THE ART OF VIOLENCE

Reapproaching Invective in Ancient Greek Literature

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The Art of Violence: Reapproaching Invective in Ancient Greek Literature

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FOREWORD

The "Art of Violence," the first part of the title of this special issue, is a reference to invective as it manifests itself in the genres, texts, and contexts of ancient Greek literature. If we pin down the definitions of invective that have been proposed not only in classical studies, but also in interdisciplinary theory, we find that one characteristic appears again and again: violence. Invective is fundamentally violent, polemical, and immeasurably aggressive. Much has been written about invective in the study of antiquity and several attempts have been made to define the term. At core, these works, which are presented and discussed in the articles in this issue, agree that invective is any form of violent attack against a person's identity, an attempt to portray the 'other' – whoever that may be, rivals in court, political opponents, foreigners, people accused of religious offences, even antagonists of playwrights – in the worst possible way. It is a deliberate attempt by one person to undermine, diminish, stigmatize, and destroy the perception that others have of another person.

The contribution of an ambitious, large-scale, transcultural, and intertextual project funded by the National Science Centre of Poland (grant number 2021/41/B/HS2/00755) and carried out at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń by Rafał Toczko in collaboration with Andreas Serafim (2022-2024) and Sławomir Poloczek (2024-present) is that invectives are redefined as a cultural phenomenon. Invective derives its meaning from the general cultural context (i.e., moral, legal, aesthetic, socio-economic, political, religious, etc.) of the epochs, across a wide range of surviving verse and prose texts, fragments, and scholia from Homer to early Christian literature up to the fifth century AD. In other words, the project considers invective as a cultural phenomenon, not merely a literary technique. It existed in society before it was incorporated into texts, and it was valorized and embellished by sophisticated modes of argumentation according to the etiquette of certain genres and texts.

This special issue is a good excerpt from a series of seminars on invective organized by Rafał Toczko and Andreas Serafim as part of the re-

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search activities of the Toruń project. It focuses specifically on verbal invective in ancient Greek: the use of language that serves the purpose of invective, i.e. attacking an individual or collective target, diminishing one's credibility, discrediting the *ethos*, and achieving all kinds of authorial, literary, and contextual ends. In the courtroom, for example, the speaker aims to turn the audience, especially the judges, against the target of criticism and urge them to vote against him.

Work has been done to discuss the language of abuse. Explicit examples of invective (ranging from accusations of personal mismanagement and unethical behaviour to the use of expletives, profane language, offensive nicknames, and sexual insults), comic abuse, and attacks, articulated through references to nonverbal communication, as in the forthcoming volume *'Embodied Invective' and Identity Construction in Ancient Literature*, edited by Dennis Pausch, Rafal Toczko, and Andreas Serafim, are among the topics discussed in classical scholarship. The contributions to this issue offer a new way of thinking about the way verbal attacks are made. **(1)** They shed light on the most interesting but under-researched topics: the differences between genres that affect the way invectives are articulated and the limits of their expression in texts and perhaps in society. **(2)** They will address controversial issues (e.g., *hybris* in Attic law) to explore how invective reflects socio-cultural norms, values and institutions in the ancient world. **(3)** They utilize interdisciplinary theories and research tools to better and more comprehensively understand verbal invective in ancient literature. **(4)** They shed welcome new light on the under-researched use of indirect forms of verbal abuse, i.e., irony, insinuations, ambiguous statements, and taboos. And **(5)** they discuss texts from a 'microscopic' angle by examining the lexical markers of invective in texts, e.g., superlatives, diminutives, questions, and hyperboles.

Andreas Serafim and Rafał Toczko would like to thank the authors of the special issue for taking the time and effort to revise their contributions for publication. We would also like to thank the National Science Centre of Poland for generously funding the Toruń project; the reviewers for their constructive criticism, which helped to improve the content of the articles; and the editors of *Classica et Mediaevalia*, Dr Thomas Heine

Nielsen and Dr George Hinge, for the professional work and effort they put into the preparation of this special issue.

Andreas Serafim and Rafał Toczko
(Changchun and Toruń in July 2025)

DETECTING INVECTIVE IN HERODOTOS'S *HISTORIES*

By Donald Lateiner

Summary: Invective is rather unwieldy and elastic for analysis. Greek and Roman insult poetry and oratory constitute recognizable invective – extended personal attack. Herodotos first exhibits it in prose. His invectives, relatively primitive, exist in two forms: character speech and author text. The historian presents an historical person denigrating an adversary and his position for an adjudicating presider or presiding body (triangulation). For example, the debate between Demaratos and Achaimenes after Thermopylai. Otherwise, the historian presents his own views that contravene previous traditions, contemporary (oral) authorities, or specific publics. He thus critiques Hekataios, theorist-geographers, Ionians' views of Lade, Alkmaionid treason at Marathon, and most post-war Hellenes refuting Athenian liberationist claims. Invective essentials in poetry and contemporary oratory influenced Herodotos's composition, since he resided in Athens, central for developments in Aegean speech-making. Herodotos features invective situations: political status and rivalrous decision-making (characters) and defects of other historians and publics (author text).

Invective differs from insult

Insults populate many genres of ancient Greek literature, beginning with the Homeric epics. Achilleus directs his Iliadic barrage of 'dogface' and 'people-eater' insults – Athene authorized but dishonoring Agamemnon's *basileutatos* status (*Il.* 1.69, 210-45). Laodamos, the scion of the Skherian king, chides his guest's non-participation when, disguised as a shipwrecked sailor, Odysseus declines his invitations to compete (*Od.* 8.145-64). Odysseus responds with more direct abuse while on the playing fields (8.152-85, esp. 166, 175-79). Back in Ithaka, however, as a beggar Odysseus must slyly affront his wife's Ithakan suitors. Eurymachos and Antinoos are taunting, teasing, and assaulting him (*Od.* 17.444-80, 18.346-93). He lands indirect, 'kernelled' aggressions, insults nestled inside flattery that confound and anger his supposed betters. Archilochos' short

Donald Lateiner: 'Detecting Invective in Herodotos's *Histories*' C&M Supplementum 3 (2025) 1-33.

and extended sexual iambs savage named opponents. Aristophanes' comedies multiply verbal and nonverbal character ridicule in short scenes and satirize live contemporaries such as Kleon, Sokrates, and Euripides, and targeted Athenian institutions such as the assembly and the law-courts. Lysias' dicanic oratory (3, 12, 13, 24) and Demosthenes' prosecutions and defenses (e.g., Dem. 21, 54) document vivid, brief insults and the latter produces lengthier invectives. The orators illuminate Athenian street-life and nightlife. Ariston reports that while strolling he suffered insult and injury (*aikeia*, *hybris*) at the hands of a bully, Konon, his sons, and his gang (Dem. 54). They accosted him, crowed over him, stomped him lying prostrate in the street's mud. Choice red-figured pots illustrate fifth-century physical violence and strongly suggest that insults accompanied the acts, verbal violence.[1]

Thus, surviving literary records of everyday 'street-talk', obscene gestural hand-talk, insults in traditional confrontations, and informal social ostracisms produce an implicit poetics of Hellenic abuse that predate Herodotos' prose records or his compositions of Hellenic and barbarian dissociative activities.[2] This paper focuses on Herodotos' text, both received data and testimony and his own authorial development of ancient invective in his examples of direct speech, a significant subset of aggressive, insulting, and unforgivable verbal interaction.

The subordinate status of invective in the broad category of hostile speech becomes clear from the realization that Greek has many words for insulting verbal and nonverbal acts (*v. infra*) but not any word at all restricted to invective, as now defined. Invective is a subset of insult describing extended and elaborated verbal assault. Both Latin-derived words – certainly overlapping – describe related forms of destructive social interaction – methods and strategies that reduce your opponent's

1 E.g., Onesimos' *krater* depicts brawlers, brutal street-fighting men (ca. 490, St. Petersburg Hermitage 651). Latin varieties of crude abuse suffuse Catullus' invective poems (Lateiner 1977) and the prose of Petronius and Apuleius (Lateiner 2013). Disgusting details feature smells, unnatural and prostituted sex, excrement, and so forth. Kamen 2020 surveys insults in classical Athens, Opelt 1992 lists the logographers' kakologistics, and Lateiner 2013 examines the vocabulary of gendered insults in Latin.

2 Lateiner 1995, 2004, 2015, 2017.

standing and self-regard. The semantic difference recognizes that invective is restricted to sustained, multi-faceted verbal aggressions, while the more common and less artful insult typically produces a snapshot-like sting whether others are present. Insulters do not require a third-party audience separate from the target, as invective does, although insulters enjoy appreciative bystanders.[3] Insults can be verbal or gestural, or even physical attacks – all of them components of the peculiar Athenian crime known as *hybris* (Fisher 1992). In Ariston's report of Konon's assault, one observes multi-channeled redundancy of words, gestures (crowing), and battery – attack, strip, trip, punch, and stomp. Both forms of denigration, however, can be triangulated, social situations where rival speakers perform in the presence of third parties – an individual, small groups, or crowds.

The term 'invective' smells archaic now,[4] and has rarely enjoyed a positive reputation, while 'insult' saturates parlance and practice, both now – and long ago. The classical Attic vocabulary describing *insult* is rich and varied, as Deborah Kamen (2020: 10), *inter alios/alias*, catalogues it – *skommata, aischrologia, loidorein, blasphemein, komoidein, diabole, kakegoria, hybris* – but vocabulary specific to invective had barely emerged when Herodotos wrote and read out his *Histories* to others. Similarly, pottery had long since illustrated insulting actions, but invective is impossible to draw.

Recent books collect 'Insults Ancient & Modern', but only a few modern titles collect invectives.[5] Book *titles* abound, such as *The Wittiest and*

3 The sociolinguist Bill Labov's 1972 study of techniques of strategic African-American one-upmanship includes 'the Dozens', 'Signifying', and 'Sounding.' He provides insight into distinct methods and rhythm for certain types of contemporary invective, sustained insult.

4 Public figures today prefer to claim victimhood rather than macho slam-downs, although the U.S. President Donald Trump illustrates both performative postures. He repeats incessantly that he is the target of 'witch-hunts', that is, of baseless campaigns to find non-existent malefactors, while maligning opponents with alliterative nicknames and labels such as witch-hunts, frauds, and 'crooked.'

5 E.g., Nancy McPhee *The Book of Insults*, New York 1978; Gary Dexter, *Poisoned Pens. Literary Invective from Amis to Zola,* London 2009. Compare titles such as *The Insult Dictionary*; *Surrounded by Idiots*, *Insults and Comebacks; Scorn. The Wittiest and Wickedest Insults in Human History*.

Wickedest Insults in Human History, but hardly any for invective, except for Petrarch's Ciceronian 'imitations' and modern drama and music criticism. Cicero's Second *Philippic* relentlessly 'invectivates', inveighs against, Mark Antony, his person, his mind and body, his family and ancestry, and his former allegiances and future policies. Cicero's *Philippics,* contrived, repetitive, and distasteful – today they are hard to sit through.[6] Scholars reputed wise[7] in the study of malicious scolding, be-

6 Denniston 1926/1982, Kennedy 1972: 268-83. The Antonine Anecdotalist Aulus Gellius refers to Cicero's speeches against Caesar's lieutenant as *Antonianae orationes* (*NA* 1.22.17, 13.22.6). At 7.11, Gellius counsels against descending into *convicia* and *maledicta* because you sink to your enemy's level when you accuse opponents of what they say of you: *dum paria et consimilia dicas atque audis*. He cites Q. Metellus Numidicus (cos. 109) who referred to C. Manlius the Tribune, his invectivizer, as a man "unfit to be ill-spoken of by the upright," *ne idoneum quidem cui a probis maledicatur*.

7 Contrast "Wikidiff" (consulted 12/1/2022), a web guide for the perplexed. "The difference between invective and insult" as nouns is: "invective is an expression which inveighs or rails against a person while insult is an action or form of speech deliberately intended to be rude." On 1/22/2025, Wikidiff AI improved its distinctions: "insult" is a more general term for a single, disrespectful remark, while "invective" implies a more forceful, sustained verbal attack often filled with anger and intended to severely criticize or discredit someone, usually with strong rhetorical flair; essentially, "invective" is a more intense and elaborate form of insult. This internet distinction still misses the general crudeness of insult and the public nature of invective. Kamen 2020 explores insult but see Lateiner's 2022 review. Koster 1980 concentrates on Roman not Greek authors, and those Romans seem more comfortable than the Athenians, at least, in launching invectives, even if Cicero's dubbing his invectives against Antony "*Philippica*" seems to dignify his defensive offense by reference to a distinguished Hellenic antecedent. See Cic. *Ad Brut*. 2.4; Antony's furious response, *ad Fam*. 12.2.1: *vomere, non dicere* [Antonius]. The *De cor.* aligns more closely as a parallel defense and invective against an opponent (cf. Denniston 1926: xvii). In the assembly, social constraints frowned on personal attacks, and Athenian law supposedly provided guard-rails against extreme invectives and penalized them. To be sure, speakers found ways to inject it, as democratic limits to *parrhesia* grew weaker. See chapter 5 of Filonik (forthcoming) for clarification of this variety of political speech as a privilege (that the assembly granted) and an obligation to speak frankly for the city's benefit – not "freedom of speech" as the North Atlantic community often understands it. The Athenian courts, however, permitted greater freedom to accuse opponents of bribery, dishonesty, and other *topoi* of deception than the *ekklesia* (Carey 2005: 78). See below, n. 13.

rating, contemptuous words, and slander – students of relentless denunciation, poetic and prosaic – offered assistance for this research.[8]

Colleagues suggested that, while no hard and stable difference distinguishes between the two terms, 'invective describes a sustained, literary, thematically coherent outpouring of multiple insults' (Judith Hallett). Or 'invective as a subset of insults implies the 'words as weapons' metaphor. Verbal invective can 'slice and dice' an opponent like a sharp sword or knife. Horace *Sat.* 2.1.39-44 uses this knife metaphor in his *Sermones*' (Ralph Rosen). 'Words used as weapons or fists ..., *voilà,* formalized, performed invective!' (*idem*). Invective remains a judgment call, and a judgment that varies depending on class, epoch, context, and culture. The vehement wit and insulting 'put-downs' that sufficed for Themistokles' verbal triumphs (Hdt. 8.59,* 61, 125.2*)[9] were doubled in the age of Aischines, and squared for Cicero's audiences. Political invective aims to erase the civic identity of the target, producing social death. Fifth-century Attic parameters apparently devolved to ever nastier fourth-century forms of invective. The Romans had fewer taboos, to judge by Cicero (see Appendix 2 below).

Insult often carries a threat of violence ready at hand, while invective may hope to incite it. Insult, legal *hybris*, often with no pretensions to rhetorical complexity, whether witty or not, filled the urban 'street' – places like the Athenian agora's barbershops, workshops, homes, and alleys (Lys. 23.3, Dem. 54.1-12, e.g.). In nearby gymnasia, where men young

8 Papaioannou & Serafim 2021: 8-12 summarize modern theories of invective. Slander, false allegations of bad behavior and thinking, accelerate on the slippery slope of vicious hostility to one's opponent. Unlike the first *Philippic,* Cicero never delivered this pseudo-speech, the second *Philippic* at all. No audience exerted potential controls of vocal and paravocalic objection (sounds, not words, such as hoots, hissing, or cheers) or noisy foot-stomping interjection. See Denniston 1926: v, Kennedy 1972: 268-74. Cicero's second *Philippic* was a lengthy, and largely ineffective, pamphlet, a reply to Antony's attack on Cicero (*ad Fam.* 12.2.1) with scurrilous but not thereby untrue attacks on Antony (cf. *Phil.* 2. 44-48, 63-70, 103-5). The title 'Philippic', although first suggested by Cicero (*ad Brut.* 2.4), does not seem to have been seriously intended. Kennedy (1972: 270) regards the second *Philippic* as an unbridled, tasteless, and unattractive attack on character, deploying disparaging lies, deceit, and sophistry and spuriously justified by the cause for which it was used.

