ALL ROADS LEAD TO *PSOGOS*: RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN LATE ANTIQUE INVECTIVE*

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Summary: This paper aims to explore different rhetorical and literary strategies used by fourth century AD authors when composing invectives. Particular attention will be paid to the approach taken by these authors based on how they engaged with the people they intended to chastise: explicitly, implicitly, or by manipulating the notion of εἰκός.

The historical, religious, and cultural controversies of the fourth century AD facilitated the composition of rhetorical invectives and vituperative texts. Their intended audiences and the circumstances that prompted their composition varied: from religious disputations to personal feuds or to bitter political debates, late antique authors often found themselves composing invective lines for which they had numerous rhetorical strategies. Among this repertoire, I have chosen to outline three different approaches to the composition of an invective based on the author's kind of engagement with their targets. First, I will offer an example (Libanius of Antioch's *Or*. 37, *Against Polycles*) of the topics and tropes involved in the composition of an invective in which the themes that caused vituperation are unequivocally stated. Second, I will explore how the vituperative content of a text can only be fully understood if we read between the lines. Excerpts from works by Libanius, the emperor Julian and the philosopher Themistius will be explored by paying attention to tropes like ἀμφιβολία ('ambiguity'), ἔμφασις ('emphasis') and ἐσχηματισμένον ἐν λόγῳ ('figured speech'). Finally, I will suggest a third category – 'imagined invectives' – by bringing into action the notion of εἰκός

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('likelihood, probability') so the invective force of a text could be disguised as something happening on an alternate timeline. By studying these approaches, I intend to show that rhetorical invectives were literary artifacts that could be composed in different ways.

Explicit invectives

Late antique conflicts in different fields were discussed in rhetorical *psogoi*, a subgenre in which the figure of the 4th century AD sophist Libanius of Antioch stood out.[1] His role as one of the most influential figures in the cultural panorama of his time presented him with numerous opportunities to compose invectives against his rivals in the oratorical milieu and against those who opposed his views on culture and religion. His speech 37, *Against Polycles*, is an example of this. It is an invective that Libanius composed around 366, in which the sophist did not shy away from openly and explicitly exposing the motifs of his vituperation.[2] In this short invective, Libanius harshly reprimanded Helpidius and Polycles (who held the posts of prefect of the East and governor of Phoenicia respectively in the early 360s) for spreading the rumour that the emperor Julian, who had been killed in 363 during his campaign against the Persian empire, had ordered the poisoning of Helena, his own wife. Libanius admired Julian and lamented his untimely death at length in his orations 17 and 18. He therefore decided to defend and extol him by composing an invective where the *basilikos logos'* elements dedicated to honour Julian are unsophisticatedly intertwined with vituperating motifs.[3] The sophist's gibes against the rumour-mongers were based on topics which, according to the sophist, represented the exact opposite of Julian's ethos. For instance, since the emperor wanted to be known for his

1 Libanius composed numerous speeches that could be labelled as invectives (e.g., *Or.* 2 *To those who called him tiresome*; *Or.* 3 *To his students about his speech*; *Or.* 23 *Against the refugees*). Other late antique invectives that share the direct approach to its target found in Libanius *Or.* 37 are Claudian, *Against Eutropius* or John Chrysostom, *Against the games and the theatre*.

2 On the date of composition, see Cribiore 2015: 50-51; Woods 2018: 660.

3 The *basilikos logos* was one of the main forms that adopted late antique panegyrics. On this topic, see Rees 2018 for a comprehensive overview.

