic/rhetorical tradition he receives, and makes an attempt to transcend it, he finds himself at a philosophical impasse; it is Aristotle who first succeeds in making a major break with this virtually pervasive ideology.

Peitho/Bia

The first axis to be considered is that connecting peitho and bia.⁶

⁵ The love for parallel structure manifests itself quickly in Greek culture, in the plastic arts and in architecture as well as in literature. The designs on vases of the Geometric period, the rows of columns on a temple, evince a desire for order (*kosmos*) and arrangement (*taxis*) that proves one of the most characteristic traits of Greek classicism. So it comes as no surprise that such a principle should also be manifested in the Greek language. Binary parallelism is by no means an exclusively Greek phenomenon; but in its conjunctive form (*both A and B*) as well as its disjunctive (*not A but B*), it lies very close to the heart of Greek syntax. Nor is it sheerly a matter of structure. Concepts themselves may be juxtaposed in an associative or dissociative way, even when there is no parallelism at the syntactic level. Such juxtaposition is useful because it clarifies thought: if we want to know more about A, it may help us to know that A is like B, or that there are bonds of association between A and B. Or, if we are told that A is *not* like B, that A is implacably opposed to B, or that A and B are mutually exclusive, then B serves as a foil, a ground against which A can be figured more clearly.

The best-known study of this as a phenomenon of language is G. E. R. Lloyd's *Polarity and Analogy: Two Types of Argumentation in Early Greek Thought* (Cambridge, Cambridge Univ. Press, 1966).

⁶ For explicit use of the antithesis see, e.g., Isocrates *Plataicus* 8, *Nicocles* 22, *Philippus* 15–16; Lysias 1.32–33, 2.19; Plato *Laws* 722b; and (much later) Plutarch *Themistocles* 21. The dyad may be implicit in Nestor's words to Achilles and Agamemnon at *Iliad* 1.274: *peithesthai* is preferable (*ameinon*) to coercion. In this context it is worth noting that the threat of physical force may be used as peitho.

Sometimes the word used to designate the bia-element in this dyad is *anagkê* (or *anagkaiê*), "force," "constraint," or (most familiarly) "necessity." For early examples of this concept personified,

Typically this collocation of ideas is antithetical: I will try to persuade you, but, failing that, I will force you. Such a disjunction is rooted in our most fundamental concepts of civilization. The wild beasts settle their disputes by *bia*; it is a mark of our humanity, we feel, that we can use persuasion to effect change, that we are not limited to the use of coercion. The writer of the *Rhetoric to Alexander* observes, "All other living creatures have passion and anger and such urges, but only humans have *logos*."⁷

The *peitho/bia* axis is at the base of some of our most ancient literary and rhetorical formulations. It determines Homer's overall structural poetics in the *Iliad*; the trajectory of the story-line as a whole is a kind of arc from *bia* to *peitho*, and books 1 and 24 represent the opposite extremities of this arc. In a fundamental sense the whole poem is *about* the *peitho/bia* antithesis. Book 1 begins with the wrath (*mênis*) of Achilles, who is face-to-face in conflict with another mighty lord, or *anax*.⁸ Achilles and Agamemnon are quarreling over who is going to take the girl as his war-booty. *Peitho* having failed, or not even having been attempted, Achilles is on the verge of committing an act of violence (*bia*) against Agamemnon, and must be restrained by force (*bia*)—Athena pulls him back by the hair. In book 24, by contrast, Achilles is confronted by yet another *anax* who wants something (someone) Achilles has: Priam wants the body of his son Hector, which Achilles has attached to his chariot so that he can drag it around and around the walls of Troy. Here the *peitho* of Priam prevails, and Achilles puts aside his *bia*. He could have killed Priam on the spot, as he came alone and defenseless to Achilles' camp, but he looked so much like Achilles' own aged father that this aroused compassion in Achilles, who next does the one thing we should never have expected him to do: he relinquishes the body of the man who had killed his soulmate Patroclus. Against all odds, the unquenchable *mênis* of Achilles is assuaged. Overall, then, we find a movement from *bia* to *peitho*. Indeed Priam's visit represents *the triumph of peitho over bia*: Achilles is induced to abandon the frenzy of his revenge and violence, and to reach a new level of human understanding.

Within this arc there are other recognizable points, in somewhat symmetrical arrangement.⁹ Book 9 represents an attempt at the use of *peitho* on Achilles, which fails; all the rhetorical stratagems of the Greek generals

see *Iliad* 6.458, Herodotus 8.111. It is perhaps significant, in this light, that for Aristotle the crucial element in the deployment of *peitho* will turn out to be the enthymeme or rhetorical syllogism (*Rhetoric* 1354a, 14–15); and, of course, the operative force in syllogistic is none other than *anagkê* (*Prior Analytics* 24b, 18–20; cf. *Topics* 100a, 25–27). The taming of *bia*?

⁷ *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* 1421a. The converse idea is a familiar *topos* of invective: the heaviest aspersions may be cast upon another person's humanity by denigrating his or her very humanity, by calling such a person a "beast" or the equivalent. For examples of this in Roman drama and oratory, see John T. Kirby, *The Rhetoric of Cicero's Pro Cluentio* (Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1990), 144 and nn.