9 An asterisk indicates speech reported directly (*oratio recta*), following Powell's 1938 *Lexicon to Herodotus*.

and old gathered for exercises physical and verbal, Sokrates found fertile spaces for putting down anyone claiming to know anything. He developed his performative long faces, smiles, glances, ironic flattery, and arguments in extra-institutional performance venues and later boasted of his absence from institutional spaces. His modest persona avoided direct insult or invective, unlike some of those that his embarrassed targets such as Thrasymachos and Kallikles deployed. Invective, however, surfaced in, or at least survives from, institutionalized spaces – in the agora's *dikasteria*, and *bouleuterion*, in *ekklesiai* on the Pnyx, and in the *demos*' tax-supported comic theater on the Acropolis' south slope (Gottesman 2014: 1-23).

Later Greek rhetoricians, centuries afterwards (and long after Aristotle), flourished *kakologia, diabole,* and *psogos* (Latin *vituperatio*) as technical terms for invective. These rhetoricians cursorily discuss techniques of invective and their *topoi* (Usher 1999: 62n.28), but Carey (2004: 20) argues, rightly I think, that invective *per se* was under-developed in theory. Reasons for this include, first, invective remained rather disreputable – nothing to boast about, or teach, although speakers commonly manipulated it in practice, in extant speeches.[10] Second, *diabole*, eventually the closest Greek term, is itself slippery, ambiguous, polyvalent, and eventually 'diabolical.'[11]

Attacking one's opponent's character (*ethos*) is one form of self-defense and retaliation – both respectable Athenian actions, modes of self-presentation in everyday Attic life. Invective's bad reputation, however, and third, arises from its association with non-negotiable character assassination – something that '*you* do, not what I do' (Carey 2004: 6, citing Lys. 30.7). Yet, in ancient Hellenic contexts, litigation and diplomacy, denigrations of persons irrelevant to the immediate charge were common and deemed informative.

10 Carey 2004 mentions Thucydides' use of *diabole* in passing – how the Lakedaimonians used the Alkmaionid 'curse' to 'set the Athenians at variance' with Perikles (1.127.2 with 2.13.1, and cf. the verb at 4.22.3: the Spartans' strategy with the Athenian assembly (*to plethos*), not willing to risk a double-cross, μὴ ἐς τοὺς ξυμμάχους διαβληθῶσιν εἰπόντες καὶ οὐ τυχόντες). Fifteen occurrences of the noun appear in Thucydides, more of the verb, but Carey disregards the evidence of the verb and noun in Herodotos. See below.

11 Pelling 2007: 182-85 helpfully anatomizes the word and its developed metaphorical meaning.

Polyainos, Lysias' soldier-client, for instance, defends himself against his prosecutors' malicious, negative characterizations (*diabal-/diabol-*: Lys. 9.1, 2, 3, 18,19) that have no relevance to his life but – he alleges – apply rather to their own habits.[12] He spins his charges against his opponents. A man's habits and manners were deemed admissible evidence for many charges in Attic courts, even when they had no relation to the asserted violation of law. In Polyainos' case, utilizing a defendant's common move, the dirty pot is calling the kettle black, while claiming his kettle is shiny clean.

Since invective remains an amorphous, ill-defined category, it does not qualify as a figure of speech or a recognized genre of speech in extant ancient Greek handbooks. Hellenic invective rather constitutes the forensic equivalent of an operatic aria, an intensified segment of verbal violence in a longer presentation directed at diminishing a fellow citizen or a foreigner, a group or city.[13]

Stephen Usher emphasizes how preserved early speeches provided the basis of later oratorical theory,[14] specifically citing Lysias' devious and indirect skills for invective (cf. Voegelin 1943).[15] This paper addresses the prose of an author prior to extant logography, Herodotos, an older contemporary of speechwriter Lysias. Herodotos, the oldest surviving prose 'kakologist', produced the earliest examples.[16] Both writers mastered character portrayal, combative speechwriting, and narratives of past events, in fact-relating, praising, and mud-slinging modes.

12 Lys. 9.18: λοιδοροῦσι, τοῖς μὲν ἐμοῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασιν οὐ προσηκούσας διαβολὰς ἐπιφέροντες, τοῖς δὲ αὐτῶν τρόποις τὰς οἰκείας καὶ συνήθεις.

13 The Athenians admitted suits for defamation (δίκη κακηγορίας, see Lys. 10; cf. Todd 1993: 258-62). A statute prohibited the use of taboo words (*aporrheta*) in public speech. The truth of the charge, contrary to modern law, was not a defense (e.g., 'patricide', 'shield-dropper'), a signal of noteworthy different thinking.

14 '... later theory had its origins in the earliest practice' (Usher 1999: 62, referring to Lys. 12).

15 Lavency (1964: 164-69) addresses, but inadequately, 'l'aspect théâtral de la logographie.' Invective and gestures are absent from his index.

16 Herodotos and Lysias were non-Athenian writers who admired Periklean Athens and its institutions. Both found success in Athens and joined the Periklean experimental foundation of Italian Thurioi. Admittedly, a few passages of extended prose prior to Herodotos survive. Hekataios F1 (*FGrHist* 1) provides a proto-invective against competitors' narratives (*logoi*) – whether of the past or present is not clear.

Herodotos' speeches and evaluations betray familiarity with techniques of civic praise and blame that contemporary Attic writers were presumably employing in Athenian public speech. Herodotos had heard Attic orators speak – Perikles, Kimon, and Antiphon, perhaps the rising logographer Lysias. These speakers addressed past politics, present court cases sometimes involving family vendettas,[17] and they strategized present and future *polis* policies. They prepared speeches in many of the varied modes that Herodotos presents. Proposed dates for the composition and dissemination of the *Histories*, in parts or the whole, have hovered between 435 and 415, when Attic speech-making flourished.[18] Herodotos probably performed *logoi*, chapters, before and between, those dates. His *logoi* when finally assembled, had to be copied, then and thus 'published', an *apodeixis* of his investigations.

Herodotean invective

The recent *Herodotus Encyclopedia* (Chr. Baron (ed.) 2021) provides no entry for 'invective', elaborated and clever language intended to cause offense and to diminish an enemy. 'Insult' gains entry (M. Lloyd), and rightly so. Speakers in Herodotos, nevertheless, on occasion sustain character assassination in the presence of, or behind the back of, their competitors in both Greek and barbarian venues. They 'diabolize' enemies in *de facto* judicial situations, legislative debates, and less formal but still agonistic situations.

17 Attic litigants often appear to wish to perpetuate rather than resolve their conflicts (Todd 1993: 261). This behavior is found in the present as well.

18 Fornara (1971) downdated the publication of the completed *Histories* from ca. 431 to 415 BCE, modifying the *communis opinio,* but the argument had to be based on several unprovable assumptions. Herodotos refers explicitly and implicitly to events of the Peloponnesian War (e.g., 6.91, 7.133-37, 7.233, 9.73, and probably elsewhere, where we cannot recognize the allusion). The issue is not a 'pseudo-problem' (Hornblower 1996: 28), although no solution can be proven, but such *aporia* often distresses students of ancient history. We cannot say, for example, who first brought all Herodotos' *logoi* together in one manuscript, or when.

First, however, let us establish a distinction between two types of historiographical invective for Herodotos and for his historiographical successors, since two quite separate lanes of Herodotos' *Inquiries* traffic in invective. The first lane consists of *character* speeches. Here, his narrative presents two or more parties in conflict. Each party wishes to persuade a judge that its position is most just or prudent or persuade peers that his or their proposed policy is the best available, all the while insinuating that competing parties are selfishly motivated and/or they present inferior or misleading arguments. Who, then, among Herodotos' historical figures 'invectivates' – looks for politically acceptable ways to denigrate another man's acts, plans, and character without descending into mere abuse or snark (*loidoria*)? When speakers A and B address an audience or judge, how do they manage to appear to address issues while they actually detour into their opponent's shady record, disreputable family and life, questionable loyalties, or even criminal acts?

For a good preview example of Herodotean character invective, consider Artabanos, the King's uncle, when he chooses words carefully in Royal Conclave, because he contradicts his King's wildly overly optimistic expectations for his proposed Hellenic conquests (7.10*, 46*).[19] Despite Artabanos' explicit and prudent caution, Xerxes inveighs against this prudent (if *a posteriori*) evaluation as cowardly, even womanly (see below).

The second lane of ancient Greek historical invective consists of the *author's* speech or text *in propria persona***.** The historian criticizes earlier authorities often, but he sometimes inveighs against competing ethnog-

19 Sokles the Korinthian likewise (5.93*) entered dangerous territory, despite wide disfavor among Sparta's allies for a planned attack on Attika, when he 'spoke freely.' He stopped the Spartans from employing their Peloponnesian juggernaut to attack – unjustifiably, παρὰ τὸ δίκαιον – the new Athenian government, now a proto-democracy. After the successful coup against the Magos, the false Smerdis, the Persian conspirators allegedly assembled for their discussion of how to organize the future Persian state (3.80-83). They inveigh in turn against various regimes – monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy – but decorously they do not inveigh against the persons who propose them.

raphers, 'philosophers', logographers, poets, and/or at locally or ethnically biased, contemporary patriots.[20] These authorities claim to provide an historical accuracy that Herodotos denies.[21] His own invectives or anti-invectives (see below) step beyond disagreement to attack competitors' methods, motives, or even personality. Revisionist from the start (remember the dismissed Persian *logioi* of 1.1-5: περὶ μὲν τούτων οὐκ ἔρχομαι ἐρέων ὡς οὕτως ἢ ἄλλως κως ταῦτα ἐγένετο...), Herodotos employs several verbal weapons that his characters exhibit.

20 Greek historians differ in the frequency of invectives of both types. Thucydides presents little, and nearly none in character speech**,** condemning individuals, although many speakers inveigh against *poleis*, especially against Athens. The historian inveighs against Perikles' successors (2.65.6-11) and certain policies that he considered disastrous, for example in connection with the General Alkibiades. He also criticizes previous historians (1.97.2: Hellanikos of Lesbos; Herodotos only implicitly (e.g., 1.18.3, cf. Hdt. 6.57, 9.53)), and public beliefs about the past and present (e.g., 1.9.1, 10.1, 20.2-3, 21.1, 6.53.3-60.1). The prudent (*sophrones*), presumably aristocratic men, scorn Kleon's family and promises and burst out laughing at him in the *ekklesia* (4.28.5). Thus, they openly *insult* a prominent democrat, but Aristophanes and the 'Old Oligarch' mount the sustained invectives, the thorough condemnations of the individual and his ilk (*Knights*, Ps.-Xen. *Ath. pol.* 2.17-19). Nikias' case against unnamed Alkibiades' youth, personal expenses, ambition, and strategic folly (6.12-13*), and Alkibiades' reply about unadventurous elderly statesmen (naming Nikias, 6.16-18*) may qualify as invective. Appendix 1 below explores the earliest known *antilogy* of personal invective speeches in a historian, Xenophon's treatment of Kritias and Theramenes in *Hellenika* II. Historiographical invective grew more acceptable, perhaps from Herodotos' example. Polybios (Book 12) largely consists of invective – especially authorial speech. Polybios condemns predecessor historians such as Timaios, Aristotle, Kallisthenes, Democharis, and Agathokles. He evaluates them as childish, deficient in judgment, gullible (12.3), among other things, although his severe criticisms (12.11a) calumniate them also for their invectives – faultfinding and pedantry similar to his own.

21 Lateiner (1989: 104-8) supplies an inventory of such Herodotean polemic with discussion of how and why Hellenic historiographers argued against other historians and local *logioi*. The chapter does not analyze their rhetoric, catch-phrases, *topoi* and emotion-laden, derogatory vocabulary.

Antilogies, opposed speeches, especially competing speeches, populate the *agones* of Greek tragedy and comedy, public oratory,[22] and sophistic educational performances such as those parodied in Plato's acidulous dialogues.[23] These exploiters of polar differences contributed to the combative historiographer's development of forms for presenting arguments in *his* new genre. When Herodotos' historical figures invectivate, their words reflect styles, purposes, and ends of predecessors and contemporaries' attacks in analogous public and private locales.[24] Political figures in life and in Herodotos' text create disdain and prejudice against opponents for a third party to decide – character invective.[25] The second lane, author invective, exhibits Herodotos himself criticizing (a)

22 Especially dicanic/forensic for obvious reasons, but also bouleutic – Thucydides' assembly debates in Books 3 and 6 in Athens and beyond. The implicit antilogies of Spartan and Athenian commanders before battles who could not have heard each other argue for the inferior skills and/or character of opponents. Even epideictic addresses can import invective – Perikles' Epitaphios features a running contrast between Athens' and Sparta's *politeiai*, one that suggests contempt for the latter's compulsory way of life.

23 Medico-philosophic texts in the Hippocratic corpus, such as *Ancient Medicine*, contemporary with Herodotos, favor certain approaches to illness and trauma while they inveigh and dismiss other methods of practice and theory. Thomas (2000: 203-4, 240, *et passim*) and Kingsley (2024: 17, etc.) emphasize Herodotos' intellectual links, investigative and rhetorical, to Presocratic thinkers, scientific medicine, and arts of persuasion.

24 This paper leaves aside gossip and innuendo, the sort of shady word-mongering that Herodotos associates with *logopoioi,* like the dismissed opinions of Hekataios and Aisop (Hdt. 2.143, 5.36, 5.125, 2.134; Isokr. 15.136-37). As Gottesman shows (2014: 20, 83-85, 149), the word differs from *logographos*, but identifies busy-bodies and 'spin-doctors', men influencing public opinion. Hunter (1994) *passim* discusses the manipulation of Athenian opinion.

25 Carey's 2004 essay incisively examines the place of *diabole* in the Attic orators and the rhetoricians. Voegelin marches his dissertation on Lysias (1943) through the standard *topoi* of invectives (see his helpful chart 170-71), specifying where he discusses each *topos* in each speech. Failure to serve in the military, sycophancy, and religious misbehavior are the most common accusations. The noun *diabole* appears five times in Herodotos' text, but see also Powell's *Lexicon,* s.v. διαβάλλω. The Attic orators' clients shillyshally about inveighing against neighbors (e.g., Lys. 3) but do it. The speaker acknowledges that *nomos* (law/custom) prohibits arguments and evidence beyond the matter in a court dispute, but he then delves into just such questionable invective (3.44-45: παρ' ὑμῖν οὐ νόμιμόν ἐστιν ἔξω τοῦ πράγματος λέγειν (cf. *Ath. Pol.* 67.1). He will leave unmentioned trespasses of his opponent, τὰ μέν ἄλλα ἐάσω, except for one matter!

other researchers for faulty methods and motives, (b) communities and (c) historical individuals for mistaken, ill-conceived, and/or one-sided, because self-serving, opinions. Not every disagreement or criticism requires or offers invective, to be sure, but the manner and content of negative characterization in Herodotos' speeches, narratives, and judgments parallel and illuminate earlier Greek forms of disputation: arguments, insults, and invective – sustained disputation and character assassination. Below, readers will find examples of the two lanes of invective.

