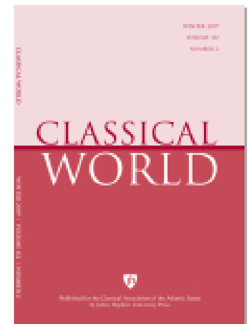
The Mortal Voice in the Tragedies of Aeschylus by Sarah Nooter (review)



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preference for Cicero rests above all on his development of *decorum* as a general constraint on the orator in *De officiis* and his picture of moderate oratory in *De legibus*. But in spite of the importance of *decorum* for Remer, he misunderstands the basic point of how this fits into the system of virtues of *De officiis* (it is not derived from justice; see 221 n. 29). On the other hand, Remer brackets out Aristotle's ethical treatises, since they do not deal with the orator in particular. The result is thus to some extent a comparison of apples and oranges.

Some fundamental differences between the two systems should have been addressed. Thus, in interpreting Antonius' remark about winning over goodwill for oneself and one's client (*De orat.* 2.182), Remer (219 n. 8) correctly remarks that this refers to judicial oratory but fails to point out that this is different from the Athenian system assumed by Aristotle, in which the defendant speaks in his own defense (even if he has to resort to a ghost writer).

There are unfortunate omissions and misunderstandings. Thus, failing to explain the circumstances of the trial of Norbanus described in detail in *De oratore* 2, Remer arrives at the false conclusion that "Antonius . . . employed arguments to mislead" that were "not germane to the question at hand" (40). In fact, the anger that prevailed against the general Caepio for the massacre of a Roman army was very relevant as a mitigating factor when Norbanus was on trial for presiding over a disorderly public meeting.

Remer, then, has produced a well-intended attempt to relate Ciceronian ethics to current politics, but the reader will be well advised, as always, to keep up his or her critical guard.

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Sarah Nooter. *The Mortal Voice in the Tragedies of Aeschylus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. Pp. x, 309. $99.99. ISBN 978-1-107-14551-1.

An active reader of ancient drama may well have dreamed of the voices of the actors and wondered what would cries of woe, densely alliterative passages, and Aeschylus's infamous compound bombast have evoked in Greek audiences. Nooter digs into these and other questions in her perspicuous analyses of Aeschylus's most meaningfully textured Greek. She examines descriptions of embodied sounds, sonic metaphors, and passages that prime the reception of voice in different audiences. This scholarly monograph presents a wide-ranging, challenging, phenomenological investigation of the material voice in Aeschylus.

In the introduction and in parts of the five chapters, Nooter raises numerous theoretical questions and speculative theses concerning the materiality of voice. These thought-provoking elements of the book draw on theories of the material as an aesthetic category formulated by James Porter (*The Origins of Aesthetic Thought in Ancient Greece: Matter, Sensation, and Experience* [Cambridge 2010]) especially, as well as Shane Butler (*The Ancient Phonograph* [New York 2015]) and Sean Gurd (*Dissonance: Auditory Aesthetics in Ancient Greece* [New York 2016]). Chapter 1 is devoted to more general concerns of the voice in relation to the body in archaic and classical literature. Chapter 2

compares Aristophanic parody with early Aeschylean drama (including coverage of some fragmentary Aeschylean texts). These first two chapters contain a mix of well-trodden ground and more scattered reflections, since they cover numerous works in different genres. Nooter's theoretical categories support more sustained interpretation in the close readings of *Oresteia* passages in chapters 3 to 5. The focus on voices as both "material emissions of bodies" (2) and metaphor are well grounded in analyses of Cassandra's silent, animal, and divine registers (44–46, 138–144). Nooter demonstrates that the choruses and characters of the *Oresteia* use sonic forms and metaphors to ventriloquize the past (chapter 3), embody and gender voices (chapter 4), and attempt powerful, even demonic action (chapter 5).

Nooter's larger arguments can, at times, be difficult to assent to, in part because they either conflict or are under-examined. The most widely repeated argument in the book varies the idea of Aeschylus consciously using "the edges of lexical language to allow voice as such to surface" (46, 181). At key points, including in the introduction and the final pages, Nooter quotes intentionally ungrammatical or nonsense verses from modern poets, such as Wallace Stevens, to imply that Aeschylean plays analogously use sound to overwhelm sense (1–2, 46–47, 288). Yet nowhere, except in laments and exclamations, does this rather drastic contention find an unambiguous referent. To careful interpretation, even the most heavily alliterative or condensed verses of Aeschylus convey articulate and deeply interwoven meanings, which sound augments rather than overwhelms. It is telling that when these premises are examined, in an easily missed excursus (219–220), Nooter denies that Aeschylus is for the most part urging the audiences to think of the material voice. Instead Nooter returns to the much more metaphorical aspects of voice, its natural intertwining of all the elements of tragedy, from metrics to imagery to characterization.

Nooter draws our attention specifically to many instances where the material voice is a marker of presence (2) that promises solid meaning within the plays (6) and in Greek culture more generally (15–19). She ties it with the theme of voice inherently evoking loss (52), sometimes in the same passages (123–127). One is led to ask, are these different registers of interpretation of how voice operates? If they coexist, how does it affect our marking of the *meaning* of the material voice, both in particular uses and as a category? The ratio of analysis to block quotations, which take up significant portions of nearly every non-introductory page, leads to missed opportunities for deeper interpretations of individual passages. Nooter's arguments would also have been greatly clarified by concluding remarks to individual chapters or the book. Instead, a lyrical, half-page coda is appended to the final chapter.

This is nevertheless an original, stimulating, and worthwhile contribution, from which established scholars and graduate students may gain new questions, analytical tools, and readings. Due to its heavy emphasis on the Greek and considerable need for background knowledge, this book would be most useful to specialists in the field of Aeschylus and tragedy more generally. Those interested in related ideas concerning the senses in Greek texts will benefit as well. In sum, the book's proliferating interpretations of the material voice and new readings of interconnections in Aeschylus are intellectually provocative.

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