'self-control' (ἐγκράτεια) and his σωφροσύνη,[4] Libanius accused Helpidius and Polycles of prostitution and of resorting to illegal practices of magic and astrology moved by greed and treason. By putting topics and strategies related to two rhetorical antagonistic subgenres – *basilikos logos* and *psogos* – into a dialogue, Libanius' strategy in this oration seems to have merged Menander of Laodicea's prescriptions for the praise of an emperor (Men. Rhet. 368-377.30) with Aristotle's instructions for the composition of blame (*Rh.* 1368a10-37).[5]

In fact, Libanius was well aware that the rhetorical mechanisms of praise and invective were intertwined. In one of the speeches dedicated to Julian, the sophist acknowledged that praising Julian also meant attacking the emperor Constantius II (Julian's cousin and political enemy, *Or.* 12.44): "I take no pleasure in accusing Constantius, but my narrative demands that I do so, for it is impossible to separate the praise from the blame."[6] Moreover, in a letter that Libanius sent to Helpidius in 363, the sophist admitted that his social contacts were polarised along the invective-encomium axes (*Ep.* 1410): "For I suppose that one ought to praise or censure deeds, not praise excessively those one associates with, but censure those whom one does not spend time with."[7] In line with these references, in *Against Polycles* the sophist underlined the connections between praise and blame when he accused Polycles of having criticized Julian while giving the impression of praising him (2: ἐν σχήματι δὲ ἐπαινοῦντος ἔψεγες). This contrast is not an isolated instance of the way

4 On the rhetorical use of Julian's *sophrosyne* in this oration, see Doyle 2023: 823-25.

5 The editor of Libanius' work, Richard Foerster, described this discourse as a *scriptiuncula*, that is, as an undeveloped opuscule (1906: 236). Furthermore, the sadly deceased Raffaella Cribiore 2015: 50-51 also underlined the lack of a usual structure (proem, narration, argumentation, epilogue) in this invective, which, in her opinion, provokes a marked sense of sloppiness.

6 ἀλλ' ἐκείνου κατηγορεῖν ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐχ ἡδύ, τῷ λόγῳ δὲ ἀνάγκη. διαστῆσαι γὰρ τὴν εὐφημίαν ἀπὸ τῶν μέμψεων οὐκ ἔστιν. Translation taken from Norman 1969.

7 ἐπαινεῖν γὰρ οἶμαι δεῖν ἢ ψέγειν τὰ ἔργα, ἀλλ' οὐ τοὺς μὲν ὁμιλοῦντας πάντως ἐπαινεῖν, τοὺς δὲ οὐ συνδιατρίβοντας ψέγειν. Translation taken from Bradbury 2004.

in which Libanius juxtaposed praiseful and invective terms in *Against Polycles*, as throughout *Or.* 37 Libanius arrayed several contrapositions and antitheses in which praiseful and vituperating topics were put together.[8]

The reading of Libanius' *Against Polycles* is tremendously instructive on how rhetorical invectives worked in Late Antiquity when the reasons for the composition of the *psogos* were explicitly stated. The content of the accusations against Julian that the sophist tried to refute by praising the emperor, as well as those that he himself made against Helpidius and Polycles, informs us of the topics and rhetorical strategies commonly used in the composition of late antique *psogoi*. Therefore, Libanius reused topics and strategies that were frequently employed in Classical and Hellenistic literature.

Among the topics reformulated by Libanius in *Or.* 37, accusations of morally dubious sexual practices had a prominent position.[9] The sophist hinted that Helpidius had prostituted himself as a young man (*Or.* 37.3):[10] "At this point, stricken in my soul by your [Polycles] words, I cried out and said, 'But wouldn't Helpidius have sworn that he did not prostitute himself when he was young?' ... you were so overwhelmed by the truth that you even acknowledged yourself that you had heard this from one of his attendants. I said, however, that this man [the attendant] was dishonoured because he had become a woman voluntarily and his way of life had deprived him of the ability to slander another."[11] Libanius designed this attack on Helpidius to discredit his testimony and to portray

8 *Or.* 37.1: ἀφ' ἧς ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ οἶμαι φανεῖσθαι κακός, ἄλλος δέ τις ἴσως οὐκ ἀγαθός; 4. ἔλεγον τοίνυν καὶ ἀντέλεγον ἀγαθὸν κακοῦ κακοῦ κακῶς ἠγορευκότος. 5. τίς γὰρ Ἑλλήνων ἢ βαρβάρων πιστεύσειεν ἄν; 12. ἀνθρώπῳ κιναίδῳ κατὰ ἀνδρὸς σώφρονος συναγορεύω.

