

# HYBRIS IN DEMOSTHENES’ AGAINST CONON

By Priscilla Gontijo Leite

**Summary:** The speech *Against Conon* from the *corpus Demosthenicum* addresses the dispute between Ariston and Conon due to physical aggression by Conon’s son against Ariston, which has the contours of *hybris*, a term that appears in more than half of the sections. Despite the recurrence, the legal action is not a *graphe hybreos*, but a *dike aikeias*. This paper aims to analyse the role of *hybris* in the speech to characterize exacerbated violence, such that father and son are considered unfit for political life. The violence is physical, since Ariston is bedridden after the attack and symbolic, through the imitation of the rooster crowing over his beaten and naked body. *Hybris* is also associated with youth and wealth, topics presented by Aristotle in *Rhetoric* as a means of stirring up *pathos* and depicting *ethos*.

Violence is, unfortunately, a common occurrence in human experience, which is why it is necessary to reflect on it and its various manifestations. Whether in the past or in the present, violence is seen as something deleterious and punishable. However, some forms of violence are tolerated simply because they are considered milder or have less offensive potential.<sup>1</sup> One example is invective, characterized primarily by verbal violence.<sup>2</sup> Although it may be considered minor due to its occurrence in the verbal domain, violence and aggression are central to its nature. Invective is a verbal act intended to undermine the individual, directly attacking their identity. As such, it can easily approach *hybris*, given its demeaning and degrading impact on the person

Even in cases where violence is authorized, it generates unease among members of society who expect the aggressor to be punished in some way. Violence thus refers to an order that has been broken. Thinking

1 Gagarin 2005.

2 Papaioannou & Serafim 2021: 2.

about violence therefore also means thinking about the organization of this order. The relationship between violence and the breaking of an order is expressed in the term *hybris*, a central concept in the speech *Against Conon* (Dem. 54).

*Hybris* is difficult to translate into modern languages, and it is translated as ‘violence’, ‘insolence’, ‘outrage’, ‘injury’, ‘arrogance’, ‘haughtiness’, and ‘pride’.<sup>3</sup> *Hybris* is characterized by violence in which there is a clear intention to harm another person and the perpetrator feels a sense of superiority.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it is not clear, even in legislation,<sup>5</sup> which acts can be considered *hybris*. In *hybris*, there is a subjective component of the desire to perpetrate humiliation on the victim and the aggressor’s satisfaction in carrying out the act.

When humiliation takes place in the verbal realm, *hybris* can be closely associated with invective, even though there are other Greek terms to denote offensive speech – such as *blasphemos*, *loidoros*, and the legal action *kakegorias dikai* (cf. Dem. 54.17–18). What brings invective closer to *hybris* is its intense intention to defame and humiliate the individual. However, not all instances of invective bear the marks of *hybris*; it is the context in which the offense occurs that ultimately determines this association.

3 MacDowell 1986: 129.

4 There is an intense debate surrounding the notion of *hybris*. Gernet (2001), in his seminal study dated 1917, highlights the religious aspects of the *hybris*. This point has been disputed in more recent studies such as those by MacDowell (1976, 1986), Fisher (1976, 1976, 1992) and Cairns (1996). Fisher and Cairns disagree with MacDowell that *hybris* can be practised by animals; for both, *hybris* can only be practised by men and against men. Cairns equates *hybris* with injustice (*adikia*), also considering the author’s intention; on the other hand, Fisher, based on the Aristotelian conception, highlights the psychological state of the author and the humiliation caused to the victim.

5 Cf. Dem. 21.47; Aeschin. 1.15. These sections with different drafts are certainly apocryphal. However, it should not be completely disregarded in analysis. This law, authored by Solon, provides more information about the procedure than what *hybris* is. So, any Athenian might bring a *graphe* before the *thesmothetai*. On the law of *hybris*, see MacDowell 1986; Philips 2013, 2014; Fisher 1990: 123–38; 1992: 36–37; Murray 1990: 139–46. For an analysis of *hybris* and violence in the archaic period and Solon’s legislation, see Valdés Guía 2019.

