Rhetoric Society Quarterly, 36:123–127, 2006

ISSN: 0277-3945 print
DOI: 10.1080/02773940500403678

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Book Review

The Roman World of Cicero's "De Oratore," by Elaine Fantham. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2004. 354 pp.

Elaine Fantham's *The Roman World of Cicero's "De Oratore"* will be of much interest to those who research and teach the history of rhetoric because, even though *De Oratore* is no doubt a work often listed on history of rhetoric syllabi, Cicero's perspective on rhetorical theory is most likely subordinated to the theories found in Plato's *Gorgias*, Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*, and Isocrates's rhetorical works, *Against the Sophists* and *Antidosis*. Fantham's insights in her new text urge us to consider giving *De Oratore* more attention.

In the preface, Fantham announces four main goals: 1) to provoke more interest in Cicero's ideal orator; 2) to show how the social crisis of our 1990s parallels the crises during Cicero's era; 3) to explain why Cicero failed in a failing form of government and 4) to suggest that *De Oratore* can help us communicate in new ways in the modern world. In this last goal, Fantham may mean something about using new media (such as cyberspace) or communicating effectively in a global society. Although Fantham leaves behind her second and fourth goals, she succeeds in promoting interest in *De Oratore* and in illuminating the disastrous breakdown of Roman society that occurred between the time of Lucius Lucinius Crassus and the time of Cicero himself.

Fantham's ultimate goal is enough for one book: to illuminate the political climate of the Roman world—from the fictionalized time of the dialogue (September 91 BC) to the time when Cicero finished the dialogue (55 BC). By exploring the political climate of this period, Fantham offers much needed background of *De Oratore* to readers. This background information is one of the book's most valuable features, for most prefaces to *De Oratore* are limited to a few pages, most of which are found in E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham's translation of *De Oratore*, a few more pages in J. S. Watson's famous translation, and a newer and suppler introduction (but hardly adequate given the scope of *De Oratore*) in Jakob Wisse and James M. May's 2003 translation.

Fantham's first four chapters provide background to Cicero's own career, the careers of the two main characters (Crassus and Antonius), the construction of the dialogue and, finally, Cicero's design of the

ideal orator. Chapters five through thirteen cover the influences of Aristotle as well as discuss some of the greater ideas in Cicero's rhetorical theory such as law, literature, humor, style, and the centrality of a civic career (each topic receiving its own chapter).

Chapters one and two are especially useful for new readers of *De Oratore* because Fantham summarizes Cicero's own life, his career, and then focuses on Crassus and Antonius. Fantham's discoveries about Antonius and Crassus explain why Cicero did not mention certain details of their lives. We learn that both men engaged in or were accused of seamy behavior. Antonius, for instance, had to fight against one of the worst attacks on his reputation; he was accused of committing incest with a vestal virgin. Luckily for Antonius (and the priestess who would have been buried alive), Antonius won the case. As for Crassus, he was not a victim of an accusation but rather a perpetrator of a controversial decree; he outlawed the teaching of rhetoric in Rome in 92 BC. Fantham ends the chapter by pointing out that both men, because they were active in politics, well-educated and eloquent, inspired Cicero in his design of the ideal orator, serving as models of citizenship and rhetorical perfection.

In addition, Fantham enriches our understanding of *De Oratore* by discussing Plato's influence on Cicero's rhetorical theory. The keenest influence is that Cicero modeled *De Oratore* after Plato's dramatic dialogues. The subtlest influence is that Ciceronian rhetoric is a polemic against Plato's negative views of rhetoric. According to Fantham, Plato's three main problems with rhetoric were that 1) philosophy is truth seeking and rhetoric is often truth suppressing, that 2) rhetoric is not an art, but a habitude, and that 3) the contemplative life is necessary for improving individual morality and serving in civic affairs is therefore detrimental to developing individual morality.

Cicero answers Plato's first problem by uniting philosophy and rhetoric, disciplines that Socrates keeps in separate rooms, in two ways. First, Fantham explains, Cicero has Crassus argue explicitly against divorcing the two disciplines. For Crassus, separating the discipline of thought (philosophy) from the disciplines of expression (rhetoric) is impossible, for one cannot express a non-thought and, likewise, thoughts must be put into words. For Crassus, it matters little whether a citizen is called a *philosophical* rhetorician, or a *rhetorical* philosopher. Second, to underscore this view, Cicero deliberately chooses characters who were paragons of both arts; even Socrates, Cicero surprises us, was at his rhetorical best when he was denouncing rhetoric in favor of philosophy. The irony is sumptuous. Yet Cicero's most important response to Plato is his description, to some extent a blueprint, of an ideal orator, a super-citizen who devotes

his life to pursuing knowledge and eloquence and serving in political offices. As Fantham summarizes, "Cicero did not want to reject Greek philosophy, but to reconcile the quarrel between philosophers and rhetoricians by arguing for a new Roman synthesis of philosophical and rhetorical training" (53–54).