9 On the usefulness of the information about sexual practices in Antiquity, see Serafim et al. 2022: 5: "This updated approach to sexuality and sexual practices in the ancient Greek and Roman world has the potential to enhance our knowledge and understanding not only of matters that are related to sex *per se*, but also of the cultural workings in antiquity, i.e. how the beliefs of the ancients about sexuality connect with, and are being interpreted through the lens of, life within the civic and cultural communities of the past."

10 *Or.* 37.12: ἀνθρώπῳ κιναίδῳ. On *cinaedi*, see Sissa 2023.

11 On this topic, see Kapparis 2022. Translations from Libanius' *Or.* 37 have been taken from Cribiore 2015.

him as an unreliable source whose words on Julian were nothing more than unfounded defamation. Libanius levelled a similar accusation against Polycles. As in the case of Helpidius, the sophist aimed to discredit the validity of Polycles' testimony by remarking that he had maintained improper relations with men. At least that is how Cribiore interprets Libanius' comment about Polycles (*Or.* 37.17): "Rest assured that, by such a strong retaliation, you have let us know how you acted as a young man."[12]

Another topic that could motivate the composition of an invective was the betrayal of a friend, since this meant the loss of all the good traits involved in the conception of friendship in Late Antiquity: piety (εὐσέβεια), goodwill (εὔνοια), prudence (φρόνησις), and other elements that were related to an individual's religion or education.[13] In the first sections of Libanius' *Or.* 37, the theme of friendship looms large and acts as the framework within which the sophist elaborated on the origin of his attack on Polycles, since they were good friends until their relationship eventually fell apart (*Or.* 37.1): "It is evident to everyone, I think, that something must have put an end to our close relationship and to your daily visits to me in the afternoon. I would like to clarify the reason for this so that people will not inquire why this happened and will not trouble themselves guessing. I do not think that as a result I will appear base but believe that someone else will perhaps be revealed as not good." This statement is supplemented when Libanius recriminated Polycles that (*Or.* 37.18): "you were never my friend, you pretended it." The presence of the accusation of hypocrisy and false friendship against Polycles worked on two levels: first, Libanius wanted to give the impression that Polycles was an untrustworthy person even with his friends, hence his testimony against Julian should not be relied upon; in the second level, the emphasis on this broken friendship contrasted with a previous ref-

12 Cribiore 2015: 77: "The sophist hints that as a young man he might have indulged in illicit, homosexual pleasures." On homosexuality used as an invective topic, see for instance Aeschines' attacks against Demosthenes in *Or.* 2.88, 127. See also Serafim 2016-2017.

13 On Libanius' sense of friendship, see Kraus 2023.

erence to the true friendship that, according to Libanius, existed between him and the emperor (*Or.* 37.4): "Yes, he [Julian] was my friend and I would not deny it."

Once the theme of false friendship had appeared in the speech, Libanius continued his oration against Polycles by introducing a new invective topic: the practice of astrology for divinatory purposes. According to the sophist, Polycles circulated defamation and slander about Libanius among those who pretended to be experts in astrological matters (*Or.* 37.18): "You twisted my words about the stars and the assistance they provide, and made hostile to us people, whose (concept of) Destiny we censured, reporting these words to them, wronging me and flattering them, placing your hopes for the most important matters – such as offices and marriages – in their evil arts."

If these accusations had been true, Libanius' reproach would not have been gratuitous on this occasion, since magical and astrological practices were strictly regulated and severely punished in Late Antiquity, as recorded in the *Codex Theodosianus* (e.g., 9.16.4). The risks involved in carrying out illegal magical practices was a common argument in Libanius' invectives and in the narration of his feuds with his nemesis, who more than once accused him of engaging in astrological practices not only to discredit him, but also to unseat him from his position among the cultural elites of the fourth century. For example, in *Or.* 1.44, he recounted that Bemarchius, a sophist with whom he had sustained a long rivalry, accused Libanius of sabotaging his oratorical performances in public competitions by resorting to an astrologer, "who controlled the stars and through them could bring help or harm to men" (*Or.* 1.43).