In the Attic orators, the term *hybris* appears 344 times, with a prominent place in Demosthenes' speech *Against Meidias*,<sup>6</sup> where it occurs 131 times.<sup>7</sup> In general, *hybris* is used by the orators to negatively characterize opponents and point out inappropriate social behaviour.<sup>8</sup> The descriptions of hubristic assaults in turn contain signs of desire, dishonour, and shame, which comes close to the definition of *hybris* that Aristotle presents in the *Rhetoric*.<sup>9</sup>

5. The person who gives insult also belittles; for insult is doing and speaking in which there is shame to the sufferer, not that some advantage may accrue to the doer or because something has happened but for the pleasure of it; for those reacting to something do not give insult but are retaliating. 6. The cause of pleasure to those who give insult is that they think they themselves become more superior by ill-treating others. That is why the young and the rich are given to insults; for by insulting they think they are superior. Dishonor is a feature of insult, and one who dishonours belittles; for what is worthless has no repute, neither for good nor evil. (Arist. *Rh.* 1378b)<sup>10</sup>

Shame and pleasure in oneself are important elements in the description of the aggression with traces of *hybris* that Ariston suffers in the speech *Against Conon* (Dem. 54). It is very similar to Aristotle's concept of *hybris*; therefore, I will use the philosopher's assumptions to analyse this speech.

*Against Conon* was written by Demosthenes while he was working as a logographer, probably in the year 341 BCE.<sup>11</sup> What is remarkable about the speech is the vivid way in which it describes the attack on Ariston, the young man who commissioned the speech.<sup>12</sup> He was brutally beaten by Conon, his son Ctesias, and others who were with them one night in

6 Harris 1989.

7 Rowe 1993: 397.

8 Cohen 1997.

9 Phillips 2014: 84-86.

10 All translations of *Rhetoric* are from Kennedy 2007.

11 Foster 1943; Bers 2003: 45-67; Lentakis 2024: 55.

12 The vividness of the narrative is part of the orator's technique for concocted version of events, not the events themselves. See Lentakis 2024: 60-61.

the streets of the agora. They even stole his clothes and left him naked in the mud.<sup>13</sup> The attack was so severe that he was bedridden for several days (Dem. 54.1-25) and suffered from fever due to haemorrhaging,<sup>14</sup> so that he almost died (Dem. 54.10-13).

Furthermore, the speech is an interesting source for understanding the dynamics between groups of young men in the competitive Athenian society and how some of their interactions were violent.<sup>15</sup> The violence in *Against Conon* manifests itself physically, verbally, and symbolically in ways that complement each other. The physical and verbal forms are easily identifiable, as they leave marks that can be witnessed by someone, such as bruises or insults. However, the symbolic violence that a wound leaves in someone's psyche is not always recognized by others, either because it is subtle or because it is seen as less serious. Ariston's wounds are attested by the testimony of friends, family (Dem 54.8, 20), and a doctor (Dem. 54.11-12); the verbal insults are also attested through testimonies of some other people (Dem. 54.9). The symbolic violence is again expressed by the laughter of his attackers and the action of making Ariston the laughing stock of his fellow men: the attackers mocked Ariston, who lay naked in the mud, and imitated a rooster after the attack.<sup>16</sup> This is an example of comic invective that evokes malicious laughter at the expense of Ariston's identity, which is consequently belittled.<sup>17</sup>

13 Cirillo (2009: 13-14) notes that the word 'mud' (*borboros*) appears only this passage in the *corpus* of Attic orators. This suggests that Demosthenes used it to portray Ariston as disgusted by the aggression that he suffered, emphasizing that Conon, by acting in such a manner, is a disgusting citizen. Furthermore, the shameful state he was left in after the assault is strong evidence of *hybris*.

14 See Cirillo (2009) for use of Hippocratic language to describe the consequences of aggression.

15 *Ithyphalloi*, *Autolekythoi*, *Triballoi* are some groups of young people who practiced wrong acts (Dem. 54.14, 17, 20). See Cirillo 2009: 21-24; Halliwell 2008: 35-36; Humphreys 2018: 426-27; Roisman 2005: 21.