Lane 1: Character texts in Herodotos

In Herodotos' composition about the Persian discussion of Xerxes' strategic alternatives (7.9.2-9γ*), the King's convocation of generals allegedly to determine whether he should invade Greece, Mardonios for thirty-eight *OCT* lines calumnizes all the Hellenes as inferior warriors. He decribes them as senseless, few, poor, cowardly, reckless and impetuous, stupid, destructive of their own property, and unstrategic.[26] Invective thrives on scattershot aggression – if one charge does not stick to the wall, another may, a *techne* that ambitious Mardonios applies here. Xerxes' uncle Artabanos (7.10η1-2*) in response deems that speech to be divisive, 'pushing between', invective, *diabole,* and analyzes the content of his (Greek) term. He asserts that Gobryas' son Mardonios has egged on Xerxes with excessive zeal (πᾶσα προθυμίη) and prejudice (διαβάλλων) against the Greeks in order to persuade Xerxes to attack and subdue them for Mardonius' own advantage.[27] He judges such *diabolai* as δεινότατον, 'the most terrible thing of all', for three reasons. Namely the traducer stretches truth or lies outright, his audience believes the lie(s) without investigation of their accuracy (ἀτρεκέως),[28] and the victim suffering the verbal attack (διαβληθείς) is adjudged bad, inadequate or

26 Konijnendijk 2016 damningly analyzes Mardonios' self-serving speech, persuasive invective for the intended audience of one who judges and can execute (in more than one sense of the word) the speakers.

27 His desire to command all or part of the force was known to all; cf. Artabanos' insinuation to this effect, *supra*.

28 Herodotos uses this word about his own effortful investigations repeatedly (Lateiner 1989: 10, 231n20 with bibl.).

guilty without recourse.[29] Here he refers to Mardonios, Xerxes, and the Greeks – although he himself is another victim of Mardonios' successful *diabole* that persuaded Xerxes. Artabanos' response is analysis based on experience (in Skythia with Dareios) and evidence, and it is not primarily personal attack. But both speeches constitute triangulated performance before a judge, and Artabanos' certainly casts shadows on Mardonios' reasoning and motives (7.10η*1-2: πᾶσα προθυμίη).[30]

Artabanos, after his careful opening and precautionary *captatio benevolentiae* to forfend retribution from his uncle (7.10α), analyzes and condemns Mardonios' *diabole*, his invective against the Hellenes. He risks his life and suffers severe consequences, saved from death only by his kinship with the King. He tries to dissuade Xerxes, his nephew, from this invasion, but the logic only enraged (θυμωθείς) the potentate. The new Great King's mind, despite his explicit words to the contrary (7.8δ2*), was set on stamping Persian history with his own imperial mark. Xerxes insults his uncle and adviser to his face and before his peers as foolish in his advice (ἐπέων ματαίων), and cowardly in his person (κακός τε καὶ ἄθυμος). The King insults him terribly. He orders him to stay behind in Persia with the females (ἀτιμίη ... μενεῖν ἅμα τῇσι γυναιξί) – he equates him with women.[31] The three speeches exemplify invective, anti-invective, and the judge's consequent insult. Xerxes proceeds to organize his massive invasion of Hellas.

29 Artabanos makes a case that fifth-century Athenians also made, disallowing defamation, slander, or open abuse.

30 Herodotos once employs *diabole* in his narrative when explaining a character's motivation. As the Persian King Kambyses lay dying, he summoned the leading Persians and revealed truthfully that he had ordered his brother Smerdis murdered, but now he beseeched these Persians not to enthrone a *Magos*, the false, non-royal Smerdis, after his early death. Truth-telling for once, Kambyses was ironically disbelieved (ἀπιστίη πολλή), as if he were trying to discredit/besmirch his living brother (3.66.3: ἐπὶ διαβολῇ). Pelling (2007: 183-85) insightfully analyzes this slippery stem (*diabal-*) for slippery speech.

31 One of his and other Persians' favorite gendered insults, cf. 8.88.3*, 9.20, and 107.1*. The patriarchal Greeks presumably seemed to Herodotos more respectful of women.

After the Persians' dubious victory at Thermopylai, Herodotos has Xerxes flourish the heretofore unknown (Greek) term *kakologie*.[32] This descriptive compound appears only here in *his* text. The sometimes, but not always 'Great', King refuses to hear any more *kakologie* abusing his Hellenic guest-friend. He defends his refugee advisor, ex-Spartan king Demaratos, against the invective of his own brother Achaimenes (7.236-237*). Achaimenes' invective indicts both Demaratos personally, Xerxes' guest-friend, and, resuming Mardonios' invective, he calumniates the Hellenic *ethnos*. Spartan Demaratos, like Artabanos, fears being candid (7.104*) before the autocrat Xerxes. The conquered enemy Kroisos, the paradigm of how to behave, or not, before despots, had exhibited similar and justified anxious qualms about speaking openly to autocrats before Kyros (1.88.2*; 207.1,* etc.).[33] After the behavior of the Spartans at the battle of Thermopylai, nevertheless, inexplicable to the Persian King, Demaratos explains their illogical choice of death and offers his best strategic advice for Xerxes' campaign of conquest. The Persian advisor Achaimenes responds; he inveighs against the alien interloper Demaratos, with the usual tropes of ethnic invective. Xerxes, the *de facto* and *de iure* Supreme Judge, however, condemns this undeserved invective. Herodotos presents here a different Greek word for 'invective.' He writes 'bad talk', *kakologie*.[34] Although Achaimenes' strategic advice

32 Thucydides never employs it, although he does like *kakopragia*. Herodotos never employs the word *psogos* but see Thuc. 1.70*, 2.45.2* – the latter concerning women's delicate reputations in Athens. *Kakologia* appears in Xen. *Cyr*. 1.2.6 (on a sound sort of education), and in Theophrastos *Char*. 28.1 where this person-type thrives on reviling the quick and the dead. His essential nature is bad-mouthing, whether one translates this type's tendency as slander or invective. The examples tend to be one-liners. The *Rh. Al.* 1440b5 applies the adjective κακολογικόν to the category opposite to eulogy. Arist. *Rh.* 1381b7: we don't like those who speak ill of others; Menander fr. 200.

33 Herodotos observes that the wise Athenian Solon did not condescend to flatter Tyrant Kroisos (1.30.3 with the Lydian autocrat's dismissive first reaction: 33). Kroisos' wise advice forced him to flee Kambyses' wrath (3.36).

34 One might expect invective in narratives where it never surfaces. The Athenian and Tegean commanders, for example, debate before the Spartan army as judges as to which of these two cities' soldiers deserves to hold the left wing in the upcoming battle of Plataiai against Xerxes' army (9.26-27*, 28). Legend vs. Legend boasts in the fracas leads the Athenians to their rhetorical trump cards. First, ancient history is irrelevant, παλαιῶν

seems superior to Xerxes, better than Demaratos', Xerxes rejects his character assassination directed at his *xeinos*. Achaimenes has imputed to Demaratos and the Greek *ethnos* envy of another person's success (φθόνος), also treachery (προδοσία), hatred of successful strength (τὸ κρέσσον στυγέουσι) – in sum, lack of loyalty to the Persian King and cause. Xerxes indicts the condemnation as *kakologie*, and Herodotos oddly ascribes this first (surviving) appearance of *kakologie* to his Persian Potentate. The word carries more technical Attic weight than translators seem to recognize, when they English it as 'slander', 'abuse', or, better, 'vituperation.' This term of art became one Greek *terminus technicus* for extended passages of censure and bad-mouthing, 'invective.'[35] The semantics of *kakologie* include personal and ethnic failures and consequent political disloyalty, as here, treason to the Persian cause and to Demaratos' imperial protector. Xerxes, nevertheless, rejects Achaimenes' violent attack on Demaratos' person and views as inappropriate invective.[36]

In an earlier Persian succession crisis, the confused inflection point after Kambyses' death and successor, Herodotos places the so-called 'Constitutional Debate', what sort of government should follow the fall of the false King Smerdis (3. 91, 73.2*). Whether some discussion actually occurred, as Herodotos insists (3.80.1, cf. 6.43.3) to contemporary and subsequent disbelief, or whether it was a Greek Sophist's later fictional invention to tart up a disquisition on regimes, Otanes, one of the seven conspirators before, and subsequently exempt from Dareios' rule and

μέν νυν ἔργων ἄλις ἔστω; and second, Marathon proved the Athenians 'alone' could defeat 'forty-six nations' marshalled by Persia's empire. Neither debating team 'descends' into personal or civic acrimony, invective. Herodotos' sources perhaps left out arguments *contra* the other city, or even invective arguments anticipated (*prolepsis* or *prokatalepsis* – a Demosthenic specialty) that the opposing party might use – true, spurious, or irrelevant.

35 See Koster 1980; Süss 1910: 245-67; Usher 1999: 62. Dem. 18.126-31 eviscerates the κάθαρμα Aischines, compounding indignation with ridicule and irony.

36 After Kambyses had died, Gobryas, Dareios' former spear-carrier (Behistun: DNc), caps the seven-person discussion convened to decide whether to attack the false (and earless) pretender, Smerdis. Gobryas repeats the Persians' earlier suspicion about why Kambyses had repudiated the *magos* 'Smerdis' as not his brother. They agreed that Kambyses had spoken in order to create bad feeling, ἐπὶ διαβολῇ, against his real brother. This accusation offers another level of discourse – a complaint against an invective not present in the text. I thank Rosaria Munson for this distinction.

whim, describes any and every autocrat as most ready to *accept as true* divisive speech, personal attacks, or invective (3.80.4*, διαβολὰς δὲ ἄριστος ἐνδέκεσθαι).[37] *Diabole* has usually been translated here as 'slander', but slanders need not constitute invective, and invective need not be slanderous. Herodotos, in any case, shows autocrats repeatedly receiving slanders and invectives as well as false projections predicting easy success for imperial ventures, which they occasionally reject.[38]

The first example above, Mardonios' fawning encouragement of Xerxes' egoistical dreams and his tirade against Hellenic skills and intelligence, constitutes an invective, as Artabanos states. His arguments go beyond casual insult to determined, extended verbal aggression, that is, invective. Thorough condemnations beyond possibility of compromise exceed casual street-dissing, or off-the-cuff insults.

Hellenic invective explains the Ionian rebels' disastrous failure to stay united after mustering their allied men and ships prior to the battle of Lade. They continually inveigh against their new admiral's discipline, as sailors do. Dionysios of little Phokaia kept them sweating, practicing naval ship maneuvers, rowing in the summer heat (6.12). For seven days, they followed orders, but then, in a once-for-all, collective invective against Dionysios, they wonder what *daimon* maddened them to follow this martinet's orders. They accuse him of being a braggart (ἀλάζων), of supplying a mere three ships, of insulting them and severely injuring

37 An unexpected, oxymoronic collocation of admirable and execrable value terms.

38 Translators into English incline to the 'slander' translation of *dia-bal-* stems (literally, 'setting apart'), influenced by its later notoriety in prose authors, especially orators and rhetoricians, and perhaps by the Christian scriptural uses of the term in non-political, small-group contexts (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:11, 2 Tim. 3:5, Titus 2:3). The verb in Herodotos' text sometimes denotes antagonism (e.g., 5.35.1, 5.97.1, 6.61.1, 6.64: two Spartan kings). More often *diabal-* indicates the maligning of competitors and enemies, whether at length or repeatedly (6.51, 61.1: φθόνῳ καὶ ἄγῃ [hapax], 7.10η* thrice) or once only (e.g., 7.22.3, 8.90.1 & 3: Phoinikian captains; 6.46.1: Thasos' neighbors; 9.17.4*: Thessalians bad-mouthing Phokians; 6. 133.1: a Parian had maligned Athenian Miltiades). Herodotos reports that Hippias and his family "diabolized" the democratic Athenians to the satrap Artaphernes and to the Persian court (5.96.1 & 97.1 resumptively; cf. 5.97.2 'deceive', still 'diabolizing' Athenians: 6.94.1). This was not mere 'slander' (Purvis transl., cf. Pelling 2007: 183-85) – false and mean accusations, but a continuing invective directed against those many Athenians who overthrew the Peisistratid regime. Macaulay's translation (1890) 'stir up enmity' catches the flavor.

them (λυμαίνεται λύμῃσι ἀνηκέστοισι), and of causing illnesses by his punishing regime (πολλοὶ ἐς νούσους πεπτώκασι). This invective succeeds in inflaming its audience: the Ionian sailors declare that they would prefer slavery (δουληίη), 'whatever that is', to further military exercises. They mutiny – they quit and lie idle in the shade. The lively collection in one paragraph of personal attack and complaints, the gist of their griping, produces a group invective against their unrelenting commander that persuaded their mates.

Hellenic envoys (7.157-62) come to seek alliance from the Syrakousan tyrant Gelon. Herodotos presents a contentious parley in 480 BCE. He records a more conversational interchange; both sides display angry emotions and inveigh against the other's position. Gelon inveighs (7.158.1 πολλὸς ἐνέκειτο) against the self-serving Hellenes who failed to help him defend the western Greeks against the Karthaginians. He accuses them of contemptuous indifference for Sicilian Greek autonomy, and they dishonored him (ἀτιμίης) as no better than a barbarian, but he will behave differently. He will supply, nevertheless, a huge army and navy, provided *only* that they appoint him commander of all Hellenic army and naval forces and the Hellenic leader (7.158.5*: τε στρατηγός τε καὶ ἡγεμών). Indignant at this non-negotiable demand, the Spartan representative Syagros speaks vehemently against the proposed sheer robbery (7.160: ἐπεστραμμένους, ἁπαραιρῆσθαι). Agamemnon would groan, he says, would turn over in his grave, if he heard Gelon's excessive demand (Homeric μέγα οἰμώξειε)! Gelon objects to the Spartan's insults and insolent behavior (7.160.1*: ὀνείδεα, ὑβρίσματα ἐν τῷ λόγῳ, ἀσχήμονα by implication), but he reduces his demand to 'only' command of the entire Hellenic fleet. Now the Athenian ambassadors (unnamed) furiously reject his reduced demand. Gelon then angrily orders all the mainland delegations to depart the island at once (7.162.1*: οὐκ ἂν φθάνοιτε τὴν τάχιστην ὀπίσω ἀπαλλασσάμενοι). The exchange of diplomatic invectives resembles earlier Ionic wrangling and scenes of conflict in Euripides' war tragedies. When the Greeks call Gelon 'King', they may merely mock the upstart son of nobody Deinomenes who rose to tyrannical power. When, however, the Spartan and anonymous Athenian cite Homer's poetry to support claims to hegemonical positions (a *topos* suggesting diplomatic desperation), Herodotos implies that

Gelon held the superior strategic hand and arguments in this diplomatic dust-up.[39]

Lane II: Author invective

Herodotos censures local views *and* other authors who provided orally or in writing accounts of *ta genomena*. As far back as Homer (2.23, 53, 82,120, etc.) and extending beyond his predecessor Hekataios (2.143, 6.137, etc.) to contemporary positions, Herodotos doubts, denounces, and sometimes renounces local Hellenic (2.178, 8.94), Panhellenic (6.43.3, 7.139, 214), and barbarian *logoi*, *logioi* (1.1-5, 4.46.1, 8.73.3), inscribed objects (5.54, 9.85), literary texts (4.36), and *polis*-authorized views in one community or another. For example, parochial festivals and inscriptions "naturally" praised their own originating and participating *poleis* and implicitly denigrated and excluded neighbors, expelled inhabitants, or oppressed classes (6.14, 105, 111; 9.85.3), but Herodotos reports little of this because it ran counter to his theme. His first-person denunciation, however, of an Aiginetan fraud and of other cities' copy-cat pretences witheringly critiques these *poleis*' construction of bogus cenotaphs long after the battle at Plataiai to honor fallen compatriots but really to hide their shame: ἐπαισχυνομένους τῇ ἀπεστοῖ τῆς μάχης ἑκάστους χώματα χῶσαι κεινὰ τῶν ἐπιγενομένων εἵνεκεν ἀνθρώπων). Hans-Joachim Gehrke (2023) and adherents describe this process of massaging or falsifying past historical events as 'intentional history', perhaps a cynical but accurate label for how contemporary and subsequent generations reconstruct to their own advantage both admirable and shameful past policies and actions or inaction.[40]

39 The Athenians reject Tegean mythico-historic arguments facing a jury of Spartan judges before the battle of Plataiai in 479 BCE (9.27*, n.34 supra). Spartan Sthenelaidas similarly rejects in advance (*prokatalepsis*) Athenian claims of military success in the more recent past (Thuc. 1.86*). This *topos* of diplomacy devalues past virtue when overshadowed by present vice.