Regarding the slander against the emperor Julian that provided the foundations for the composition of Libanius' oration – that is, the notion that the emperor had bribed a physician to poison his own wife -, these rumours should be contextualized within the long process of fictionalization to which Julian was subjected right after his death in 363. Libanius reproached Polycles that "you added that Julian gave a doctor a jewel that had belonged to his mother as a fee for causing the death of his wife" (*Or.* 37.3). However exaggerated or serious such accusation against Julian may seem, it should not be surprising in the context of the Julianic tra-

dition.[14] The transformation of the emperor into a legendary figure implied a process of literaturization in which bribing a physician to poison his own wife was not out of place among the other accusations and inventions created to defame him (e.g. human or even child sacrifice in religious rites; human immolation for divinatory practices) that were explicitly stated in invectives composed during the 4th-5th centuries.[15]

Implicit invective through ambiguity

In this section, I would like to explore how late antique invectives were sometimes expressed in an allusive[16] and implicit way by means of innuendo, inference and intentional ambiguity rather than with explicit verbal accusations. The rhetorical and literary toolkit of ancient authors was well equipped for the expression of such notions thanks to tropes such as ἀμφιβολία ('ambiguity'), ἔμφασις ('emphasis'), and ἐσχηματισμένον ἐν λόγῳ ('figured speech').

ἀμφιβολία, understood as 'ambiguity, double entendre', was a trope that was difficult to classify given the countless types of ambiguity that language can create. In fact, Quintilian thought that "there are innumerable species of ambiguity"[17] (*amphiboliae species sunt innumerabiles*, *Inst.* 7.9.1), although other grammarians like Trypho I were more concise in their definition (*On tropes* 27): "ἀμφιβολία is a word or speech that reveals two or more things" (ἀμφιβολία ἐστὶ λέξις ἢ λόγος δύο καὶ πλείονα πράγματα δηλοῦσα). Recent scholarship has rightly underscored the value of ἀμφιβολία as a rhetorical figure used by public speakers to attract or divert audience attention. As pointed out by Blank in his study

14 It should be noted that Woods 2018: 666 is less supportive of the view of Julian's poisoning as slander: "Unfortunately, Libanius pays little attention to the details of the charge against Julian but focusses rather upon praising his character and condemning that of those responsible for this charge, Polycles and Helpidius. A different approach to the refutation of this charge might have proved more informative and effective, although considerably less entertaining."

15 Célerier 2014: 207-332, 361-433; Cribiore 2015: 45.

16 On the 'allusive style' of late antique literature, see Kelly 2008: 161-316.

17 Translation taken from Russell 2001.

of the use of ἀμφιβολία in Isocrates' writings, "in dealing with amphibolic statements it is, therefore, the audience to a *logos* that has to make sense of the argument's unclear meaning on their own, simply because the author fails to do so ... The less context a speechwriter or speaker provides, the more he cedes control over the interpretation of his argument."[18]

The ambiguity that ἀμφιβολία produced was intentional in some instances. The philosopher Themistius, for example, was inclined to use neutral religious vocabulary when he discussed both political and religious matters. As a public figure working for the court of Christian emperors, he chose not to compromise himself from a religious point of view, even though he was a moderate pagan. In his oration *On Philanthropy*, Themistius dealt with philanthropy, a virtue that both pagans and Christians shared, though from different perspectives. When it came to discussing philanthropy and its relation to the idea of "mankind," Themistius wrote that (*Or.* 6.77a): "Yet what need is there for me to elaborate in minute detail that those who love a brother must obviously also love mankind? Come hither, O fortunate men, come hither and recognise your true Father, the abundance of his children and the entire host of your brothers."[19] The wording of "true Father" in Greek is τὸν ἀληθινὸν πατέρα, an amphibolic phrase that shows the "carefully ambiguous religious language which Themistius employed, designed to bridge over the gap between pagans and Christians."[20]