16 For Cirillo (2009: 19-21) the use of the rooster in the description of violence promotes a hybridization between man and bird, which reveals the serious nature of the assault. In turn, Halliwell (2008: 35-37) presents a general association between mimicry and joking and shows that taunting a wounded enemy was an old ritual of triumphalism.

17 Serafim 2021: 72-74.

To describe this assault, the orator uses the word *hybris*, which occurs 28 times in the speech: 1(2x), 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13(2X), 15(2x), 16, 17, 20, 21, 24(2x), 25, 28, 32, 33, 37, 40, 41, 43(2x), 44. This includes the very first word of the speech: *hybristheis* – aorist passive participle, masculine nominative singular. It also occurs in the last paragraph: *hybristeoi* – adjective plural masculine nominative. This clearly shows the speaker's intention to make the judges perceive the aggression as an act of *hybris*. The repetition of the term becomes even more significant considering that this speech has 44 paragraphs, which means that more than half of them mention *hybris*. By beginning the speech with the theme of *hybris* and following it through consistently,<sup>18</sup> the orator creates an expectation in the audience, urging them to find out the reasons why Conon may have been guilty of *hybris*. Thus, the judges listen to the narrative of the assault after having been instilled with the idea that it was an act of *hybris*. The intention is for the judges to conclude that it is unacceptable for the city to have a citizen outraged (Dem. 54.44).

Despite this rhetorical operation, the speech is not a *graphe hybreos* but a *dike aikeias*.<sup>19</sup> The choice of procedure is presented in the very first paragraph:

[1] I was assaulted (ὕβρισθεῖς), gentlemen of the jury, and at the hands of Conon, the man here, I suffered injuries so severe that for a very long time neither my family nor any of the doctors expected I would survive. But when I unexpectedly recovered and was out of danger, I initiated this private case for battery (δίκην τῆς αἰκείας) against him. All the friends and relatives whom I asked for advice were saying that for his deeds Conon was liable to summary arrest as a cloak stealer, and to public suits for *hybris* (ὑβρεως γραφαῖς). But they advised me and urged me not to involve myself in greater troubles than I could

18 The same happens in the *Against Meidias*: 131 occurrences of *hybris* distributed in 227 paragraphs. Rowe (1993) argues that the repetition of the term *hybris* does not only indicate the importance of the word, but also a technique of the orator and a stylistic feature of the speech. For the use of *hybris* in the *Demosthenicum* corpus see Gontijo Leite 2013.

19 MacDowell 1986: 123; Phillips 2014: 85–87. Lentakis (2024: 61) notes that the law of *aikēia* is not mentioned in the speech unlike the law on *hybris* and robbery (*lopodysia*).

handle; and also, not to be seen to complain more than a young man should about what was done to me.<sup>20</sup>

*Dike aikeias*, for battery, is a private action interpreted by the victim: the person who suffered physical violence. The first to deliver a blow was considered guilty, whereas penalty was limited to a monetary fine.<sup>21</sup> In the confusion of temperaments that usually surround fights, it is difficult to determine who was the first to start; hence it was common for participants in the quarrel to sue each other as being the other responsible for starting. In cases of physical violence with a weapon or that resulted in death, the aggressor could be prosecuted for *traumatōs ek pronoias*. In cases of aggravated battery or where the victims were non-citizens (women, slaves, foreigners), the aggressor could be prosecuted under the law of *hybris* (*graphe hybreos*).

Demosthenes' emphasis on exploring the *dike aikeias* and *graphe hybreos* in the speech *Against Conon*, rather than delving into the charge of murder, suggests that Conon could easily refute the latter charge in his counterargument. Conon would likely focus on demonstrating Ariston's share of responsibility in the rivalry with his sons. However, in presenting his procedural choice to the judges, Demosthenes aims to depict Conon's offenses as more serious and harmful to the community than what the *dike aikeias* presupposes. Throughout the entire speech, the orator develops the polarization between Ariston and Conon. Despite being young, Ariston is considered as an example of virtue and a good citizen who contributes to the city in military arts and liturgies. He also heeds the advice of his friends and family. On the other hand, Conon, even in his prime, is an example of a bad citizen. He incites his sons to violence, does not contribute to liturgies (Dem 54.44), and pursues and assaults other citizens in public.