In the second theme, Fantham discusses how the culture of Rome changed from the time of Crassus to the time of Cicero. Fantham's fifth chapter, for instance, "The Orator and the Law," helps to explain a question that should arise in any reading of *De Oratore*, Why does Cicero, one of the greatest Roman advocates, denounce forensic rhetoric? Early in the dialogue, Crassus rebukes Scaevola, the philosopher, for limiting rhetoric to a legal activity. Crassus complains that philosophers have "locked up" the orator in "law-courts and petty little assemblies, as if in a pounding-mill" (35). Crassus' stance against forensic rhetoric is directed at orators as well. Crassus reproaches Antonius for reducing the orator to a "mechanic" of the court, that is, to a legal advocate (193). Even in book two, shifting from the voice of Crassus to the voice of Antonius, Cicero laments that the writing of Roman history suffers because Romans busy themselves with lawsuits which eminent Greek orators avoided (239). Solving this conundrum, Fantham offers a reason why Cicero underscores law in theory even though practicing law used up an orator's time at the expense of civic involvement: Because "Roman legal representation was hierarchical," Cicero lays greater stress on civil law than criminal law in order to "make rather than lose, influential friends," (104). What we can deduce from Fantham's scholarship is that, in Rome's litigious culture, those who served in politics were often accused of crimes against Rome and consequently brought to trial (such as Catiline). Thus, both civil and criminal lawsuits were necessary tasks for aiding friends (and building friendships) as well as crushing "political antagonists" (130). But ultimately, during the time of Crassus, civil law was more critical to the career of advocates, and, as Fantham persuades us, creating realism is the reason for Cicero's emphasis on the study of law, a point which helps us understand the seemingly paradoxical stance against forensic rhetoric he advances in *De Oratore*. In short, tending to lawsuits was still essential for self-promotion and preparing the orator to serve in higher public offices. Fantham elaborates on the importance of self-promotion in Cicero's contemporary culture in chapter six when she discusses how the genres of poetry and history gave Cicero an outlet for publicizing his service to the State (156). This type of historical analysis makes Fantham's book a worthy aid for the study of Ciceronian rhetoric.

To those studying classical rhetoric in general, even without special interest in Cicero, Fantham's seventh chapter, "Rediscovering

Aristotelian Invention," will be of great interest. In this chapter, Fantham sheds light on the extent of Aristotle's influence on Cicero's rhetorical theory. Challenging W.W. Fortenbraugh's thesis that Cicero was unfamiliar with Aristotle's *Art of Rhetoric*, Fantham asserts, with compelling textual evidence from *De Oratore*, that Cicero was well versed in Aristotle's treatise. To support her assertion, Fantham reminds us that Antonius himself admits having knowledge of the *Synagoge Technon* and the *Art of Rhetoric* (313). The key question Fantham addresses is 'How far are Cicero's rhetorical theories Aristotelian?' She argues that Cicero's rhetorical theory is fully Aristotelian in the sense that, just as Aristotle used his experience in practicing logic to inform his rhetorical theory, so too did Cicero use his court experiences to inform his ideas in *De Oratore* (163). Although Cicero used the same types of non-artistic proofs in the Roman court as Aristotle outlined for Greek courts, he significantly changed Aristotle's artistic proofs, particularly ethos and logos. Cicero reconceptualized the concept of ethos due to the differences between Greek court audiences and Roman ones (173). In other words, Fantham assesses that the Roman courts ignored two of the tripartite features of Aristotelian ethos—intelligence and good will—leaving one feature, virtue (174). The reason for overlooking intelligence and goodwill is that Rome's judiciary, a body of educated citizens, assumed an advocate's intelligence. Moreover, they also assumed an advocate's good will because of "common interests" he would have shared with the "homogeneous" audience that comprised a Roman legal council. What was not certain, however, was whether the advocate was a virtuous man (174). Fantham's assessment thus illuminates why Roman *auctoritas* was so central to forensic arguments.

Whereas Cicero revised Aristotelian ethos, he fully appropriated logos and even contributed to it through various heuristics for encoding arguments. Fantham writes, "it is in the theory of *inventio* in book 2 that he comes closest to Aristotle" (168). Fantham's seventh chapter is not only indispensable because we can more accurately measure the influence of Aristotle but also because it underscores the rich and various kinds of invention Cicero contributes to rhetorical theory. For instance, Antonius's client interrogation was one method of getting to the heart of the first question of stasis theory, *an sit* (169). Aristotle's influence is highly evident in *De Oratore* according to Fantham, and she concludes the chapter by showing that even on the subject of *dispositio*, or arrangement, a subject on which Aristotle comes up short, Cicero too dispenses with it (184).

The shortcomings in Fantham's work are forgivable. Most likely a result of having more than one goal, Fantham ushers in comparisons

between modern times and ancient Rome that need much more elaboration. Despite this inconsequential feature of an otherwise excellent piece of scholarship, Fantham's *The Roman World of Cicero's "De Oratore"* is useful as a supple introduction to *De Oratore* and another insightful look at the complex history of classical rhetoric.

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