As is often the case with rhetorical concepts, it is difficult to study 'emphasis' (ἔμφασις), without linking it to other notions as it was connected to other concepts such as hyperbole, περιβολή or *amplificatio*.[21] For the grammarian Trypho I, ἔμφασις was "a discourse that amplified what was evident by insinuation" (*On Tropes*, 15: Ἔμφασίς ἐστι λέξις δι' ὑπονοίας αὐξάνουσα τὸ δηλούμενον). The rhetorician Tiberius defined 'emphasis' as a concept "not stating the thing itself but implying it

18 Blank 2023: 6. See also McNamara 2018.

19 Translation taken from Heather & Moncur 2001.

20 Heather & Moncur 2001: 187.

21 For a thorough analysis of ἔμφασις, see Kustas 1973.

through reference to other things."[22] Hermogenes' approach to 'emphasis' was somewhat more complex as he connected it with *parrhesia* (*Inv.* 4.13): "It is 'by implication' (ἔμφασις) whenever we are not able to speak (openly) because hindered and lacking freedom of speech, but in the figure of giving a different opinion we also imply what cannot be spoken by the way the speech is composed, so that the hearers understand and it is not a subject of reproach to the speaker."[23]

These definitions of ἔμφασις underlined its role as a device through which something was implied, that is, a sort of tacit agreement between the author and the audience about understanding something that was not uttered. An example of the use of ἔμφασις can be found in *The Sophist* (*Or.* 23), one of Themistius' most important private speeches, in which the philosopher aimed to defend himself from the criticism that portrayed him as a showman whose interests lay in getting public recognition and in maintaining his influence in the Constantinopolitan court. Themistius described the verbal attacks that he was receiving as "arrows" that did not harm him since he was in possession of armour (*Or.* 23.284): "crafted not by Hephaestus on Mt. Olympus, but by the gods who gave us philosophy and preside over it. Whomever they equip with defensive gear they make utterly invulnerable."[24] The reference to that divine armour helped Themistius on two levels: first, it allowed him to develop the metaphor of invective language as arrows, which was a topic in vituperative contexts. Thus, in Lucian of Samosata's *Slander* or in Gregory of Nazianzus' *On Silence at the Time of Fasting*, arrows feature prominently as images of verbal abuse. Second, there is an implicit reading of this metaphor in Themistius' text that intimates that he was under the patronage of the gods after he was entrusted with such a divine object. A direct remark made by him that pointed this privilege out could have

22 Translation taken from Kustas 1973. 'Emphasis' was not only used for rhetorical purposes, but also in religious (e.g., it is present throughout Clement of Alexandria's *Stromata* as a way to point out the religious obscurity and inconsistencies of paganism) and philosophical argumentations (e.g., Iamblichus used emphasis to underline the insinuating nature of some of Pythagoras' dicta, *VP* 118).

23 Translation taken from Kennedy 2005.

24 Translation taken from Penella 2000.

been understood as a conceited statement, but he managed to insinuate his meaning using implication (ἔμφασις).

Returning to Libanius and the accusations against him for participating in astrological and magical practices seen in section 1, the Antiochene sophist took advantage of accusations of that nature in his *Autobiography* by using ἔμφασις. When narrating his oratorical rivalry with the sophist Bemarchius, Libanius outlined his rival's ethos by enumerating his flaws (*Or.* 1.39-42): his support of an unworthy emperor as Constantius was in Libanius' eyes; his "blasphemous oratory"; his drinking and gambling problems; the absence of a collegial attitude ("being present when I introduced an oration to a public audience he listened in no very sweet frame of mind"); his failed speech in front of a big audience. Libanius' characterization of Bemarchius ticked all the boxes of a standard invective in which moral and ethical blemishes are clearly highlighted. At no point did Libanius explicitly admit that his personal and rhetorical skills were better than those of Bemarchius, but the former's superiority was evidenced with ἔμφασις when Libanius mentioned that Bemarchius (*Or.* 1.43): "went around with the fairy tale that he had been worsted by magic. I was intimate, so he said, with an astrologer who controlled the stars and through them could bring help or harm to men."[25]