Therefore, *hybris* is central in *Against Conon*. According to Halliwell, the accusation in this speech is constructed from a combination of *hybris* and *aselgeia* (impudence, insolence, violence, and vulgarity), which occurs 6 times: 2, 4, 5, 13, 25, 26.<sup>22</sup> This is further evidence of how Conon

20 All translations of *Against Conon* are from Bers 2003.

21 Antiph. III 2.1; III 3.2.

22 Halliwell 1991: 287.

wanted to cause great shame in Ariston and that this aspect is one of the pillars of the argument developed by Demosthenes. It is also important to highlight the occurrence of other terms like *paroinia*, 'excess induced by drunkenness': 4, 5, 14, 16; *anaideia*, 'lack of respect' or 'shamelessness': 33, 37, 38, 42; and *poneria*, 'wickedness': 37.<sup>23</sup>

In order to better understand this centrality, I divide this paper into two parts: the first part focuses on the relationship between Ariston, Conon, and Ctesias, and the second part will explore the figure of the rooster, the laughter, and the symbolic violence.

### Ariston, Conon, and Ctesias

The speech does not provide a clear indication of the social and political standing of Conon and his family.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it is difficult to ascertain whether any political rivalry existed between the parties involved. As a result, the speech is considered as a personal disagreement that arose from youth group rivalries. However, it is essential to note that the lawsuit was directed towards Conon and not Ctesias, whom Ariston had declared rivalry against. Additionally, Ariston alleges that Conon initiated the altercation, even though others were also involved in the fight. Conon, on the other hand, maintains that he arrived later, and Ctesias and Ariston were already fighting when he came.

[28] Instead, they would have done so from the first, before bringing the suit, when I was lying wounded, not knowing whether I would survive, and I was declaring to all who came to visit that Conon was the first to strike me and had inflicted most of the abuse I suffered (ὕβρισμήν). He would have come to my house right away with many witnesses, and on the spot he would have offered to hand over his slaves and would have called in some members of the Areopagus. I say Areopagus, since if I had died, the trial would have taken place in that court.

23 Fisher 1992: 50.

24 Conon is not an uncommon name. Conon's family is from the deme Paionidai (Humphreys 2018: 937).

Throughout the speech, the orator seeks to demonstrate that Conon was not only guilty of committing violence but also responsible for introducing his son into a violent environment, encouraging him to participate in groups of youths who rivalled other groups, even engaging in physical fights (Dem. 54.16-18). In this way, the father did not offer the necessary education to his sons, who committed reprehensible acts in front of their father's authority without any shame (Dem. 54.23), such as the serious violence suffered by Ariston.

In the speech itself, there are possible arguments that Conon could use to defend himself and his son's attitude (Dem. 54.13, 14, 21, 30, 31, 32).<sup>25</sup> According to Conon, there are several young men in Athens, sons of respectable citizen, who have fun and gather in groups (Dem. 54.14, 17, 20). In these groups, they can get drunk, chase courtesans, and mock others. Thus, the assaults committed would not be outrageous but innocent pranks. This argumentation could have a positive impact on the judges because Athenian culture associates youth with being prone to exaggeration and lack of control.<sup>26</sup> These elements are evident in the description of the character of the young in *Rhetoric* 1389b:

In terms of their character, the young are prone to desires and inclined to do whatever they desire. Of the desires of the body they are most inclined to pursue that relating to sex and they are powerless against this. They are changeable and fickle in desires, and though they intensely lust, they are quickly satisfied; for their wants, like the thirst and hunger of the sick, are sharp rather than massive. And they are impulsive and quick-tempered and inclined to follow up their anger [by action]. And they are unable to resist their impulses; for through love of honor they cannot put up with being belittled but become indignant if they think they are done a wrong. And though they love honour, they love victory more; for youth longs for superiority and victory is a kind of superiority. [...] And [they are] filled with