40 This analysis does not adjudicate the truth or falsehood of Herodotos' damning charge. Apparent dependence on Athenian informants reveals an anti-Aiginetan bias.

Herodotos' authorial invectives attack predecessors for faulty method, suspect or deceitful motives, and personal defects (of intelligence and preparation, also character). Inadequate research into available sources, lack of autopsy, limited awareness of partiality, chronology, topography, and even local ecologies contribute to innocent incompetence. Personal gullibility, local *polis* and ethnic bias,[41] and personal pride also deprive accounts of credibility and dependability. Such invective against predecessors, caustic revisionism, became a regular and prominent feature of Hellenistic historiography,[42] and, as usual, Herodotos' critical but inclusive text inaugurates and anticipates these judgmental developments (2.99.1, 3.38, 7.152.3).

Herodotos inveighs against scientific theorists, philosopher-scientists, who explain the origins of Egypt's land or Nile's flow (2.10-17: Ἴωνες οὐκ εὖ φρονέουσι, 20-27, 4.53.1). He inveighs scornfully against *a priori*, symmetrizing map-makers – many of them, but none working from phenomena but rather drawing Ocean with a compass (ὡς ἀπὸ τόρνου) and continents – whether two or three – equal in size (ἴση) to each other (4.36.2: γελῶ δὲ ὁρέων γῆς περιόδους γράψαντας πολλοὺς ἤδη καὶ οὐδένα νόον ἐχόντως ἐξηγασάμενον). Yet, Herodotos himself alleges that the rivers Nile and Danube mirror each other in length and course (2.33-34, cf. Thomas 2000: 78). This backsliding into theories not

41 Plutarch's *De malignitate Herodoti* provides a Roman imperial example. Kirkland (2022: 105-51) analyzes Plutarch's critique of Herodotos: a malicious, faulty, and deceitful person and author (e.g., *Mor*. 863d-e).

42 Polybios' demolition of Timaios and other virulent invectives against Ephoros, Demochares, Agathokles, and others, serve as textbook examples (12.1-28a, e.g.). These predecessors in his territory are guilty of naiveté, ignorance, intentional falsehoods, bias, scurrility in attacking their predecessors (12.25c, g-h). Thucydides briefly pillories Hellanikos – uniquely by name (1.97.1-2) – when justifying his account of the run-up to his war, the 'Pentakontaëtia.' He never names Herodotos, his obvious target in several polemics, but his decision to present critical revisions of Spartan *lochoi*, the Peisistratid tyranny, and his sophistical minification of the significance of the Persian Wars (1.20-21, 6. 54-59, 1.23.1) implicitly implicate this illustrious predecessor. His very choice to begin with 478 BCE, however, at Herodotos' endpoint, points to a grudging acceptance of Herodotos' account, at least as sufficient for antecedents to 'his' war. So Hornblower persuasively argues (1996: 17-38 with Annexes A and B: 122-45) that Thucydides presents independent views on some issues, follows his predecessor silently on more issues, and nowhere rejects him entirely.

supported by evidence is arguably attributable to his Plan B desire, when information fails, to explain the unknown by the known – τοῖσι ἐμφανέσι τὰ μὴ γινωσκόμενα τεκμαιρόμενος. He inveighs briefly against evidence-deficient histories composed by local or panhellenic patriotic poets.[43] While not all disagreement in historians, then or now, sinks into invective, these examples exhibit determined scorn for both claims and authors.

Herodotos also attacks boastful claims by *polis logioi*, Atthidographers and their ilk, compilers of *horoi*, local genealogists, boosters expressing favorable bias or prejudicial hostility to alien persons and neighboring groups – *polis* antipathies (2.178.3, 6.14.1, 6.121-24, 7.152, 8.73.3). After the battle of Lade, for example, all the Ionians blamed (and still inveigh against) each other: ἀλλήλους γὰρ καταιτιῶνται. In this case Herodotos prudently withholds judgment, as the various cities play the blame game and justify their own fight or flight actions. Elsewhere too, he inveighs against such self-serving local 'patriots' or local historians, of which the Atthidographers are the best preserved example – cf. Felix Jacoby's *Lokalgeschichten* (*FGrHist* IIIB).

Herodotos directs his most frequent, extended, and pointed authorial invective at Hekataios because he was his most prominent prose predecessor – indeed, the only prose author that *he* mentions by name (2.143, 6.137-38).[44] Herodotos' presentation of accounts of the indigenous Pelasgians' expulsion from Attika sets Hekataios against local Attic tradition, but Herodotos' apparent preference for that local tradition energizes his invective against this predecessor in geography and genealogical chronology. Herodotos ridicules Hekataios' vain claim in the Egyptian *logos*, in a mini-drama between the Milesian tourist and Egyptian *logioi* (temple priests), that he had descended from a god after only sixteen generations – not the Egyptians' 345! The revisited incident spotlights Hekataios' naive grasp of chronology and his inability to

43 Mostly attempts at epic. See 2.116-20: μάταιον λόγον λέγουσι οἱ Ἕλληνες; Lateiner 1989: 99-100, 106-7. While no booster for one community or alliance, Homer is Herodotos' most frequent foil – since he was the historian's pre-eminent predecessor and he wrote the first extended war narrative.

44 See Lateiner 1989, ch. 4, 'Disputation.' Herodotos, however, praises Hekataios' statecraft (5.36.2, 125).

absorb unwelcome counter-evidence. Herodotos' own process and method in this invective establishes his superiority. His frequent explicit admissions of ignorance, admiration for Egyptian record-keeping (2.3, 15.2, 19.1, 50.1, 77.1, 99.1, 143, etc.), and declarations of *non liquet* when and where evidence fail[45] argue for better methods.

In a significant polemic, however, placed in an Attic context (6.121-124; cf. supra), the investigator rebuts an enduring divisive invective (*diabole*) that accuses the Alkmaionidai clan of raising a shield to signal helpful information to the Persian invaders at Marathon. He counters the libelous charge against the Alkmaionidai of having medized, betrayed their city. This *diabole,*[46] a floating invective that accused the Alkmaionidai of having conspired with the expelled Peisistratid Hippias[47] and his Persian puppeteers (6.121.1), strikes him as absurd. He entertains 'an imaginary objection' (ἀλλὰ γάρ – *prolepsis*, or *prokatalepsis*) and counters it, 'on the contrary', in good oratorical style.[48] The hypothesis alleges that dishonor by the *polis* drove the family to collaborate, to commit treason against the Athenian democracy (6.124), but Herodotos answers that no family was more esteemed or honored by the democracy (δοκιμώτεροι), so no logical argument supports blaming them for the undenied, hillside shield-flash above the battlefield plain of Marathon. The polemic exhibits elements of the vocabulary and structures of contemporary Attic eristic and oratory, rhetorical moves that counter personal invective, thus an anti-invective.

Herodotos later (7.139) endorses an opinion, abominated/invidious/offensive for most men, but he is compelled to deliver the truth (ἀναγκαίῃ ἐξέργομαι γνώμην ἀποδέξασθαι ἐπίφθονον μὲν πρὸς τῶν

45 Dewald 2002 well analyzes this incident in which Hekataios comes off as naive, pompous, and self-deluded.

46 Carey 2004: 8 observes that *Rh. Al.* 15.4 discusses how to rebut, rather than create, *diabole* – just as Herodotos does here: θῶμα ὦν μοι καὶ οὐ προσίεμαι τὴν διαβολὴν, τούτους γε ἀναδέξαι ἀσπίδα.

47 This allegation is based in facts, as an archon list fragment mentioning Kleisthenes the Alkmaionid proves, Meiggs & Lewis (Oxford 1969) *Greek Historical Inscriptions* no. 6, new fgt.c.

48 Hornblower & Pelling 2017 ad loc. 124.1 cite Denniston 1966: 104, 475. Herodotos' rejection of an enduring *diabole* evokes a 'combative tone' in this polemic. Readers confront an anti-invective, indeed a eulogy of a generally anti-tyrannical clan.

πλεόνων ἀνθρώπων, ὅμως δέ, τῇ γέ μοι φαίνεται εἶναι ἀληθές, οὐκ ἐπισχήσω) to presumably non- and anti-Athenian audiences. He implicitly accuses the Hellenes en masse of unjustified invective against the Athenians that contradicts his better – and non self-inflating – historical record of their actions in 480 BCE. He declares that the Athenians' actions saved Hellenic freedom when faced with Hellas' critical moment choosing between autonomy and slavery. He addresses present, panhellenic hostility to Athens, and vituperation of their current, oppressive empire. He supports their claim to *have been* 'the saviors of Hellas' (τοὺς σωτῆρας γενέσθαι τῆς Ἑλλάδος). They had protected Hellenic autonomy, such as it was for various communities and classes, when Xerxes decided to invade mainland Greece. Here, while he implicitly sets aside later Athenian suppression of fellow Greeks' autonomy, their later justified negative reputation as oppressors of fellow Greeks is clear. Herodotos ends his entire narrative before the Athenians begin openly to exploit former 'allies', although they still chose to call them that.[49] He knows that his anti-invective will arouse hostility, because the Athenians' empire surely did extract men, money (league tribute), and local energies for their own benefit. It spawned widespread hatred of the Athenian suppressors of local autonomy and freedom (Thuc. 2.8.4). Cities incorporated willy-nilly into the 'Delian League' over the next six decades resented increasing loss of autonomy and forced participation in another city's expansion. Those *poleis* who still retained any autonomy or thought themselves 'free' *poleis* feared subjection in the near future.[50] Thucydidean speakers in Mytilene, Sicily,

49 Herodotos' accounts of Militiades and Themistokles' aggressions against Paros and Andros (6.133-35, 8.111-12) herald implicit charges of Athenian oppression. Herodotos pauses his own narrative (7.139) to rebut with discomfort this ubiquitous and substantial contemporary invective against the Athenians.

50 Thucydides prefaces his war narrative by laying out the Athenian transformation of an alliance of the willing into an empire, commencing from the end of Herodotos' narrative. He surveys public opinion and its hostility to the Athenian imperial construct in 431 BCE, aroused or fomented by Spartan propaganda, itself a form of state invective (2.8). Many speeches delivered in various *polis* and league assemblies inveigh against, or justify, the Athenians' Empire. Thuc. 1.22.1 explicitly denies verbatim recollection or transcripts but alleges substantial accuracy 'gist' for his version of actual speeches. Some

or Ionia hostile to this oppression inveigh against the personified 'tyrant city', not against persons. Herodotos, before and during the Peloponnesian War, responds to these invectives; his text praises the Athenians' sacrifices for Greek autonomy in the Persian Wars – including abandoning their city and the Persian demolition of its holy shrines.[51]

Attic comedy and oratory weave together slur-rich *topoi* for invective.[52] They expatiate on non-citizen birth (such as slave or foreign parentage), non-aristocratic upbringing, poverty and/or banausic family occupations (such as cobbler, ass-keeper, leatherworker, carpenter, cook), physical defects (such as demeanor, deformities, disabilities), intellectual defects (such as not bright enough, not educated or exercising enough), and moral defects – degenerate sexual or family habits, lack of patriotism or enemy sympathies, insufficient self-control, duplicity – behaviors commonly demonstrated by cowardice, bribe-taking, tax-dodging, *hybris* or *pleonexia* (Christ 2006; Fisher 1992; Balot 2005). Other *topoi* leading to invective include failure in finance, embezzlement, tax-avoidance (e.g., liturgies), military deficiencies (desertion, cowardice), political activities (bribing or being bribed in state service), litigiousness, and

Thucydidean speeches – given at considerable distance from each other – respond to each other in ways impossible to imagine in reality (e.g., before the battle of Naupaktos, 2.86-89*). The speakers who condemn Athenian imperialism (but not the Spartan variants of oppression) offer damning invectives – sustained condemnation of the morals and policies of the 'tyrant *polis*.' Consider the words of the Korinthians, Mytileneans, even Perikles, (1.122.2-3,* 3.10-14*, 2.63,* etc.). This personification of a city as an oppressive, upstart autocrat (1.122.3*, 1.124.3*), even by its own politicos (2.63.2*, 3.37.2*, 6.83*, 85.1*), extends the idea of invective from persons to collectives.

51 Spartan Sthenelaidas nevertheless avers that if the Athenians will claim to have benefited Hellas earlier, all the worse of them to tyrannize over Hellenes now (1.86.1*) – a nice invective turn in which a plus becomes a minus.

52 Süss 1910 listed chief Roman *topoi* (as Corbeill 2002 Englishes them): 1. servile heritage; 2. barbarian (non-Roman) background; 3. having a non-elite occupation; 4. thievery; 5. non-standard sexual behavior; 6. estrangement from family and community; 7. melancholy disposition; 8. unusual appearance, clothing, or demeanor; 9. cowardice; 10. bankruptcy.

gender deviance (prostitution of self, overaged boy-chasing), and contempt for Attic social norms.[53] Even a man's repeated misfortunes are alleged to prove the disfavor of the gods. Herodotos' invectives deploy many such charges.[54]

Conclusions

The presentation of self among characters in Greek history and literature focalizes dramatic interactions from Agamemnon and Odysseus to Julian.[55] Every person needs to maintain face and create sympathy for her- or himself and distaste for immediate opponents – good will and bad will – when s/he speaks before third-party audiences, whether a royal judge, a law-court, an assembly of peers, casual acquaintances at a gym or dining together, or meeting strangers on dark streets or returning by the road from Delphi.

The creation of prejudice, negative characterization, or 'spin', as the shady business of Public Relations now calls it, has 'implicit ground rules' in official and unofficial contexts (Cary 2004: 12). The practice was common in ancient Hellenic dicanic and symbouleutic oratory, even in epideictic (Lys. 2.2, cited by Cary 2004: n. 3). Cary demonstrates that writers on rhetoric – Aristotle, Anaximenes, and later professors – are thoroughly aware of *diabole.* The word denoted a way to 'set at variance' before it developed a bad reputation, to 'slander', 'to speak falsely', or 'to

53 See Süss 1910; Voegelin 1943; Usher 1999 (e.g. 227-29); Roisman 2005; Christ 1998 and 2006, etc.

54 E.g., Alkmaionid blood-guilt and curse, foreign relatives (5.71), Alkmaionid medizing (6.124), the charges of imposter and tyrant laid against Dionysios of Phokaia (6.12), Hippokleides' lack of self-control in appetite and demeanor (6.127-29), Miltiades' deception, perhaps 'bad advice' or embezzlement (6.136: ἀπάτη), Hellenic stupidity and incompetence (Mardonios, 7.9*), Kleomenes' questioning of his rival Demaratos' royal, or even legitimate, birth in order to depose him from Spartan kingship (6.61, 65). Demaratos' Persian opponent inveighs against his alien race and his alleged traitorous sabotage of his patron and savior, Xerxes (7.236*).

55 Akhilleus' disregard of others' good opinion marks his social isolation from his warrior community, as his refusal to attend assemblies and remaining in his bivouac proxemically expresses his geographical self-isolation.

traduce.' The theorists never outright espouse it.[56] *Diabole* constituted the darkest technique of the dark art of rhetoric (paraphrasing Carey 2004: 9), a skill already sunk in bad repute in the fifth century because of the sophists' (such as Gorgias') pride in eristics. It sank further in the fourth century, after the rhetor of invective, Thrasymachus, made a name in *diabole* and Plato's Sokrates fashioned elenchic attacks on teachers of rhetoric such as Gorgias, Protagoras, Lysias, and others.[57] Akhilleus[58] and Odysseus' insults in disputation sanctified post-epical Hellenic efforts to destroy one's opponents' words and character, but Herodotos' rhetoric reflects fifth-century developments in the 'diabolical' arts of invective – its scope, appropriate contexts, vocabulary, and insidious tropes.

