
Victor Bers
Department of Classics
Yale University
P.O. Box 208266
New Haven, CT 06520-8266
e-mail: victor.bers@yale.edu
Proposal for panel 5, "The Powers of Persuasion"
Title: "Heterogeneous Mass Audience and Heterogeneous Mass Voice"
20 minutes requested

Heterogeneous Mass Audience and Heterogeneous Mass Voice

Applied to classical Athens, "powers of persuasion" suggests a multiplicity of means whereby speakers or singers can confirm, modify, or overthrow the beliefs of a jury, assembly, or theatrical audience. I propose to consider an apparent parallelism between the heterogeneity of ecclesiasts or dicasts and problematics of the choral voice in Attic tragedy. These are matters about which the ancient sources provide very little explicit description or polemic. I argue that the persuasive modes of oratory and tragedy have radically different morphologies and mechanisms; and that the ramified asymmetries of the various *fora* should warn us against the too facile assimilation of theatrical and political spheres in much recent scholarship.

On rare occasions, speakers in the Athenian *ecclesia* or courts acknowledge that they are addressing men of different ages and different experiences (e.g., Thucydides 6.143.1, Isaeus 5.20). Rhetorical treatises, notably Plato's *Phaedrus* and Aristotle's *Rhetorica*, characteristically treat those to whom rhetoric is directed as constituting a fundamentally uniform group. They offer no systematic strategy to cope with the variations they themselves acknowledge at length--Plato by describing effective rhetoric as soul-directed and the spectrum of human souls as varying arithmetically by a factor of thousands (249a2), Aristotle by devoting a long stretch (1388b29-1391b7) to sketching differences of age and prosperity in speakers and those who judge. It is unclear whether Plato imagines the *Phaedrus* to be of practical use, but one might expect Aristotle to recommend specific adaptations to varying demographics of voters *en masse*.

In tragedy, there were still greater variations of age, class, gender (perhaps), and legal status within the audience. Moreover, the chorus presents manifold complications, much studied in connection with authority and identity (Alt, Goldhill, *inter alios*), number and self-reference (Kaimio), unison and solo performance (Bers), and relation to ritual (Bierl, Henrichs, Scullion). All these engender complex and radical refractions of voice, and hence of basic modalities of persuasion. It follows that *Peitho* is no single deity undergoing surface changes of costume and mask to fit the occasion, but rather names a group of sisters more disparate than alike.