25 Lentakis 2024: 56.

26 According to Roisman (2005: 17-21), *Against Conon* presents an extensive image of young people.



hopes; for like those drinking wine, the young are heated by their nature, and at the same time [they are filled with hopes] because of not yet having experienced much failure. [...] And all the mistakes they make are in the direction of excess and vehemence, contrary to the maxim of Chilon; for they do "everything too much"; they love too much and hate too much and all other things similarly. And they think they know everything and strongly insist on it; for this is the cause of their doing everything too much. And the wrongs they commit come from insolence, not maliciousness. And they are inclined to pity, because of supposing [that] everybody is good or better than the average; for they measure their neighbours by their own innocence, with the result that they suppose them to be suffering unworthily. And they are fond of laughter and, as a result, witty; for wit is cultured insolence. Such, then, is the character of the young.

Young people are thus naturally inclined to commit *hybris* and consequently to practise violence and injustice, but this is not necessarily the result of malice. Furthermore, young people are also prone to laughter and may use it in inappropriate situations.<sup>27</sup> In such cases, laughter, even if it is an outrage, may be socially acceptable because it is seen as less offensive; even more so when one considers that the two young men, Ariston and Ctesias, had a previous incident that could be used by the defence to claim that the two had a previous enmity.

Two years earlier, an incident had taken place at a garrison on the border with Euboea. Ctesias and his companions set up their tent near Ariston and his group. While at the camp, Ctesias and his friends were frequently drunk and disruptive, bothering everyone, particularly Ariston's slaves (Dem. 54.3-5).<sup>28</sup>

[3] Two years ago I went out to Panactum when we were assigned guard duty there. The sons of this man Conon pitched their tent near us [...] [4] You see, with the excuse that while they were cooking, our

27 Halliwell 2008.

28 The construction of Ctesias's *hybris* begins with the description of this episode, in which he and others urinates on Ariston's slaves. See Cirillo 2009: 8-11; Roisman 2005: 19-20.

slaves were aiming the campfire smoke in their direction, or that every word our slaves spoke to them was an insult (κακῶς λέγειν), these men beat them, emptied out their latrine buckets on them, urinated on them, and indulged in every sort of brutal and outrageous behaviour (καὶ ἀσελγείας καὶ ὕβρεως).

Thus, the speaker in *Against Conon* attempts to show that *hybris* is the typical behaviour of the opponent's family, dismantling Conon's main line of defence: Ariston was not so innocent in the conflict and had a greater role in the fight than he was willing to admit, which is more likely given the long-standing enmity between the youths.<sup>29</sup> This would be proven in Conon's favour by the statement that his son and Ariston were already fighting when he arrived at the agora (Dem. 54.31). From this point to the end of the speech, the theme of false testimony, from which Conon would benefit, emerges. In the speech, Conon's brazen character enables him to lie and make others lie in order to gain victory in court (Dem. 54.40).

Although the case is difficult to win, as Ariston himself may be responsible for the violence, Demosthenes skilfully explores the circumstances of Conon's involvement in the rivalry between the youths and uses persuasive mechanisms to construct a positive image of Ariston and convince the judges that he was severely harmed. In contrast, the opponents are portrayed as representatives of *hybris* par excellence.

These considerations are important in order to understand why, although Ctesias was Ariston's original enemy, the case was brought against his father Conon. He is guilty not only of his own *hybris* but also of failing to raise his son properly and participating in a fight that did not concern him.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, a detailed account of the aggression is crucial in order to demonstrate the opponent's *hybris*.