Appendix I: Kritias and Theramenes' invectives

Xenophon (*Hell.* 2.3.23-56, written ca. 380 BCE) produced and showcased the unexpectedly earliest (surviving) pair of Attic political invectives, those of Kritias prosecuting Theramenes for 'treason' against the oligarchic Thirty, in a special session of their loyal *boule* (late autumn 404 BCE), and the latter politician's aggressive defense. Xenophon was likely acquainted with older peers who had attended this pivotal session, some 'moderate' sympathizers participating in the revolutionary oligarchical regime, citizens who shared anti-democratic and pro-Theramenes, vaguely *patrios politeia* policies.[59] Theramenes was first subjected to a campaign of private, one-on-one repeated invective (ἰδίᾳ διέβαλλον), designed to soften up *bouleutai* sympathetic or otherwise. Subsequently,

56 Cicero considers invective to provide a useful tool to maintain the civic order. See Corbeill (2002: 197, 209, 218).

57 *Phdr.* 267c-d: allegedly Thrasymachos was διαβάλλειν τε καὶ ἀπολύσασθαι διαβολὰς ὁθενδὴ κράτιστος.

58 Achilleus' brazen insults against the Commander-in-Chief Agamemnon in *Iliad* 1 (122-231, e.g., φιλοκτεανώτατε πάντων, ἀνειδείη ἐπιειμένη, κυνῶπε, κ.τ.λ., cf. ἔπεσιν ὀνείδισον, Athene's permission, and 304: the narrator describes their face-to-face verbal wrangling) develops into his massive verbal demolition of the Argive's sneaky and greedy – ignoble – character in *Iliad* 9 (308-429).

59 See Usher 1968: 128, 134-35.

Kritias convened the body and brought in young men with (poorly) concealed daggers. Athenians remembered the similar build-up to the Four Hundred's terror-regime take-over in 411 BCE (Thuc. 8.69.4). Kritias' speech (24-34), as Xenophon presents it, features many frequent *topoi* of earlier and subsequent character assassination. He mentions Theramenes' factional and class disloyalty, his scoundrel nature (πονηρός),[60] his primary dedication to self-preservation, and thus his fickle, undependable personality (εὐμετάβολος), and consequent nickname of side-switching 'Slipper' (κόθορνος). Besides name-calling, Kritias alleges his treasonable acts of 411 BCE and a traitorous psychic nature (φύσει προδότης ἐστίν). He claims that Theramenes was responsible for the most deaths of both aristocrats and democrats, when he brought about the demise of the Four Hundred later in 411 BCE and failed to save drowning sailors after the battle of Arginusai in 406 BCE (*Hell.* 1.6.22-35). Neither honor nor friendship motivates Theramenes but greedy self-advantage (πλεονεκτεῖν), so he has plotted against the oligarchical government. His execution will usefully discourage democratic opponents. Kritias has attacked Theramenes' words and deeds, his nature, intentions, and associations.

Theramenes defends himself – his entire career – and counter-accuses (35-49) Kritias. He throws back at him many of the same invective *topoi*. Kritias was unpatriotically absent from Athens at the time of the Arginusai disaster, in fact far off in Thessaly working to arm the *penestai* for a people's revolt and to install a democratic regime.[61]

He accuses Kritias of having diverged from good oligarchic policy when he started arresting and executing the καλοί κἀγαθοί – innocent, rich men and true, sympathetic to the regime like Leon, Nikeratos, and a

60 An oligarchic derogatory catchword for clever demagogues, an Aristophanic word of grudging admiration for oppressed 'little guys' who manage to overcome powerful opponents and institutions. David (2014) dissects the Four Hundred's euphemistic charades (411 BCE). The Thirty reprised their propaganda in 404 BCE with a thinner veneer of truth.

61 Poor and landless native non-citizens tied to the farms of noblemen. Cf. Philostratos *VS* 1.16, 502: Kritias attacked democracy and the Athenians, inveighing against them (διαβάλλων).

trierarch named Antiphon.[62] Such executions and confiscations made well-off sympathizers suspicious or hostile to the imposed oligarchy. The Thirty also arrested and executed metics for their portable wealth, confiscated the arms of the *plethos* (people), and brought in a force of foreign (Peloponnesian) mercenaries to garrison the occupied *polis*. Kritias and his henchmen exiled some of the so-called 'good men' and drove many others, even respectable members of *to plethos*, to leave Attica. Some of them now serve as leaders of the democratic guerilla forces attacking the regime of the Thirty, such as Thrasyboulos and Anytos.[63]

The invective climaxes: Kritias' policies and acts please neither democrats nor oligarchs. 'You were the fiercest enemy of the people in the democracy and now in our oligarchy you have become the fiercest enemy of the "best citizens"' (μισοδημότατος and μισοχρηστότατος).[64] Kritias' goal is to establish a tyranny of the few, not Theramenes' oligarchy, a regime ruled by the 'good men', meaning, as he specifies, the cavalry and (some of) the hoplites.

Facts, at least as Xenophon presents them, favor Theramenes' defense speech even in a biased, one-off courtroom, the *boule* constituted by the Thirty. Xenophon records a *thorubos*, commotion or uproar, supporting Theramenes' case, flagging it as the more persuasive invective argument (50-56). Kritias had to improvise a way to success without polling the *de facto* jurors. He erased his opponent from the catalogue of the 3,000

62 Not to be confused with the long dead, oratorically gifted oligarch of the same name (Thuc. 8.68, 90).

63 Xenophon (*Hell.* 2.3.42) and the even more apologetic (because originating in apologetics of the Thirty) Aristotelian *Ath. Pol.* (37.1) disagree on the sequence of Theramenes' judicial execution and Thrasyboulos' gathering of opposition forces at Phyle; cf. Rhodes (1981/1993) 415-22.

64 *Hell.* 2.3.47. Perhaps these antithetical terms were once coined as catchwords in positive uses, 'enemies of the mob', and 'enemies of so-called "Best Men".' Kritias is condemned here in the adjectives' superlative forms in a balanced, oxymoronic piece of invective. Aristophanes' characters use the former term in pro-Kleon contexts (*Wasps* 474 and *Georgoi* (424-422 BCE) fr. 108 [Athen. 3.75a = *Aristophanes Fragments* (Loeb) fr. 110, OCT fr. 108, Kassel-Austin 108). G. Hermann had cleverly conjectured *misodemos* at *Wasps* 410 for *misopolis*. The orators also flourish this compound word (Opelt 1992): And. 4.16, Isoc. 4.151, Aeschin. 2.171.

(citizens), a tawdry preliminary necessary to condemn him to death. Springing to the Council's hearth, Theramenes the suppliant called on his fellow assembled oligarchs to reject this unilateral, pseudo-lawful, literal erasure of his name. The *boule* members kept quiet when they saw the room ringed by the troops and dagger-men of the Thirty. The Eleven, Athens' *de facto* police-force, dragged Theramenes out for execution by hemlock, then frog-marched him through the agora screaming against the outrage to law and his person (*Hell.* 2.3.55). But no cowed councilman dared to object.

Both parties, when they delivered these damning invectives, stress, as later Attic invective does, disloyalty to faction and the *polis*, and a character rotten to the core. Both mention undependable politics and ideologically suspect activities. They recall imprudent policies that had aided the regime's natural enemies and created new ones. Each accuses the other of greed and self-interest. Each demonstrates the dishonorable nature of his opponent. Kritias, however, had prepared his thugs, if invective alone could not win sufficient votes, as it did not.

In fifth-century Athens, anger and related strong emotions were suitable for jurymen or assemblymen to feel, but not for mild-mannered prosecutors or defendants to arrogate for themselves (Harris 2017: 236). Economic and social stresses of the later fourth century, and the rise of Macedon exacerbated *kakologia*. They legitimated Demosthenes, Aischines, Deinarchos, and others' virulent abuse in the Pnyx assembly and courtroom spaces. Invective lost its legitimacy and academic approval when democracy became only a name and by the time someone penned the late fourth-century *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* ([Arist.] 1421b9, b25, b38; cf. *Ad Herenn.* 3.15). Subsequently, the Hellenistic despots little needed any pungent rhetoric to enforce their will. Although τὸ ψεκτικόν (see citation above, < ψόγος) became one of seven academic elements (εἴδη) of symbouleutic and dicanic oratory, the handbooks counsel that it would be imprudent to resort to it. It detracts from creditable qualities and amplifies discreditable characteristics. Quintilian (see below) writing in an autocracy and often for school exercises reflects this later negative attitude towards invective. Powell (2007) argues that Cicero himself in the republic disapproved of invective practices. But disapproval does not equal dispensible.

Appendix 2: Roman invective: Limited or ubiquitous?

Students consider invective more a Roman habit and genre than Greek. The anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herrenium* (3.14-15), contemporary with Cicero and preserved among his works, defines *vituperatio* as censure, the converse of *laus*. The object of attack uniquely lacks self-control, presents serious defects of character (*vitia*), contrary to the cardinal virtues. He behaves *iniuste, immodeste, ignave, stulte*. J.G.F. Powell (2007), however, in a radical response to the *opinio communis* argues that invective was not a *genre* at all. Cicero has no word for extended and public open enmity in formal speech, whatever vituperation he spoke or wrote against Catilina, Clodius, Vatinius, Piso, and Antony. The word *invectio* itself has no lemma in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (1982). Lewis & Short's *Latin Dictionary* (1879) provides no earlier citation than fourth-century Ammianus (21.10.7, 22.14.2, 28.1.20) and fifth-century Fulgentius (*Myth*. 1.15). Powell's opening chapter in *Cicero on the Attack* questions the basis, evidence, and arguments of the book's other chapters. The remaining authors also barely reference the *Catilinarians*.

Powell defines invective narrowly. Others cast a wider net for public declarations of enmity and direct attacks on persons, presenting targets as unprecedentedly foul in body, mind, and policies. Powell (2007: 1) rightly asked almost two decades ago: 'What exactly is invective … ?' Cicero had no word for it; *invehi* the verb from which it is derived means, before metaphorical accretions, 'to ride in to attack' against both persons and causes. Powell questioned the category altogether, and wished to limit the term, if at all useful, to direct personal attacks – and those not subtle or gentle ridicule but declarations of open emnity. He thus excluded (to reviewers' disbelief) Cicero's *First Catilinarian*, because the senatorial speech denounced a plot without describing Catilina's person (2). Vituperation, Powell argues (4-5), is rarer in Latin oratory than scholars commonly claim, although he acknowledges, reading Quintilian (*Inst.* 3.7.19-25), that the speeches against Piso, Clodius, and Curio contain severe criticisms of those persons, Cicero's competitors. How exceptional were these invective-filled speeches?[65] The evidence from

65 Nisbet 1961 cites Cic. *De or*. 2.240 discussing *mendaciuncula*. The *Pro Cluentio*'s attack on Sassia, the mother of the defendant, pulls no punches (see 17-18, 188, 192-94, 199).

other Roman orators, needed to decide, is now unavailable (10). Cicero may have been *sui generis*, offering much or little abuse of persons. The theorist decries the practice of invective, except as a threat (6), but no mentor would advise otherwise. In calmer, philosophical prose, Cicero (*De or.* 2.304) acknowledges that anger (*iracundia*) may harm an advocate's case. Better to maintain self-control (cf. *Pro Tull.* 51). However, the active advocate frequently deploys insults, *maledicta* (e.g., *Cael.* 6). Although such denigrating tactics do not themselves win legal disputes, Powell's dismissive position for Ciceronian invective seems extreme: absence of evidence does not constitute evidence of absence. Cicero's enemies smeared him with the unflattering epithet *consularis scurra* (Macr. *Sat.* 2.1.2, 'buffoon consul') after his vicious cross-examination of Vatinius, because, Powell improbably argues, its scurrility was *atypical* rather than unexpected from a litigator (12).

Quintilian, one hundred-fifty years later, alleges that only inferior advocates sink to *convicia* (*Inst.* 12.9.8-9). The client may pay twice by losing after securing an over aggressive attorney. Insults differ, however, from invective, as we saw above, and Quintilian was tutoring students aiming at success under despot Domitian. The rules of lawsuit advocacy had changed. Invective demonstrated anger and displayed hostility and courage to threatening high-stakes competitors in republican Rome. Then, pursuit of personal grudges was legitimate, indeed expected and required of public figures, and invective in poets and pleaders served to advance one's standing.[66]

66 I thank Andreas Serafim, Rafał Toczko, and the Nicolaus Copernicus University for inviting me to present this paper in a series of lectures on invective, first delivered remotely. Professors Daniel Levine and Jeff Rusten provided me with essential bibliographic assistance.

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INVECTIVE IN GREEK TRAGEDY: A MEANS OF RELEASING OR ESCALATING TENSIONS?

By Hanna M. Roisman

Summary: This paper assesses the impact of invective in extant Greek tragedy, including its effects on the emotional status of both the speaker and the recipient, as well as on plot development. After presenting definitions of invective in general and in tragedy in particular, case studies of the use of various types of invective in Euripides' *Andromache* and in twelve other tragedies are analyzed. The intention behind the invective is shown to be to belittle, shame, or otherwise harm the target of the invective. The factors affecting the emotional impact of this invective are discussed giving examples from extant tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. After this exploration of invective scenes in tragedy their roles are considered. The invective scenes are shown to enhance the audience experience of the tragedies by heightening plot tension, while also intensifying sympathy with those powerless characters who suffer verbal abuse and therefore contributing to the experience of *catharsis*.

Introduction: Definition of Invective in Tragedy

Invective is widely understood as the use of rude, abusive expressions with the intention to hurt, shame, humiliate, belittle, or exclude the interlocutor, or a third party not necessarily present, often including some kind of character assassination.[1] As such, invective has apparently been

1 For some definitions of invective, for example: 'criticism that is very forceful, unkind, and often rude' (*Cambridge Dictionary*); or as 'a form of rude expression or discourse intended to offend or hurt'; or as 'a denunciatory or abusive expression or discourse' (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*), see Papaioannou & Serafim 2021: 1-2. It is important to note that the element of comedy associated with invective in drama is not necessarily included in these definitions, leaving room for a more appropriate definition of invective in drama to be made.

Hanna M. Roisman: 'Invective in Greek Tragedy: A Means of Releasing or Escalating Tensions?' C&M Supplementum 3 (2025) 35-79.

part of human communication from the dawn of civilization.[2] It may be considered similar to verbal abuse, but in addition to often including public denunciation, it also requires some rhetorical skill, suggesting that simple insults might not qualify.

In recent years the skyrocketing use of invective in social media has led to increasing academic attention. In their discussions of invective and invectivity, Ellerbrock *et al.* (2017) examine invective as aspects of communication intended to disparage, harm, or exclude.[3] The concept of Face Threatening Acts (FTAs) developed with Brown & Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory,[4] along with Culpeper's Theory of Impoliteness,[5] has also been used in theoretical discussions of invective as well as in the analysis of Greek tragedy.[6]

Any definition of 'invective in tragedy' must also relate to the custom/norm, *nomos*, of the time, with an emphasis on 'saving face' found both in the world depicted in tragedy and in fifth-century Athenian society. This necessitates recognition of the status of the two parties involved in invective, with expected styles of address changing according to context. Indeed, it is important to remember that the emotional impact of verbal communications, written or spoken, depends on several variables. These include the societal norms impacting on the interpretation of language and on expected behaviors; the relationship between the addressor and addressee, including the relative status of the two; the actual intent of the speaker with respect to inciting violence, insulting the addressee or dissipating tension; the way the context of previous events impacts interpretation; the capacity of the particular speech act to bring about an action (i.e., performativity), and finally the presence of third parties serving as an audience.