⁸ The use of this word, which was already archaic in Homer's day, itself draws attention to the fact that Achilles, Agamemnon, and Priam are comparable in poetic as well as in social and military status.

⁹ This observation is consonant with, but does not depend upon, Cedric Whitman's analysis of the structure of the *Iliad* in his *Homer and the Heroic Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1958), chap. 11.

fail to persuade Achilles to come back with them. This is balanced further by its mirror-book, 16, where Patroclus puts on the armor of Achilles in order to masquerade as that great hero.¹⁰

Give me your armour to wear on my shoulders into the fighting;
so perhaps the Trojans might think I am you, and give way
from their attack, and the fighting sons of the Achaeans get wind
again after hard work. There is little breathing space in the fighting.

[40-43]

This is *bia* used as a kind of *peitho*: by the threat of what would appear to be the return of Achilles to battle, Patroclus hopes to turn aside the Trojan onslaught.

Interestingly, the *Odyssey* seems to yield an exactly opposite trajectory. It begins with *peitho* and moves toward *bia*. At the beginning the suitors are dealt with civilly—pleaded with to be reasonable, but meanwhile fed and entertained. By the end their presence has become intolerable and indeed dangerous, and Odysseus and Telemachus have no alternative but to resort to force (*bia*) in order to remove them.¹¹

Much of Greek tragedy runs along the *peitho/bia* axis. Often the critical turns in the plot arise from a failure of *peitho* that issues in an act (or acts) of *bia*. In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, Jocasta pleads in vain with Oedipus to desist from his persistent inquiry into the secrets of his parentage:

Why ask of whom he spoke? Don't give it heed;
nor try to keep in mind what has been said.
It will be wasted labour.

...
I beg you—do not hunt this out—I beg you,
if you have any care for your own life.
What I am suffering is enough.

...
O be persuaded by me, I entreat you;
do not do this.

[1056-64]

¹⁰Quotations from the *Iliad* are taken, or adapted, from the translation of Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1951); quotations from tragedies are taken, or adapted, from the edition of Grene and Lattimore, *The Complete Greek Tragedies* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1959). But my line-references, in all cases, correspond to the original Greek texts in their Oxford (OCT) editions.

¹¹This brings to mind, but does not of course answer, the question of whether the same person could have composed both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Gregory Nagy, in *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1979), discusses the remarkable mutual exclusivity of the two epic narratives: "... their sheer size would make it seem inevitable for them to overlap in their treatment of at least some events related to Troy—unless there was a deliberate avoidance of such overlapping. If the avoidance was indeed deliberate, it would mean that the *Odyssey* displays an awareness of the *Iliad* by steering clear of it. Or rather, it may be a matter of evolution. Perhaps it was part of the Odyssean tradition to veer away from the Iliadic. Be that as it may, the traditions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* constitute a totality with the complementary distribution of their narratives and, to me, there seems to be something traditionally self-conscious about all this. It is as if there were a traditional suppression of anything overtly Iliadic in the *Odyssey*" (20–21). This may be related to the fact that rhetorically, their plot-trajectories are mirror-images of one another.

He will not be dissuaded; he persists until he comes to that dreadful revelation which induces him to commit an act of violence more terrible, more punitive, than suicide itself, and even to call for further *bia* against his person:

What I have done here was best done—don't tell me
otherwise, do not give me further counsel.
I do not know with what eyes I could look
upon my father when I die and go
under the earth, nor yet my wretched mother—
those two to whom I have done things deserving
worse punishment than hanging. . . .

. . .
. . . I beg of you in God's name hide me
somewhere outside your country, yes, or kill me,
or throw me into the sea. . . .

[1370-1412]

The *Hecuba* of Euripides illustrates powerfully the effects of the breakdown of *peitho*. Hecuba, the august queen of Troy, is trapped, like a wild animal. In her attack on Polymestor and his children, she resorts to *bia*, not to solve her problem—for the tragedy of her situation is that there *is* no solution, either in *peitho* or in *bia*—but out of rage and vengeance:

. . . See the bodies of his sons,
killed by my women and me. His debt is paid
and I have my revenge.

. . .
Why shouldn't I rejoice in my revenge over you?

[1051-53, 1258]

She rejects *logos* for *ergon*, word for deed, and in so doing rejects the possibility of *peitho* for an ineluctable program of *bia*:

. . . The clear actions of a person,
Agamemnon, should speak louder than any words.
Good words should get their goodness from our lives
and nowhere else; the evil we do should show,
a rottenness that festers in our speech
and what we say, incapable of being glozed
with a film of pretty words. There are men, I know,
sophists who make a science of persuasion,
glozing evil with the slick of loveliness;
but in the end a speciousness will show.
The imposters are punished; not one escapes
his death.

[1187-94]

At the end of the tale, in a remarkably tense passage of *stichomythia*, Polymestor answers *ergon* with *logos*. Instead of reciprocating her act of