[7] These are the events I thought I should ignore, but not long after, while I was taking a stroll, as was my custom, in the evening in the Agora with Phanostratus of the deme Cephisia, a man of my own age, Conon's son Ctesias came by, drunk, along by the Leocorion, near Pythodorus' shops. He saw us, yelled out, and said something to himself,

29 Lentakis 2024: 62-63.

30 Roisman 2005: 18.

as a drunk will do, so you can't understand what he's saying, and then went up toward Melite. There they were drinking, as we later learned, at the shop of Pamphilus the fuller: Conon here, a fellow named Theotimus, Archebiades, Spintharus the son of Eubulus, Theogenes the son of Andromenes, and many fellows whom Ctesias incited as he made his way into the Agora. [8] It happened that we encountered these men as we were turning away from the temple of Persephone and were walking back, just about at the Leocorion. In the *mêlée*, one of them, a man I didn't know, rushed Phanostratus and pinned him down, and Conon here and his son and the son of Andromenes fell on me.

The description begins with a chase through the streets of Athens, narrated in detail.<sup>31</sup> Personal relationships in classical Athens are expressed through respect for the city's physical context. For this reason, the inclusion of topographical details provokes some empathy in the judges, as there would be some places for them where they should behave with more respect. The violence begins in front of the Leocorion, a sacred place, and continues in another sacred place, the Pherefatium, a temple dedicated to Persephone. Conon and his sons were so drunk after participating in the *symposium*, that they began to chase and beat other citizens. In addition to the outrage caused by the aggression, they do not show any respect for public spaces.

The violence becomes even more serious when Conon starts imitating a rooster. This is symbolic violence. Its consequences could extend beyond the moment of the event, causing significant harm to the individual's social life. A man who has suffered from *hybris* could potentially become the target of invective and many jokes, thus putting his self-image at risk in the eyes of the community.

31 This description makes the speech a valuable source for reconstructing the environment of the agora in 4th century BC Athens, work carried out by Fowler (1958). In this paper, the author contrasts the speech with other textual and archaeological sources to reconstruct the topography of the place. Millett (1998), in a paper that discusses the various types of meetings held in the agora, demonstrates the public nature of the place and its importance for the development of various aspects of the political, social, religious and economic life of the *polis*, thus constituting the symbolic centre of the city.

### Aggression, Laughter, and the Figure of the Rooster

The description of the aggression is made even more vivid by the account of Conon's victorious crowing over his enemy, who lies in the mud after being beaten and stripped (Dem. 54.9). Conon imitated the crowing of a rooster. He bent his arms and flapped them as if they were the bird's wings.<sup>32</sup> For modern readers, this scene may be disconcerting and even provoke laughter, since it is unusual in battles for a participant to imitate the crowing of birds as a sign of victory.<sup>33</sup> This oddity leads us to question the veracity of the scene. Was this picturesque scene drawn by Demosthenes genuine or was it merely an invention by the orator to win the sympathy of the judges? According to Schmitz (2000), who conducted a study on the plausibility of Greek orators, this narrative must be true because it is too bizarre to be a mere fantasy.<sup>34</sup> Thus, this scene is capable of arousing various emotions in the judges: compassion for the victim, laughter at Conon's theatrics or disgust at the adversary, who sees his actions as horrific and exaggerated.

[8] First they pulled off my cloak, then tripped me and threw me down in the mud, jumped on me and hit me so hard they split my lip and made my eyes swell shut. They left me in such a state that I could not get up or speak. And as I lay there, I heard them saying many shocking things (δεινὰ λεγόντων). [9] Generally it was filthy stuff, and I hesitate to repeat some of it before you, but I will tell you something that is evidence of Conon's insolence (ὑβρεως) and indicates that the whole business came about at his instigation. You see, he sang out, imitating victorious fighting cocks, and his cronies urged him to flap his elbows against his sides, like wings. Afterward, passersby took me home, naked, and these men went off with my cloak. When I got to my door, my mother and the serving women cried and shrieked and only with difficulty got me into a bath, washed me off all around, and showed me to the doctors.