2 For the examples of invective recorded in ancient cuneiform tablets that follow in the text, and others, see: Noegel 2021: 101; D'Agostino 1998: 273-78; Matuszak 2014: 359-70; Lion & Michel 2016.

3 Ellerbrock 2017.

4 Brown & Levinson 1987: 25, 61-83.

5 Culpeper 2011.

6 See, for example, Battezzato 2021.

Invective speech may be defined as that which, while "having regard to the mores and ethical preconceptions of a given society, sets out publicly to denigrate a named individual. Its concrete manifestations are λοιδορία, ὄνειδος, κακηγορία, ψόγος, and *vituperatio*, all terms signifying abuse."[7] In classical invective literature, the target of invective is attacked for a variety of specific reasons, even if they do not actually apply. These may include: lowly birth, such as being born to a slave; poor upbringing, due to an 'unfit' mother; a simple, non-'noble' occupation; moral defects such as cowardice or greed; foreign origin; physical shortcomings (such as being short, lame, or ugly); bad fortune; peculiar attire and strange habits; old or young age. All of these are common targets of invective.[8] Invective often includes a form of dark humor, matching the advice found later in *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* (1441b23-26):

> And in abuse speeches one should use irony and laugh at one's opponent on the points that he prides himself on, and in private with few present, seek to humiliate him; but in crowded settings one should rather abuse him with the standard accusations: one should augment and diminish one's abusive remarks in the same way as with eulogies. (after Rackham 1937)

In ancient Greek and Roman society, it is possible that invectives were intended to isolate, publicly denounce, or shame a person who may have breached societal norms, and so played a regulatory function, controlling behavior. Greek and Roman oratory is saturated with invective, strongly associated with the elements of comedy, satire, or farce normally found in various literary genres.[9] The comic aspects of invective are discussed at length by Papaioannou & Serafim (2021), who explain the ways that comedy can be associated with attack.[10] Early examples of

7 Watson 2015. For oratorical terms for invective, see Kamen 2020: 62-64.

8 For specific common *topoi* of invective in comedy, see Kamen 2020: 42-52; for those in orators see 68-81.

9 See also for example Booth 2007: ix-xiv.

10 Papaioannou & Serafim, 2021: 2. The authors argue that despite the aggressive nature of invective, from antiquity to modern times, invective has been associated with humor.

invective literature are found in the iambic poems of Archilochus (ca. 680-ca. 645 BCE) and Hipponax (541-487 BCE). In tragedy, as in human society throughout history, invective is used to disparage, harm, or exclude.[11]

The definition of invective in tragedy that will form the basis of the following discussions is:

> Any pronouncement that includes an outpouring of insults, inappropriate to the relationship between the two parties, made with the intent to damage the reputation of, or cause shame to, or to undermine, or to belittle, or in any other way emotionally wound the addressee. Invective may occur in the form of extensive speeches, as found in an *agon*, or in shorter addresses such as in *stichomythia*, or both. The insults may be hurtful either because they are unsubstantiated, or because of their incisive accuracy. The effect of any invective act on its recipient depends on its emotional impact. While invective may weaponize words, giving them some of the power of physical violence, and may incite actual physical violence, conversely it may lead to a dissipation of tension, with the verbal altercation sufficing, sometimes through dark humor, to resolve the issue. It usually serves a particular purpose within a play: it may be used as a means of characterization; it may heighten or resolve plot tension; it may advance or change the direction of plot action, for example when in cases of extreme anger, a curse may be invoked, directly or indirectly causing death or mutilation, or when a person is exiled or punished in some other way. Lastly, invective may add to the entertainment value of the tragedy, through its rich language and imagery.

While the subject matter covered in the tragedies usually focusses on royal families of a semi-mythical heroic age, the plays do not describe heroic actions in wars, but rather the human suffering of kings, queens, warriors, heroes, and their families. This may have helped the audiences to identify with the characters, but many of the situations would still be somewhat removed from their realm of experience. The poetic language of the playwrights may have inspired audiences and filled them with

11 Ellerbrock 2017.

awe, while also maintaining a certain emotional distance. The characters' use of invective might have broken down some of these barriers, making them more 'human' and relatable. Spectators would very likely have experienced emotional outbursts themselves or witnessed invective-filled rhetoric in the courts or political assemblies of the day.

The way in which invective is used to enhance audience empathy with, or adverse reaction to, different characters is discussed in the present chapter. Either way, the strong language of invective, often including exaggerated descriptions or graphic imagery, would have held the attention of the audience, either by entertaining them or adding to the plot tension. In some cases, the use of invective might have heightened audience empathy with a character, while in other cases it might have alienated them. The use of invective in tragedy as elsewhere is not limited by gender, physical strength, age, or political power. When invective is delivered by someone in authority, there is added tension, due to the individual's ability to turn verbal threats into physical force. As people often pity those with less power, the bullying aspect of invective used by those in power might have added a negative element to their characterization and increased the audience's empathy with the character on the receiving end. For example, the invectives used by Agamemnon and Menelaus against Teucer in *Ajax,* when they deride his lowly birth in an attempt to silence him, disgraces the speakers rather than the target of the invective. However, those invectives spoken by characters with lower status to those who hold power over them (for example: The Chorus to Aegisthus; Antigone to Creon; Andromache to Menelaus; Medea to Jason and, later, Jason to Medea) create a more positive characterization, leading to greater audience sympathy.

However, this is not completely straightforward. While individuals of lower status, addressing those who hold power over them, need courage to speak out in the face of adversity, the choice to use invective involves selecting a particularly aggressive style. Courage could be expressed in other ways. For example, when the young maidens Iphigenia and Polyxena agree to go to their deaths without protest, they are showing extreme courage in facing a fate that they have no power to change. They do not, however, use invective. Their speeches are instead characterized

by nobility of spirit.[12] In contrast to these heroines, Antigone defying Creon and Andromache fighting Menelaus exhibit courage, but they also do not shy away from attacking their adversaries, and using insulting language, in an attempt to belittle and shame them. These feisty young women might have intimidated some members of the audiences, but would have impressed many others, gaining great sympathy. Being emotionally invested in the characters, the audience would feel the plot tension to a higher degree and feel more relief or despair as the plots progressed, depending upon the characters' fates. Even the Chorus in *Agamemnon,* who seemed particularly obtuse throughout the play, would have gained audience sympathy upon their belated awakening and willingness to take on Aegisthus verbally and potentially physically. Philoctetes' invectives against Neoptolemus and Odysseus may have underlined his desperation, as well as preparing the audience for his eventual attempted attack on Odysseus. This would have raised plot tension and made the audience more invested in the action. In a genre written to be performed at competitive festivals, invective may have been a useful tool for the dramatists. The greater degree of audience emotional involvement with, and response to, the characters would have created greater enjoyment of the play. The effect of invective on the audience would have been enhanced by the playwrights' skills in portraying true-to-life characters in dramatic situations abounding with passions rising to fever pitch, including fear, anger, hatred, outrage, jealousy, and anguish. While some invective in tragedy does include comic overtones, in other places the use of invective is found in tense moments of great pathos.

The appearance of invective in scenes from Euripides' *Andromache* (147-765) along with those occurring in twelve other Greek tragedies, by Aeschylus (*Agamemnon* 1612-53, 1662-71*; Eumenides* 179-231); Sophocles (*Antigone* 450-581, 724-65; *Ajax* 103, 112-13, 719-32, 1008-20, 1047-1315; *Electra* 289-98, 516-633; *Oedipus the King* 316-462, 532-630, 1063-64; and *Philoctetes* 927-62, 986-1003, 1281-86); and Euripides (*Alcestis* 629-740*; Hecuba* 1132-1284; *Hippolytus* 616-68, 885-98, 916-1035; *Medea* 465-519, 1323-50; and *Trojan Women* 969-1032) will be discussed below.

12 See, for example, the discussion in Roisman 2021: 111-16, 171-73.

Overview of Invective in Euripides' *Andromache* and Other Fifth-Century Tragedies

The main body of this study will consider the use of invective by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides in their tragedies while exploring the contexts and roles of invective, and in particular trying to understand whether invective takes the place of physical violence. The study starts with Euripides' *Andromache,* which includes three scenes of invective, involving four characters: Menelaus and Hermione versus Andromache and Peleus. These are the scenes most scholars agree are examples of invective in extant Greek tragedy. In all cases both sides insult each other, as opposed to one side insulting and the other defending his/her acts. The exchange of insults is followed by one of the acts of violence allowed on the Greek stage as it does not involve striking or killing, that is, binding. Euripides has gifted Andromache with a sharp wit and with the ability to hold her own rhetorically with her sparring partners. Andromache's masterful rhetoric stands out clearly in the invective scenes with both Hermione and Menelaus. While never starting the abuse, she stands her ground and answers every insult thrown at her with calm logic, never giving in or imploring.

The invective scenes in *Andromache* display almost all the characteristics that this rhetorical trope entails in extant Greek tragedy. The scenes raise the tension in the play, and thus in a round-about way contribute to the spectators' *catharsis* when the tension is finally released. They serve as characterization tools, and they comment on a political agenda as well as on social mores. They also contain a humorous touch that denigrates the opponent. The encounter between Andromache and Hermione as well as that between Andromache and Menelaus both present Andromache's dire situation: Hermione and Menelaus plan to kill her and her son. The plot tension focuses on the threat to the mother and son. Will Molossus' fate be like that of her older son, Astyanax, who was thrown from the ramparts of Troy? How can Andromache prevent such an outcome? Would Neoptolemus or Peleus arrive in time to save them? The situation of Andromache hiding at the shrine of Thetis while awaiting rescue easily arouses pity and fear, emotions that Aristotle thought the most fitting to be cleansed of if possible (*Poetics* 1449b21-28). The same is true of the encounter between Peleus and Menelaus. The two

noblemen, one a former warrior at Troy, the other Achilles' formidable father, most probably arriving with a warlike retinue, face each other over the fate of Andromache. Who will win?

The Plot Contexts of Invective

i) Plot Contexts in Andromache

The immediate context of the first scene of invective (147-273) is that Andromache, fearing death at the hands of Neoptolemus' wife Hermione and Hermione's father Menelaus, has taken refuge as a suppliant at Thetis's altar in Phthia, near the palace of Neoptolemus. Taken as a concubine by Neoptolemus after the sack of Troy, Andromache has borne him a son, Molossus (whose name is not mentioned in the play). Neoptolemus' subsequent marriage to Hermione remains childless. Although at this point he has cast Andromache out of his bed, the enraged Hermione believes that her childlessness has been caused by Andromache's use of drugs to poison her womb. Hermione has threatened to kill Andromache, and at this moment Neoptolemus is absent and Menelaus has come to visit his daughter. Andromache fears that he will kill Molossus also, and indeed Menelaus has found the boy in spite of Andromache's attempts to hide him. Upon her entrance Hermione attacks Andromache with bitter invective.

In the second invective scene, between Andromache and Menelaus (309-544), the context is a highly wrought, tension-filled scene, after Menelaus has brought in the little boy. The Chorus have just finished describing the terrible losses that the Trojan war caused, setting the scene for what may turn out to be ongoing violence resulting from the war.

The third scene involving invective takes place when Peleus arrives, having been summoned by Andromache's handmaiden (547-765). Seeing Andromache and Molossus, his great-grandson, bound in ropes, he ignores Menelaus and asks Andromache on what charges these men have bound the two. His arrival prevents any further violent acts by Menelaus or Hermione, but his question highlights Menelaus' cruelty. The binding

of the mother and son is underscored when Peleus himself unties them.[13] He taunts Menelaus by saying:

> So badly, scoundrel, have you mutilated her wrists?
> Did you think it was an ox or a lion that you were knotting tight?
> Or were you afraid that she would take a sword and defend
> herself against you? (719-22, Lloyd 1994)

ii) Plot Contexts in the Other Tragedies

In *Agamemnon* there is an invective scene between the Chorus and Aegisthus at the very end of the play. The main drama has already taken place, with Clytemnestra having successfully lured her husband into the palace, where she murders both him and Cassandra. However, as would be expected, the murder of the King and his concubine has left the *polis,* represented by the Chorus, reverberating with a new kind of tension. Throughout the play the elderly Chorus were in a kind of stupor, never fully understanding what was taking place around them.[14] Now they are finally on the verge of taking action. Confronted with Aegisthus' self-satisfied gloating, after allowing a woman to carry out a murder for him, the Chorus finally seem to boil over. Clytemnestra intervenes to prevent actual physical violence (1654-61, 1672-73). The arrival of Peleus in *Andromache* has a similar effect in preventing violence against Andromache and Molossus.

In *Eumenides*, the Furies seek to punish Orestes, effectively carrying out their role of hunting matricides. They have arrived at the sanctuary of Apollo, who tries to evict them. Apollo may, to some extent, have been involved in prompting Orestes to commit matricide, but the argument between the two sides relates to their conflicting positions: their altercation is secondary to the main plot. The audience would be focused on whether Orestes will be found guilty and condemned to death. Apollo's invective against the Erinyes describes them as horrid in appearance, underlining the nature of Orestes' suffering when pursued and maddened by them.

13 Sommerstein 2010: 30-46.

14 See discussion in Roisman 2021: 21-22.

The context for all of the invectives in *Ajax* is Ajax's threefold humiliation: at not having been awarded the arms of Achilles in the first place; at being prevented by Athena from murdering the Atreidae and Odysseus; and at having become a laughing-stock, since with his senses befuddled, he slaughtered the Greek army's flocks instead of their leaders and soldiers. The plot tension relates first to whether his friends and family can convince Ajax not to kill himself, which is the only course of action he sees possible in his deep humiliation. There are unusual incidents of reported invective in the play, following the entry of Teucer, who arrives in time to hear the Greek soldiers castigating his brother's name, but not in time to prevent Ajax from taking his own life. Teucer describes the biting invective he imagines he would receive from his father for not saving his brother. In this graphic scene Ajax would have been covered with blood, initially from the murder of the flocks, and then from falling on his sword.

After Ajax's death the tension relates to the Atreidae's attempt to prevent Teucer from burying his brother. As we will see in *Antigone*, attempting to disrupt proper burial rites brings emotions to a fever pitch. As in *Andromache*, and several of the plays yet to be described, it is the arrival of a third party, this time Odysseus, that brings the exchange of invective to a halt. Odysseus' words defuse the situation, allowing the burial to take place.

In *Oedipus the King,* when the *polis* is suffering from a plague, Oedipus curses the person responsible, not realizing he is cursing himself. He hurls abuse at the seer Teiresias, who refuses to explain the situation to the King. The invective is performative, in that Oedipus, on realizing the full implications of his true identity, gouges out his own eyes. Unlike in *Andromache*, the invective does not replace actual violence. The gouging of the eyes is described in graphic terms.

In *Antigone*, the invectives add to the plot tension throughout the play. Antigone is determined to bury her brother Polyneices, and Creon is equally determined to prevent the burial. The invectives continue to stoke the tensions, which reach a fever pitch culminating in the deaths of Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice.

In Sophocles' *Electra*, Electra's report to the Chorus of the harsh language her mother uses against her depicts the ongoing interactions of

mother and daughter years after the murder of Agamemnon. This report sets the scene for the rest of the play, giving the audience the chance to decide how they feel about the two women.

In *Philoctetes,* the invectives addressed by Philoctetes to Neoptolemus and Odysseus portray his plight, and his anger at being abandoned on an island by his fellow Greek warriors, due to a foul-smelling snakebite on his foot. The invective informs the audience of the man's hatred for his former colleague Odysseus and his desperation. The three men should have been fighting alongside each other, not attacking each other.

