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Analysis of the Genre and Intertextuality of “Mythic Progenitors in Chinese and Sumerian Rhetorical Culture: A Short Primer”

Shawn Ramsey from Nazarbayev University, in his article “Mythic Progenitors in Chinese and Sumerian Rhetorical Culture: A Short Primer”, states that rhetoric in ancient Sumer and China was shaped by the myths of the period. To make his point, he weaves all of his claims and research together in lengthy paragraphs detailing the history of this subject of research and the history of the subject matter itself. Ramsey begins his article by acknowledging the research that came before him, specifically the work of Christopher Lyle Johnstone, Edward Schiappa, and Jeffery Walker. I believe that Ramsey begins the article this way in order to orient the reader on where his research stands amidst other similar research. The first several pages explain the history of research done on the topic of myth influencing rhetoric. Most of the notable references come from Johnstone, Schiappa, and Walker who all did research on how Greco-Roman myths influenced rhetoric in the West. By acknowledging his predecessors, Ramsey shows to his readers that he is not the only one thinking about this topic, he is just thinking about it slightly differently. This starting section is a respectful explanation on how rhetoric was influenced by myth in the West. Ramsey then begins to use this section to ease readers into his claim that myth influencing rhetoric is not exclusive to the West. By spending so much time

discussing the earlier research in his field, Ramsey knows that his readers understand the concept as a whole and can hopefully understand why his research matters. *Intertextuality discussion, in depth*

Ramsey opens the next section with the title “Two Rhetorical Progenitors: Cangjie and Enmerkar”. This is where he begins to truly delve into the myths of ancient China and Sumer. Even still, he continues to use much of the terminology first explained in the beginning of the article in reference to western mythology. This becomes another facet of the genre. Ramsey is introducing new vocabulary while continuing to use old established terms. He does not want to lose his readers by making them confused, so the established vocabulary and history of the topic becomes absolutely necessary when he introduces new topics. In that way, the article is built in a terraced fashion; Each section builds upon the previous one by adding new ideas and concepts once the original ones have been fully ingrained in the reader’s minds. After that, the new concepts and old ones can be analyzed in tandem with each other. The new content can be examined by comparing it to the old, and the old content can be reexamined and reevaluated when new information comes to light. *Genre discussion, paragraphs split by original author’s subheadings, clear flow.*

This pattern continues later on in the article in the third and fourth sections, “Cangjie as a Discursive Exempla in Ancient Chinese Rhetoric” and “Enmerkar as a Discursive Exempla in Ancient Sumer”, respectively. The previous section was short, and only served to introduce us to the names of the mythological figures Cangjie and Enmerkar and explain to the reader that both characters come from very ancient myths that predate their textual recordings. By proving that both myths are sufficiently ancient, Ramsey is able to reasonably convince the reader that they had significant influence before and after writing came into existence in their respective cultures. After introducing

the reader to the names and historical significance of the two mythological figures, Ramsey delves deeply into their stories and examines how they each influenced the creation of writing and rhetoric in their respective societies. [This part is a little bit too much of a content summary. Slap some more genre analysis in here or something](#)

Ramsey's article exists in a discourse community that discusses how ancient mythology influenced rhetoric throughout the ages. The style of the content of his article is hinted at in the title of the article, namely the phrase "short primer". Ramsey's article on how Chinese and Sumerian myths influenced those cultures' respective rhetoric is one of the first of its kind. As such, Ramsey is taking it upon himself to set the stage for many future discussions on the topic. As shown previously, the concept of myth influencing rhetoric as a whole is not unique. However, previous research only really ever looked at the topic as it applied to western civilization. Ramsey's goal is to prove that this phenomenon is not exclusive to the West and encourage further research to be done on rhetorical progenitor myths as they appear throughout the world. [Establishes discourse community link](#)

This is how Ramsey's article fits into the established discourse community. It summarizes the previous research, and then analyzes the concepts introduced by them in a different light while making new observations along the way. However, his article cannot exist without the previous research he drew upon to write it. In the abstract of the article, Ramsey specifically calls out the work of Jeffery Walker, Edward Schiappa, and Christopher Lyle Johnstone as the inspiration for his analysis. All three authors chose to analyze the myths of ancient Greece and how they shaped the rhetoric of their culture and the societies that appeared after them.

Walker argues that rhetoric was first elaborated on in ancient Greece through the work of the poet Hesiod and his writings in *Work and Days*. Walker points to the myth of Corax and Tisias as a prime example on how myth influenced rhetoric, the idea of which first came from Edward Schiappa. He Walker argues that stories have the power to move someone just as effectively as a well-structured argument. He claims that Hesiod used stories like these which were already part of Greek tradition as a way to calm down discussions on government. The poet attempted to use lessons from the past to help govern decisions in the present. Although Walker's book more specifically looks at how poetry was inseparable from rhetoric in ancient Greece, both Ramsey and Walker agree that myth was used to modify rhetoric in ancient Greece. However, Ramsey builds upon Walker's claim by saying that there are many myths in different parts of the world that were used for similar purposes. For example, Ramsey makes note of how the writing of Chinese author Han Fei in the *HanFeizi* shows how the myth of Cangjie influenced the ethics of Chinese rhetoric. Although Ramsey does not make a direct reference to Walker, the influence of Walker's claims about Hesiod are apparent in the similarity between the descriptions of how Hesiod and Han Fei used myths from their respective cultures when discussing ethical matters.

Despite inspiring both Walker and Ramsey, Edward Schiappa has a slightly different approach to the subject matter. He claims that rhetoric as a concept appeared before it was defined in the fourth century because mythical stories had already begun to define it in its various facets. Ramsey mentions how Schiappa cites the story of Corax and Tisias and how it attributes the explosion of legal rhetoric in ancient Sicily to them. Schiappa continues with his analysis of Corax and Tisias while also throwing in the observation that the poets Homer and Hesiod revealed that the presence of rhetoric existed in

ancient Greece long before it was properly recognized as its own separate discipline. Schiappa's paper is very relevant to the discussion on the influence of myth on rhetoric because it makes several claims upon which many of the discussions in Ramsey's and other articles are based on. Schiappa was one of the first to discuss the idea of ancient rhetoric being influenced by factors other than technical manuals written at the time. He makes the claim that the term rhetoric appeared in order to categorize existing questions and concepts. Ramsey notes that Schiappa's most important contribution to the discussion on myth and rhetoric is his claim that the mythical culture present in Greece at the time had a very significant influence on

[To be continued...]

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