32 Cirillo 2009: 19-21.

33 What is capable of provoking laughter in ancient and modern societies varies greatly. See Halliwell 2008.

34 Schmitz 2000: 67-68.

In the Greek mentality, the rooster symbolized pride, pugnacity, legal disputes (*agon*), uncontrolled love lust, and crowing.<sup>35</sup> The development of these symbolic characteristics is directly related to physical traits and the natural behaviour typical of roosters that differentiate them from other birds. Roosters have high fertility; hens are always copulating: every day, anywhere, and more than once a day. These characteristics readily indicate lasciviousness, which is also expressed by aggressive behaviour since roosters fight to ensure sexual domination throughout the henhouse. Other physical elements also have a phallic connotation since it has an erect, reddish tiara that becomes more pronounced during fights. The virility of a rooster is represented by its crest, as when it is castrated, the red loses its vibrancy and becomes opaque. The spurs on roosters are another symbol of their combativeness, indicating that they are always ready to fight and fight over almost anything. When they win, roosters announce their victory with a loud crow. So, the attitude of Conon in this scene is used by the orator to demonstrate his *hybris*.

There was already an association between victorious crowing and a haughty posture that could lead to a nefarious fate. These aspects are presented by Aesop in *The Two Roosters and the Eagle*.<sup>36</sup> In this fable, two roosters fight over a hen. The victorious, full of vanity and pride, climbs to the highest point of a tree and crows loudly. Then, suddenly, an eagle appears and captures him. The loser comes out of hiding and begins to pursue the hens without any concerns.

Aesop, in two other fables, records the competitive nature of the rooster. In *The Roosters and the Partridge*, the competitiveness leads to excess. The poet narrates a farmer who buys a partridge and brings it home to be raised with his roosters. Upon arrival, the partridge is attacked by the roosters. She thinks that the rejection and aggression were due to her being of a different species. Soon after, she sees two roosters fighting until they bleed and ends her reflection by affirming that she no longer needs to worry anymore because the roosters do not spare even those of their own kind. In this case, the excess is marked by bleeding: indicative

35 Most 1993; Csapo 1993a, 1993b; Barbosa 2009.

36 Barbosa 2009.

of how violent and brutal the dispute was and how aggressively they attacked a fellow.

The rooster's crowing, in addition to being a sign of his vanity, also indicates his virility, with his voice capable of scaring away an animal as ferocious as the lion. In the fable *The Ass, the Rooster and the Lion*, Aesop tells that a rooster was scratching near a donkey when a lion appeared and attacked him. The rooster started crowing and the lion ran away.

The figure of the rooster, with its victorious crow and haughty attitude, was used by Aeschylus in *Agamemnon* (v. 1671) to depict Aegisthus, jealous of his revenge against the king, planned alongside Clytemnestra. The chorus leader in the exodus addresses both, saying: "Brag, show yourself brave, like a rooster by the side of a hen."

Thus, the symbolism of the rooster brings together various values of the phallogocentric Athenian culture<sup>37</sup> and was used by Demosthenes to highlight the outrageous nature of the aggression made by Conon. The orator could easily omit the mention of the victorious rooster crow, focusing on the beating and torn clothes. After all, bringing such humiliation into the public stage could have negative consequences, making Ariston the subject of ridicule. To prevent this, throughout the speech, he presents to the judges what kind of laughter is *hybris* – therefore a manifestation of comic invective – and what kind of laughter is appropriate to a good citizen, i.e., the judges themselves.<sup>38</sup>

Laughter can express different feelings, such as simple mockery, guilt, hostility, shame, and a depreciation that would be an indicator of *hybris*. In the paragraphs before the narrative of the imitation of the rooster (Dem. 54.4-6), when narrating the incident at the camp, Demosthenes already marks the hostile laughter of the opponents:

[4] When we saw this, it bothered us, and at first we objected, but when they mocked us and would not stop, we reported the matter to the general – all of us messmates going to him as a group, not I apart from the others.