What Libanius actually meant to convey by voicing such serious accusations against his rival was that Bermarchius was unable to beat him in the oratorical arena, hence Bemarchius had to spread false rumours to justify his defeat. As Trzcionka pointed out in her study on late antique magic, "the inclusion by antique authors of the accusations and trials does not necessarily reflect an increase, or isolated occurrence of them; rather it reflects the individual motivations of the authors as well as the survival of their particular works."[26] In the case of Libanius, his "individual motivations" to openly bring about those accusations involved the activation of ἔμφασις by implying something – namely, that the accusations against him were nothing but an admission of his rhetorical *savoir faire.*

25 Translation taken from Norman 1992.

26 Trzcionka 2007: 63.

Ambiguity and double entendre were also hidden in panegyrics and encomia by means of 'figured speech' (ἐσχηματισμένον ἐν λόγῳ), a concept that, according to Pernot, "applies to cases in which the orator uses false pretenses to disguise his real intent, or speaks obliquely in order to get to his point indirectly."[27] 'Figured speech' was part of praise which contained some invective messages when looked at more closely, like Julian's *The Heroic Deeds of Constantius*. This panegyric was composed to celebrate the success of his cousin, the emperor Constantius, but Julian also added "implicit criticism"[28] against him. The panegyric contains a *speculum principis* that anticipates much of the political and religious programme that Julian aimed to implement when he became emperor. Drawing on Socrates' moral anecdotes and on allusions to Platonic philosophy, Julian enumerated the virtues that an ideal emperor should put into practice (*Or.* 3.86a-93d): being an example of magnanimity, benevolence, sobriety, courage, protecting his people whilst ruling over them with justice. As a result, as Drake put it, Julian's *Or.* 3 ended up being "a soliloquy, reflecting his thoughts about what kind of leader he wanted to be."[29]

However, most of those virtues are not applied to Constantius in the following lines. Even though Julian asked his audience (*Or.* 3.93): "Do you wish to learn whether this is true of the Emperor? I will offer you trustworthy evidence, and I know well that you will not convict me of false witness," that evidence was restricted to showing Constantius' generosity when he shared the Empire with his brothers (*Or.* 3.94), his defense against the usurpers Magnentius and Silvanus (*Or.* 3.98b-d) and his mercy towards those who supported the usurpers (*Or.* 3.101b).

Julian's silence on the presence of the above-mentioned philosophical and intellectual virtues in his portrayal of Constantius followed some of the recommendations given by Demetrius in his treatment of the 'figured speech' (*Eloc.* 287: Τὸ δὲ καλούμενον ἐσχηματισμένον ἐν λόγῳ): 'tact' (*Eloc.* 288: εὐπρεπεία) by not explicitly mentioning Constantius' lack

27 Pernot 2015: 104.

28 Drake 2012: 37.

29 Drake 2012: 42. Tougher thinks along the same lines in his analysis of Julian's *First Panegyric on Constantius II* as he proposes that (2012: 29) "Julian is being deliberately subversive, directing a speech of praise to a rather different end."

of some virtues; 'ambiguity' (*Eloc.* 291: εἶδος ἀμφίβολον) by using "invective that does not seem invective" (*Eloc.* 291); the need to address a powerful person with this kind of speech as "Flattery is shameful, open criticism is dangerous, and the best course lies in the middle, namely innuendo" (*Eloc.* 294).[30]

Imagined invectives

The type of invectives dealt with in section 1 – canonical, explicit *psogos* – and in section 2 – allusive vituperations – was connected to the denunciation of moral flaws and blemishes that authors attributed to real individuals. Yet, in some instances, those same individuals became the object of invectives as a result of their behaviours and the actions that they never carried out but which were imagined as real events in an alternate reality fabricated by the author of the invective. The invention of these alternate scenarios lent itself to the expression of conjectures that presented authors with a new (although non-existent) timeline in which they could amplify the invective force of their speeches.[31]