In *Alcestis* the invective is not really a major part of the drama, but serves to characterize Admetus and his father Pheres, rather than to advance the plot. Alcestis herself, who agreed to die in place of her husband Admetus, is allegedly already on her way to Hades. At this point in the play, there is no indication that Heracles will fight Death, and bring her back. The scene serves as an interval between the first half of the play, in which the tension builds up before Alcestis' death, and the second half of the play when she is brought back. The invective scene is somewhat ridiculous, with Admetus, who is in fact guilty of causing Alcestis' death, blaming his father for not having saved her by volunteering to die himself.

Medea is an exceptionally violent play, with Medea killing the Princess and indirectly her father, King Creon, and then stabbing her own two children to death. The contexts to the invectives are Jason's decisions to marry King Creon's daughter, with Medea and her sons facing exile as a result, and Medea's punitive actions. The invectives characterize Medea and Jason, as their positions are reversed, taking place before and after the off-stage murders occur. Jason was metaphorically flying high, about to marry the Princess, before she is murdered – Medea is literally flying high in her grandfather's chariot as the play ends. Although she has killed her sons, everything is done on her terms. With the play's intense bitterness, desperation, and hatred expressed along with the violent intentions, the general tone of the invective here is perhaps more reminiscent of Sophocles' *Philoctetes* than of Euripides' own *Andromache*. While

the eponymous heroines of both *Andromache* and *Medea* survive, Andromache, who saves her son, is a real heroine; Medea is a much more problematic character.[15]

In *Hippolytus*, the characters seem doomed before the start of the action, with Phaedra craving sexual intercourse with her stepson Hippolytus. On being found out, her obsession with the necessity to die out of shame and her determination that Hippolytus should suffer mortal consequences, vie with the intensity of her sexual obsession. In *Hippolytus* words have real power. Hippolytus' spoken invective causes the death of Phaedra, as surely as Phaedra's written note causes the death of Hippolytus. Theseus' invective against his son includes a curse that brings about Hippolytus' death. The invectives both characterize the speakers and also have a concrete role in the plots.

In *Hecuba*, after the old queen has lost everything, she finally takes revenge on Polymestor, murdering his sons and blinding him, as he murdered Polydorus, her youngest son. Polymestor's invective tells the story of what Hecuba did; his description of what will happen to her foretells the culminating disaster of the former queen's tragic life. Hecuba in turn tears to pieces Polymestor's claims of wishing to help the Argives. Her horrid future, as Polymestor depicts it, has no effect on the desperate old queen. Meanwhile, the audience await the decision Agamemnon will make about the two combatants.

In *Trojan Women*, Hecuba's invective against Helen is part of the *agon* between the two women, which occurs after the brutal murder of Astyanax, Hecuba's grandson. His mother Andromache has been given to Neoptolemus as a captive concubine, and Cassandra has been allotted to Agamemnon. The tension that remains for the spectators is whether or not Hecuba will convince Menelaus to kill his wayward wife. Menelaus tells Helen that no decision has been made as to whether she lives or dies, but that the army has entrusted the decision to him (901-2). But in 905 he declares that he intends to kill her. Hecuba convinces Menelaus to let Helen then speak in her defense, promising to counter every claim she presents in her favor. Helen presents her case, claiming she is innocent

15 See discussion in Roisman 2014b.

(914-65). Hecuba's entire speech not only rebuts all of Helen's claims (except for her first one),[16] but also condemns every aspect of Helen's behavior and personality. Hecuba herself has no power over Helen, but she might hope that by winning the *agon* she can convince Menelaus or the army to punish her. Nevertheless, Hecuba is acutely aware that whatever she says, in all likelihood Menelaus will quickly be bewitched by Helen's beauty, which she is showing off to the best possible effect in her finery.

Hecuba's invective against Helen may, at least to some extent, simply be for Hecuba's own benefit. Hecuba is taking full advantage of this opportunity to condemn Helen in return for what Hecuba herself has suffered. Does this provide any *catharsis* for Hecuba? There may be some satisfaction to the person who loses everything in life to have at least the power of speech remain for them. This happens also for Polymestor at the end of *Hecuba.*

Factors Affecting the Emotional Impact of Invective in Tragedy

i) The Balance of Power Between the Speaker and the Person Spoken To

In Euripides' play *Andromache*, the first invective scene occurs between Andromache and Hermione, and it is evident in her speech that Hermione, as Neoptolemus' lawful wife, holds tangible power over Andromache (155-80). However, as the mother of Neoptolemus' only son, Andromache's status differs from that of the other household slaves and servants.[17] It is possible that she draws strength from this, and that her powerful rhetoric is not only related to her character, but also to her belief that when Neoptolemus returns, he will support her (183-231). Her main

16 Helen's first point that Hecuba and Priam are responsible for what happened to her because of giving life to Paris and not making sure that the baby is dead, was dealt with in the first part of the trilogy, which includes the human factors of compassion that Helen chooses to gloss over, but they would have been in the minds of the spectators. Hecuba ignores the charge not only because it would be of no interest to Menelaus, but because there is no effective answer to it besides pointing out the futility of such a charge; the sole effect would be to distract from Hecuba's line of rebuttal.

17 See discussion in Roisman 2023: 44-45.

problem is not knowing when that may be. Of course, she could have no way of knowing that he is already dead.

During the second invective, between Menelaus and Andromache, the balance of power between the two speakers is of particular interest. While Menelaus is a king in Sparta, he has no jurisdiction here in Phthia. However, Menelaus has claimed his right to kill Andromache and her son, despite his being Neoptolemus' son, too (309-18). Andromache counters his claims by invoking the fact that Neoptolemus is the father of Molossus, and he will not stand idly by once he learns of his son's murder (319-63). In the third invective, the arrival of Peleus (546) causes an inversion of power. Suddenly, someone else is in charge, and although he is elderly, he takes over the situation, frees Andromache and causes Menelaus to leave suddenly, abandoning Hermione.

In *Agamemnon*, the invective scene is unusual in that it takes place between the Chorus and Aegisthus, after Aegisthus' entry at line 1577. Interestingly, none of these men had taken part in the Trojan War. The Chorus stayed at home because they were elderly. Aegisthus was Agamemnon's enemy but could also easily be accused of cowardice. The Chorus do not have the status of Aegisthus, who is from the leading family of the *polis*, and is Clytemnestra's consort. Yet they now threaten to murder the man who is effectively ruling the *polis*. In some ways, then, the local Elders may be interpreted as having comparable status to Aegisthus, who is an interloper, and has been involved in regicide. Where there is no clear power hierarchy, invective scenes may become explosive – and indeed, the Chorus threaten Aegisthus with physical violence, and are only calmed by Clytemnestra, who, at least up until the murders of Agamemnon and Cassandra, has been at the pinnacle of the power hierarchy in the *polis*.

In *Ajax*, the invectives between Teucer and the Atreidae are also interesting in respect to status. Teucer suffers invectives from Menelaus and Agamemnon for insisting on giving his half-brother proper burial, while the two Atreidae want to leave Ajax's body exposed, because he intended to attack his own comrades. Menelaus first utters hateful invective against the dead Ajax. Part of this invective focuses on whether Ajax was inferior in status to Menelaus. Teucer's answers also relate to

status. Menelaus' claims imply that he was Ajax's superior and his commander in the war, while Teucer points out that Ajax sailed on his own volition. The *stichomythia* that follows this first invective speech concludes the *agon* between the two speakers (1120-41). Menelaus then moves from insulting the dead Ajax to castigating Teucer for his inferior status. Menelaus points out that Teucer is a bowman and so held in lower military esteem than the warriors who fight with swords and shields. When Teucer answers that he could defeat a fully-armed Menelaus even without a shield, Menelaus does not answer the challenge. Instead he refers to the issue of justice, asking whether it is just that his murderer (i.e., Ajax) be honored with a burial. Teucer escapes this rhetorical trap by mocking Menelaus when he says: "Your murderer? You have said a strange thing, if you have died but are alive" (1127).[18] The dialogue turns to the issue of proper burial and respect for gods. Menelaus again sets a rhetorical trap for Teucer by asking whether preventing a proper burial for an enemy is not honorable (1132). Teucer circumvents the trap by asking if Ajax was Menelaus' enemy. Menelaus' reply that they hated each other offers Teucer the opportunity to accuse Menelaus of cheating Ajax out of Achilles' arms. Menelaus then resorts to what he knows best, threatening Teucer with violence: "This speech is tending towards pain for someone." When Teucer does not flinch, Menelaus states again with bravado that Ajax must not be buried, to which Teucer replies defiantly that Ajax *will* be buried.

When Agamemnon enters, he claims that both Ajax and Teucer are nonentities and slaves (1228, 1235), reiterating Menelaus' false claim that Ajax was a commoner (1071). Agamemnon challenges Teucer's claim that he and Menelaus were not in command of the troops and that Ajax sailed as his own chief (1232-34), and goes on to discredit Teucer by claiming that his mother was a slave, which would indicate Teucer's lower status.

While it would seem that the two Atreidae hold significantly higher status and power than Teucer, he refuses to accept this. Teucer brushes off their insults related to his birth and status. Indeed, if anyone is acting nobly, and deserves higher status, it is Teucer, and not the Atreidae. The invective scene surrounds the burial of Ajax, just as the invective between Antigone and Creon is set in the context of Antigone wishing to

18 Translations from Sophocles are by Lloyd-Jones 1997.

bury her brother Polyneices, in defiance of Creon's decree that he should remain unburied. In both cases the person nominally holding power wishes to prevent a proper burial. In both cases they have been threatened by the deceased when alive, and in both cases a surviving sibling wishes to carry out the law of the gods in conducting a proper burial. Does having divine right on their side give Teucer and Antigone higher status, or at least let them feel that they have it? Their unrestrained invective would make it seem so. In Andromache's arguments against both Hermione and Menelaus, perhaps feeling that justice was on her side gave her the strength to fight so well, at least in rhetorical battles.

In *Medea* the way the characters perceive their own power changes after Medea has carried out her revenge, killing the Princess, Creon, and her and Jason's two sons. Medea was just a cast-off foreign wife during most of the play, until the murders. At the end, she has become almost divine, riding in her grandfather's chariot through the sky, preventing Jason from touching the bodies of his two dead sons. Jason's invective can no longer touch Medea, just as her earlier invective failed to touch Jason. He eventually realizes that he is powerless, and that she will ride off unscathed. However, by killing her own sons to wound Jason, Medea has wounded herself.

In *Hippolytus,* the young Hippolytus, Theseus' son, nominally holds a higher status than the Nurse, who is a slave. His invective condemning all free women has truly disastrous results both for Phaedra and for himself. Theseus is of a higher status than his bastard son and uses his power with calamitous results. Hippolytus behaves politely and humbly with his father, being careful not to enrage him. He does not answer his father's invective with invective of his own but tries unsuccessfully to explain himself and appease Theseus. The only thing Hippolytus vies for is to be recognized by his father as a son of legitimate status. However, even when Theseus realizes that Phaedra lied in her letter, he cannot bring himself to see Hippolytus as a legitimate son.[19]

In *Oedipus the King,* although Oedipus must think he is in a superior position to the seer Teiresias, because he is the king, Teiresias claims independence and equal status with Oedipus in having the right to answer. He is not Oedipus' slave, he says, but Loxias' and he will not be written

19 See discussion by Roisman 2025.

down as Creon's partisan (408-11). Oedipus is certainly of a higher social status than Creon, which Creon does not dispute.

In *Philoctetes*, the invective scenes are one-sided, with Philoctetes hurling abuse first at Neoptolemus and then at Odysseus. The crippled man has no power without his bow, and when Neoptolemus holds the bow, Philoctetes' only weapon is invective. It allows Philoctetes to vent his emotions, but he can do no real harm until Neoptolemus returns the bow to him. He only has the upper hand from a moral point of view. One does not cast out a wounded warrior.

Odysseus seems to have typically been cast as inured to both invective and verbal pleading. It is noteworthy that in *Ajax* Odysseus remains untouched both by Ajax's words and by his befuddled attempts to harm him. In *Hecuba*, he remains unmoved by Hecuba's supplication when she tries to save the life of her daughter Polyxena.

ii) Special Staging or Stage Directions Intensifying the Invective

In *Andromache*, Hermione wears a gold tiara and sparkling gown. Euripides has the character describe her golden crown and bejeweled attire on entering the stage. By doing so, he not only characterizes her as a spoiled young queen of Spartan ancestry but also emphasizes the difference in station between her and Andromache. The former Trojan princess is now a mere slave and would have been dressed as such. Stage directions may have had Andromache clinging to an altar, emphasizing her vulnerability. Menelaus arrives wearing hoplite armor, which emphasizes the difference in status between Andromache and himself and underscores his status as a hero. The Chorus comment on Peleus' 'aged steps' to contrast his physical condition with Menelaus' comparative youth, which only heightens the absurdity of Menelaus running away at the end of the scene. In *Trojan Women*, having Helen appear in all her finery, while Hecuba is dressed in rags, would have emphasized the pathos of Hecuba's situation, heightening the audience's sympathy with her.

iii) Rhetorically Heightened Tone of Invective

Using the rhetorical trope of talking *at* the opponent rather than talking to her/him serves to belittle the opponent. This technique is used several

times. In Sophocles' *Ajax*, Menelaus relates a fable, seemingly addressed to no one, in order to comment on Teucer's conduct, comparing him to a man of reckless speech who urged sailors to sail on during a storm, while he himself cowered in speechless fear. This is, he claims, how Teucer will eventually become mute in his argument with Menelaus. Teucer counters in kind, speaking *at* rather than *to* Menelaus, and mimics Menelaus' use of a fable by saying that he also saw a man full of stupidity who triumphed insolently in the misfortunes of others. However, someone like himself stopped him by saying: "Fellow do not persecute the dead; for if you do, know that you shall suffer pain!" (1154-55). Teucer thus not only has the final word but also brings the issue from sheer invective to the subject at hand: Ajax's burial.

Euripides uses a similar rhetorical trope in the invectives in *Hippolytus*. When Hippolytus arrives after Phaedra's suicide, Theseus does not confront his son with Phaedra's accusation but rather talks about the importance of being right-minded in a way that leaves no doubt that he is referring to Hippolytus (916-20). His imperiousness is reminiscent of Hippolytus himself talking *at* Phaedra rather than *to* her in his misogynistic tirade and warnings about the future, following the Nurse's revelation (616-68).[20] The invectives of both tragedians take advantage of this haughty, humiliating, and heartless rhetorical style to belittle opponents in an *agon*.

iv) The Speaker's Intention in Uttering the Invectives

The emotional impact of invective may vary according to the speaker's intentions. In the first invective scene between Hermione and Andromache, Hermione's intentions are not completely clear. While she accuses Andromache of poisoning her womb and states she will make sure that Andromache is put to death, she also suggests that if Andromache survives, she must clean her house. Perhaps the most hurtful of her insults is that Andromache somehow foolishly chose to sleep with Neoptolemus, the very man who killed Astyanax, the son she bore her husband, Hector. Furthermore, Neoptolemus is the son of Achilles, who killed Hector. Is

20 See detailed discussion in Roisman 1999a: 136-37; 2014a; Parker 2001.

Hermione trying to wound Andromache emotionally, as well as threatening to kill her? Hermione's motives appear complicated and confused. She appears to want to make Andromache feel bad, filled with shame and fear. Hermione is highly emotional, and causing her opponent to feel she is in a precarious position may be as important to her as the actual threats. Hermione concludes her first speech with one of the common strategies of invective by identifying Andromache as a member of a group of 'others' differentiated from the local population. Her accusation that Andromache is a barbarian and that amongst barbarians "father lies with daughter, son with mother, and sister with brother, nearest kin murder each other" (174-76) must have seemed particularly ridiculous, with Hermione's own mother being notoriously faithless, while Greek myths familiar to the original audience were overflowing with fratricide and incest. However, invectives often suggest sexual deviancy.