37 Csapo 1993a, 1993b.

38 Halliwell 2008: 34.

In Conon's argument, mocking laughter is one of the typical behaviours of young people, and therefore the imitation of the rooster is nothing more than a simple joke. However, Demosthenes presents the laughter expressed by the youth as a sign of danger since it would represent an imbalance in the relationships established by society. Thus, in his view, punishing Conon was an effective measure to ensure that harmful laughter was contained, thereby preserving social order since the pedagogical character of the penalty would prevent other young people from committing excesses when expressing their feelings, particularly their rivalries.

Generally, laughter can be divided into two types. The first is spontaneous and does not bring major social consequences because it aligns with the conventions shared by all those participating in the laughter. It also stems from an appreciation of a fact and is accompanied by bodily and mental relaxation. The second type is consequential laughter, carried out with intent. Most often, the purpose is to cause shame, embarrassment, or tarnish a reputation. This type of laughter leads to the ridiculing of the other and awakens conflicting feelings of approval and disapproval within society. This is the type of laughter that, in the orator's view, should be contained and becomes dangerous if it is continuously manifested by young people.<sup>39</sup>

Laughter functions as a weapon wielded among enemies with the intent to offend, as demonstrated by the use of comic invective. Therefore, parts of narratives that provoke laughter are deliberately chosen by orators to achieve their objective, whether to arouse laughter from the audience and thereby diminish the *ethos* of the adversary or to demonstrate their inappropriate character, as is the case presented in *Against Conon*.

## Conclusion

In this way, speeches can present defamation techniques capable of bordering on the comic. Comic invective is among the persuasive strategies employed by orators, and its use depends on the social status of those

39 Gontijo Leite 2014.

involved and, above all, on the orator's intent to undermine the opponent's *ethos*.<sup>40</sup> Thus, even the solemn setting of a court can give way to laughter.

Laughter as a rhetorical weapon is used to gauge the audience's response to the arguments presented and to make the orator realise whether the audience is in tune with the arguments. On the other hand, laughter, especially out of turn, can also indicate the opposite, that the arguments have not convinced the judges and are therefore being despised by them.

The imitation of the rooster by Conon possesses a high degree of symbolic violence and that is exactly why it is an example of comic invective. Its victorious crow over the prostrate body of Ariston, who could not muster the strength to either rise or speak (Dem. 54.8-9), intends to humiliate the opponent, referencing an erotic and aggressive appeal, since the rooster sodomizes the defeated. If, on the one hand, this provoked hubristic laughter from the attackers, on the other, the picturesque description – combined with the systematic appeal to *hybris* and the use of medical terminology – was clearly intended to leave the judges disconcerted. This, at least, appears to have been Demosthenes' aim in incorporating such a humiliating scene into his speech.

So, this imitation is a form of *hybris*, as it lowers the citizen from his natural status and ridicules him in front of everyone, making him a laughingstock. The laughter aroused in this episode will be used by Demosthenes to demonstrate the humiliating nature of the adversary's act and the intention to commit *hybris*.

*Hybris* thus emerges as a central element in this discourse. Despite the various legal ways available for addressing the aggression, the chosen course of action is striking, as it targets an older citizen who was not directly involved in the conflict among the youths. The appeal to *hybris* effectively shifts the focus away from Ctesias and redirects it toward Conon. Furthermore, the systematic invocation of *hybris* allows Ariston – potentially a target of comic invective – to recover his *ethos* and present himself as a citizen who, despite his youth, demonstrates prudence and acts in accordance with the *nomos* of the city, positioning himself as a victim of the *hybris* perpetrated by Conon's family.

40 Serafim 2021: 65-68.



Mockery functions as a means of diminishing an individual's social standing. Laughter construed as *hybris* is linked to pejorative expressions intended to ridicule and shame the target. No one wishes to become the target of comic invective, and by presenting the narrative of such mockery to a broader audience, there was a significant risk that Ariston himself might become the object of further jokes. Demosthenes' rhetorical solution was to emphasize the concept of *hybris*, alerting the audience to the dangers of harm laughter. Accordingly, he frames certain behaviours as unacceptable not only for young men but also for adults. In doing so, he simultaneously protects Ariston's *ethos* and constructs emotional appeals intended to persuade the judges toward a conviction of Conon.

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