Invectives created from this counterfactual process were based on the manipulation of the rhetorical value of the term εἰκός ('likelihood, probability'), a notion that operated in every sphere of Ancient Greek thought (though mainly in art, literature and philosophy) and allowed authors to test the boundaries between reality and imagination. As Wohl pointed out, "Bound to its grounding logic and fundamental ontological presuppositions, εἰκός lets us see how a genre or discourse frames its own realities and imagines possibilities that fall beyond it."[32] Thus, εἰκός was a device capable of generating alternate realities in which the persuasive

30 Demetrius' translations taken from Innes 1995.

31 Counterfactuals and conjectures in Antiquity have been studied from a cultural point of view (Grandazzi & Queyrel-Bottineau 2018; Wohl 2014) and from a linguistic perspective (see for instance la Roi 2024).

32 Wohl 2014: 7.

force of invectives was not aimed at signalling the actual flaws of individuals, but to offer audiences the chance to envisage imaginary flaws.[33] From a rhetorical and literary viewpoint, the analysis of invectives based on counterfactual premises enables us to explore the middle ground "between the 'world-reflecting' and 'world-creating' facets of literary mimesis and thus to situate fiction in its characteristically equivocal relation to reality."[34]

Regardless of that 'equivocal' factor, the creation of alternate scenarios in which εἰκός could be manipulated was contemplated in treatises on epideictic rhetoric. In Imperial times, the rhetorician Theon advised students of rhetoric to experiment with time alterations as (*Prog.* 110-11): "It is useful also to conjecture about the future on the basis of past events, as if one were to say about Alexander of Macedon, 'What would he, who overthrew many great peoples, have done if he had lived a little longer?'."[35] Menander the Rhetor also suggested the usage of counterfactual imagination to increase the pathos of monodies (436): "Share the grief of the father and mother, and amplify the pathos by showing what hopes they have been robbed of. You should also argue from the point of view of the city, saying what kind of man he would have been to it, how he would have shown himself as a benefactor, how indeed he did."[36]

These types of historical conjectures suggested by Theon and Menander feature in the invectives that Gregory of Nazianzen composed against the emperor Julian.[37] Gregory's *psogoi* not only chastised Julian for the actions and religious policies that he tried to implement during his short reign (361-363) but also reprimanded him for the negative impact that his actions would have had for Christians if the course of history had been slightly different. These counterfactual sections in Greg-

33 Gagarin 2014 surveys examples from Athenian forensic oratory in which the *eikos* argument was used. To those examples Lysias' *On the refusal of a pension* could be added.

34 Wohl 2014: 5.

35 Translation taken from Kennedy 2003.

36 Translation taken from Russell & Wilson 1981.

37 Gregory was not alone in chastising the emperor Julian by using counterfactuals, as other Christian authors like Socrates of Constantinople also attacked Julian by composing what-if scenarios (e.g., *Hist. eccl.* 3.40-42).

ory's invectives focused mainly on Julian's death and its aftermath. Gregory had compiled various reports concerning how Julian died during the Persian campaign that the emperor launched in 363. In one of the reports that Gregory consulted, it is said that Julian was lying next to the bank of a river after having been deadly wounded by a spear. Gregory tells us that, on the brink of death, Julian planned to throw himself into the river so his body would disappear and, therefore, he would be thought of as (*Or.* 5.14): "something higher than mortals."[38] However, Julian's desire to be considered as a god by making his body disappear after his death was finally hindered (*Or.* 5.14): "And had not one of the imperial eunuchs perceived what was going on and telling it to the rest out of disgust at the extravagant notion, prevented his purpose from being effected – why, another new god born out of an accident, would have manifested himself to the stupid!"[39] Evidently, Julian never became a god, but Gregory's insinuation of that possibility helped him portray Julian as a hybristic emperor who could not stop plotting even at the moment of his death.

Gregory's *Or.* 5 also included some post-mortem vituperating lines based on εἰκός arguments. After narrating Julian's death, Gregory praised the Persian's sense of moderation,[40] that eventually prevented Julian's catastrophic defeat from being even worse for the future of the Roman Empire (*Or.* 5.15): "Now, if the Persians had not made a moderate use of their victory (for it is a law with them to know how to measure out prosperity) or had not been fearful of something or other, as the report goes, and therefore had agreed to terms so unexpected and reasonable, nothing was there to prevent 'not even a fire-carrier's' (as the saying is) 'surviving out of the whole army,' so completely had the Persians got them in their power, inasmuch as the latter were fighting in their own country, and were elated by the recent events; for the obtaining of some success is a sufficient foundation for hope of the future." With these lines

38 Translation taken from King 1888.

39 This version of Julian's final moments contrasts with that of Ammianus Marcellinus', since the historian's praiseful description of Julian's death was heavily inspired by Plato's narration of Socrates' death in *Phaedo*.

40 Note the emphasis on the notion of 'moderation' in the protasis of the conditional clause (*Or.* 5.15): Εἰ μὲν οὖν μὴ Πέρσαι τῇ νίκῃ μετριάζοντες καὶ γὰρ νόμος οὗτος αὐτοῖς εἰδέναι μετρεῖν εὐπραγίαν.

Gregory invited his audience to imagine a defeat with more casualties for the Roman army by attributing the Persians with a Hellenic virtue like μετρεῖν, which contrasted with Julian's incompetence at leading the campaign against the Persians.

Following this line of counterfactual thinking, Gregory did not miss the opportunity to make his audience imagine what the Empire would have turned into if Julian's acolytes had not been expelled from the court after his death. Gregory begins his account by narrating that Julian's successor, the emperor Jovian, was forced to make a deal with the Persians that left the Roman Empire in a very unfavourable position. Even though Jovian managed to minimize the loss of territories and casualties, Gregory conveyed the idea that the Empire would not be completely secure until the few supporters of Julian remaining at the court were displaced from the spheres of power (*Or.* 5.19): "I am not ignorant that to two or three of the parasites in the palace, his equals in irreligion (for the others I willingly pass over), there was given such mighty payment for their impiety that nothing would have prevented their plundering all that was subject to the Romans, both land and sea, if an end had not been put opportunely to the business, so greatly did they surpass in rapine and greediness those hundred-handed giants of old." This allusion to another alternative scenario reinforced Gregory's goal of presenting Julian not only as a bad emperor, but especially as the person who would have ruined the Christian Roman Empire if he had not died in 363.

These examples from Gregory's invective against Julian show that εἰκός arguments provided late antique authors with an original and effective tool for chastising religious and political enemies. Even though their criticism was located on an imagined timeline, the evocative power of what-if scenarios produced "a complex interaction between facts and *eikos* arguments, in which arguments are used to validate or invalidate a fact (the will), while facts in turn (in the form of witnesses) are used to support arguments. Facts and arguments thus turn out to be mutually dependent; neither, it seems, can exist in isolation from the other."[41] In the case of Gregory's invective, εἰκός arguments were superimposed over historical facts to validate his fears concerning the destiny of the Empire if Julian had survived the Persian campaign.

41 Gagarin 2014: 25.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has tried to prove that the different ways of composing invective in late antique times showed its protean nature and its prevalence as one of the main discursive modes in late antique literature. Explicit *psogoi* like Libanius' *Or.* 37 relied heavily on the reformulation of topics and strategies that could be traced back to the iambic tradition in the Archaic period. Implicit invectives based on double entendre reflected a period of dramatic changes on every level when ambiguity, in the guise of ἀμφιβολία, ἔμφασις, and ἐσχηματισμένον ἐν λόγῳ, could be a very persuasive and powerful technique if properly articulated. Imagined invectives built on counterfactual premises were a means of increasing the pathos of an oration and to demonstrate to audiences, by manipulating the notion of εἰκός, which religious, cultural, and political values were dominant in the 4th century AD.

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