Andromache initially defends herself, explaining that she is a slave and Hermione is young, unjust, proud, and unlikely to listen to 'superior argument' from one inferior in status; she then counters Hermione's unfounded allegations, which start by simply blaming her for being a concubine (177-80), as if it were her fault or choice, and continue by accusing Andromache of wanting to supplant Hermione as the mistress of the house. Andromache does not grovel or ask for pity but counters the senselessness of Hermione's allegations head on. Then Andromache goes on the offensive. Having eliminated herself rhetorically as a source for Hermione's troubled circumstances, Andromache points to the real cause of Hermione's misery. She pinpoints Hermione's disposition as the fount of Neoptolemus' distaste for her: "You are not fit to live with" (206).[21] Hermione might be beautiful and young, but she lacks the qualities that make a successful wife (208). A wife should identify herself with her husband's household and not assert herself unduly. Hermione should identify herself as the Phthian spouse of Neoptolemus, rather than continuing to consider herself a Spartan, the daughter of Menelaus. Instead, Hermione taunts her husband by claiming that Scyros, Neoptolemus' birthplace, is of no account in comparison to Sparta, and that Menelaus is a greater man than Achilles (209-12).

21 Translations from Euripides, except for *Hippolytus,* where I offer my translations, are by Kovacs 1994, 1995, unless otherwise stated.

Andromache ends her rebuttal with another sting to Hermione:

> Do not seek to surpass your mother in her man-loving
> ways, woman. All children who have sense must
> avoid the paths their wayward mothers went. (229-31)

Andromache's reminder of Helen holds a malicious sting, which Hermione immediately recognizes, and which prompts her to exclaim, "Are you going to keep on probing my woes?" (249).

In the second invective scene, Andromache is attempting to save her life and that of her son. She belittles Menelaus and attempts to shame him into changing his mind, but to little effect. Her one actual weapon is threatening that Neoptolemus will avenge her murder and the murder of his son, by forcing Menelaus to stand trial and drive Hermione out of his house. By contrast, Peleus physically threatens Menelaus, saying he will bloody his head with his scepter (588). Was this a serious threat? The old man does actually drive Menelaus away with his blistering invective.

In the other tragedies, as in *Andromache*, the intention behind uttering invective is almost always to shame, denigrate, belittle or in any other way possible hurt the recipient. This is the case in all of the plays. In *Agamemnon*, The Chorus actually threaten Aegisthus with physical violence. They want to put him in his place. He is a regicide and should not regard himself as the ruler of the *polis.* In the *Eumenides*, Apollo wants to evict the Furies from his sanctuary. He underscores their hideous appearance. He also wants to prevent them from hounding Orestes. His words have little effect.

In *Ajax* as in *Antigone*, Teucer wants to force Agamemnon and Menelaus to sanction a proper burial for Ajax, just as Antigone wants to ensure that her brother is given a proper burial. Teucer's attacks on the Atreidae are even fiercer than Antigone's on Creon. Antigone uses an understated invective against Creon (450-70). The apparent restraint in her words gives them in fact more strength. She admits to Creon that although she knew about his edict, she has not acted out of audacity but out of consciousness of the penalty for disregarding the gods' statutes (Griffith 1999: 458-60). Teucer, in contrast, makes full frontal attacks. Antigone uses logic in her speech, acknowledging that she, like all mortals, must

die. However, at the end she includes a fierce barb, saying that if her actions appear foolish in Creon's eyes, "it amounts to a charge of folly by a fool" (470). When Antigone makes no headway arguing with Creon, she too, belittles her opponent, telling him that his edict has no worth in comparison to the "unwritten laws" (453-55). Whatever the "unwritten laws" entail is still a scholarly debate, but her claim that Creon's edict prohibiting the burial of Polyneices is not on a par with them undermines Creon's self-importance.[22] In Haemon's invective scene with his father, he wants to save Antigone's life (728-65). When he realizes that Creon will not relent, he threatens to kill himself; yet Creon somehow does not understand his son's intention.

v) The Effect of Invective on the Speaker

In *Andromache*, Hermione is highly emotional. Causing her opponent to feel that she is in a precarious position may be as important to her as the actual threats. Likewise there is no immediate contextual need for Andromache to mention Helen; she simply seeks to shatter Hermione emotionally even further. In the second invective scene, Andromache is under real threat, and is desperate to save her son's life, even if she cannot save herself. Despite her situation, she retains her rhetorical ability. Menelaus, elated that he has found Molossus, pays little attention to Andromache, and calmly lies to her about his true intentions. Once she has learnt that Menelaus deceived her, and intends to kill her, while letting Hermione determine the fate of Molossus, nothing holds Andromache back. She hurls every insult possible at Menelaus and Spartans in general. Peleus also is incensed at Menelaus' actions, threatening his great-grandson and challenging Peleus in his own kingdom. He insults and belittles Menelaus in every way possible.

In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King,* speeches are highly charged emotionally throughout. Most invectives in this tragedy are unlike any others considered in this paper. In lines 247-72 Oedipus declares a series of terrible curses on the unknown slayer of Laius, not knowing that it was he himself who killed the king. Oedipus' prayers can be interpreted as performative speech utterances of invective, as in the belief system of the

22 See detailed discussion in Roisman 2021: 129-31.

time, the curses alone are enough to bring about the events that followed. He also orders those hearing him to make his words good, in the name of the god, not realizing he is condemning himself. Oedipus' words are later reinforced by the seer, Teiresias, who hints at the truth by asking Oedipus if he knows who his parents are and warning him that the curse his mother and father received will be his undoing (415-19).

Except perhaps in the case of *Alcestis*, those speaking in invective scenes are not just 'blowing off steam' or releasing tensions. They are attacking others or defending themselves from physical or verbal assault. Their speeches may be regarded as part of a battle, the consequences of which may involve their own deaths or the death of someone they care for, or their proper treatment after death, which may have been considered equally important. Andromache is fighting for her life, and for that of her son; Peleus attacks Menelaus to save them. Apollo wants to scare off the Erinyes to save Orestes. Teucer wants to ensure a proper burial for Ajax, just as Antigone wants to ensure proper burial rites for Polyneices. Antigone eventually attacks Creon with great venom when fighting for her brother but relinquishes her own life with comparative ease. Hecuba in *Trojan Women* wants to assure the death of Helen at the hands of Menelaus. Helen, having spoken first, has no chance to retaliate, but later manages to convince Menelaus to spare her life anyway. In *Hecuba,* the old Queen simply vents her grief and despair when attacking Polymestor. Polymestor, on the other hand, blind and bereft of his sons, can only retaliate by revealing Hecuba's horrid future. Both Jason and Medea express their own desperation in their separate invective scenes. However much they may have wanted to alter a course of action, neither speaker has much impact on the other, but simply vent their own emotions. In all the other plays the speakers of invective are enraged at their opponents. Only Menelaus in *Andromache* does not seem to exhibit any anger at Andromache and her son but intends only to satisfy the needs of his daughter.

vi) The Emotions of the Recipient of the Invective

The emotions of characters on the receiving end of invective are portrayed in various ways. Although one might think that Andromache's

rhetorical skill and composure must have overcome Hermione's nonsensical accusations, it is Hermione who has the last word before entering the palace, confident that Andromache will be forced to step out of the shrine and be killed. Menelaus, likewise, is not moved by Andromache's verbal attacks. He is characterized as an insensitive, cowardly bully who is not interested in what Andromache says. However, while he seems initially unmoved by the invectives he receives from Andromache and Peleus, his sudden decision to leave Phthia does seem to have been caused by Peleus' words.

Aegisthus in *Agamemnon* is surprised that the Chorus have the courage to scold him but is not daunted by them. The Erinyes in *Eumenides* try to reason with Apollo to no avail. Odysseus, who does not hear Ajax's vituperation (*Ajax* 379-91), is oblivious to it, and it may be that this is what allowed Sophocles to have him act as a mediator in the end. Later in *Ajax*, the Atreidae and Teucer all stand their ground, whatever insults are hurled at them, with Teucer maintaining the upper hand rhetorically. Electra's description of her mother's verbal abuse (in Sophocles' *Electra*) indicates that she thinks the words are enough to justify her hatred of her mother. In *Alcestis*, Pheres is not rendered speechless by his son's invective and shows that Admetus' acts were not lost on him. Helen in *Trojan Women* is unmoved by Hecuba and simply begs Menelaus to forgive her.

In *Oedipus the King,* the ranting invective used by Oedipus against those around him has little effect on Teiresias or Creon, but he blinds himself following the curses he brought down on his own head. Teiresias is no less quick to anger than Oedipus. Although initially Teiresias seems to attempt to protect Oedipus by not sharing with him the devastating knowledge he possesses, he is worn down by Oedipus' invective. Teiresias' first speeches indicate that he has suddenly realized that he should not have come at all, and that he would prefer to return home. The fact is that although he does not present himself as Oedipus' adversary, Oedipus is right in intuitively suspecting the seer. After all, the audience know that Teiresias did not prevent the marriage of Oedipus and Jocasta,

and thus allowed a horrible and unforgivable act of incest. Overall Sophocles casts the seer as ill-intentioned, un-civic-minded, or incompetent.[23] The knowledge he holds, that it is none other than Oedipus who murdered King Laius; that Laius was Oedipus' father; and that Oedipus is now married to his own mother will cause Oedipus' downfall. He could have prevented it, and it is not made clear in the play why he did not. The reality now is that it is the presence of Oedipus himself that causes the city's suffering. Oedipus' invectives eventually force the seer to speak, bringing catastrophe not on Teiresias, but on Oedipus himself. None of Teiresias' words are actually invective. None of his statements is an exaggerated insult: they are simply hard truths, which he could have revealed long ago. Throughout the play, it is only Oedipus who utters any kind of invective, wishing harm on others and unknowingly on himself, laboring under false assumptions until he blinds himself. The wholly tragic nature of these utterances, Oedipus' false accusations and his unwitting self-condemnations, sets them apart from other instances of invective. There is no dark comedy here. While Oedipus did want to shame Teiresias and Creon when he believed that they were the true culprits, the intensity of his own shame on discovering the truth is far greater. The invective used by Oedipus against Teiresias and Creon pales in comparison to the dreadful discovery that Oedipus makes. It is possible that Sophocles wanted to build the tension up slowly to this crushing revelation. In the end, neither Teiresias nor Creon suffer anything greater than insult, although on second thought the off-stage audience might have less than kind thoughts about the seer, whose traditional role is to warn of disaster rather than merely watch it happening.

In *Philoctetes,* while it is left unclear whether Philoctetes' invectives against Neoptolemus have any impact on the young man, it is possible.[24] Neoptolemus had pitied Philoctetes from the outset and been disturbed by the idea of deceiving him. His decision to return Philoctetes' bow to the crippled hero may have derived from his own doubts about his course of action, but may also have been influenced by Philoctetes' words.

23 For discussion see Roisman 1999b; 2003. For a complex discussion of Teiresias' reticence, see Battezzato 2021.

24 See discussion in Roisman 2005: 88-105.

vii) Two Special Types of Invective: Reported and Imagined Invectives

Ajax includes several instances of both reported and imagined invective. First, upon their entrance at line 134, the Chorus report how Ajax was slandered by the Greeks as rumors were spread through the camp by Odysseus, saying that it was Ajax who butchered the Greeks' herds and flocks of war spoils. Two more cases of reported invective occur later in the plot. The first is reported by the messenger, recounting the invective hurled at Teucer on his return to the Greek camp, while the second, to be discussed below, is reported by Teucer, after he *imagined* an invective by his father, Telamon, against himself once Telamon hears that Ajax has died.

Upon his return, Teucer becomes an object of vituperation by multiple parties. First, he is verbally attacked by the soldiers in the camp, who encircle him, calling him "brother of a madman who had plotted against the army," declaring that they will not be content until he is dead, mangled by stones. The verbal abuse goes almost to the point of violence when swords are drawn (724-30). It is only the intervention of some older men present that prevents the quarrel from turning into carnage (731-32). The scene shows how invective fans the flames of hatred and could lead to physical violence, even though Teucer could have known nothing about Ajax's previous actions. The scene is reminiscent of the much later *Andromache,* in which Peleus almost strikes Menelaus.

This threatening invective against Teucer and Ajax must have raised the tension of the off-stage audience. They, like the Chorus (743-44), may have believed that Ajax's thoughts had turned in a more positive direction, and hence might be safe. However, they now must wonder how Ajax would deal with the troops' intense hatred. An additional element is found in this invective with regard to Teucer. The audience hear that he was attacked (verbally and potentially physically) because of his brother's actions, not because of anything he himself has said or done. That may have made the invective even more difficult for Teucer to deal with. As well as being concerned for his own safety, he must have been exceedingly worried about his half-brother's wellbeing. People may be even more concerned about a person dear to them, than about themselves.

This may be compared to the 'imagined invective' that Ajax suffered from. He did not hear any of the Greeks' insults but experienced them in his mind. Often it is our own thoughts that hurt us the most, magnified by imagination, isolated from calming words that others might offer us. Similarly, the shame that Ajax experienced both at his own deeds in slaughtering the flocks instead of the Atreidae and Odysseus, thereby becoming a laughing-stock of the Argives and hated by them, and at not having been awarded Achilles' arms would have grown several magnitudes as he ruminated on all that had transpired (379-82, 440-46, 454-55, 458). Had Ajax heard Odysseus' actual words (121-26) it is possible he would have reacted differently. Immediately on seeing Ajax in his madness, Odysseus had in fact pitied him, despite hearing Ajax's violent intentions against him (103-17). Understanding the insignificance of men in the bigger scheme of things, Odysseus eventually persuades Agamemnon to do the right thing at the end of the play. Having heard Odysseus' earlier words (121-26), the audience may have hoped that someone could reason with Ajax and save him. While Ajax's own 'deception speech' (646-92) may have strengthened this hope, the invective described by the messenger would probably have had the opposite effect. Abusive words with incitement to physical violence saturate the play to the extent that it seems inevitable that there will be at least one victim.

The second imaginary invective is experienced by Teucer, who arrives too late to save Ajax. Teucer anticipates the invective that Telamon, his father, will use against him, calling him the bastard offspring of his spear's war-prize;[25] or a betrayer due to cowardice and unmanliness; or suspecting him of wishing Ajax dead so he could inherit Telamon's household. Teucer explicitly connects this vituperation by the old Telamon to anger (1012-20). As with the invective that Ajax must have experienced in his own mind, Telamon's speech is entirely the product of Teucer's imagination. He is actually hurling invective at himself, although he imagines the words coming from his father. Teucer perhaps foresees his father's response quite accurately, but nevertheless, his own knowledge of the words which would hurt him the most allows him to cause himself great pain with this imagined invective.

25 For the status of a *nothos*, a bastard son, see Patterson 1990: 41; Kamen 2013: 62-70; Roisman 2025.

Another case of reported invective is found in Sophocles' *Electra.* Electra tells the Chorus how her mother casts insults at her. She calls her "godless hateful creature!" and asks whether she alone lost a father, wishing her an ugly death (289-92), and also reports that when anyone mentions Orestes, Clytemnestra blames her daughter for saving Orestes and promises she will be punished (294-98). Electra must hope that these cruel words will turn the Chorus against her mother.

viii) The Presence of an Internal Audience

In *Andromache*, the presence of the Chorus may be significant to Hermione, who wants to feel admired and loved by those around her but fails miserably in this aim. The Chorus however do follow Hermione's line of reasoning, that there are two women sharing one bed, and that this is the reason behind Hermione's jealousy. They ignore Andromache's claim that this is no longer the case. They connect the situation to the beauty contest of the goddesses, as a result of which Aphrodite awarded Helen as a prize to Paris. Once Paris had taken Helen back to Troy, Tyndareus invoked the agreement with Helen's suitors to go to war against Troy to return Helen to her rightful husband. Likewise, in the second invective scene, the Chorus, rather incredibly, initially attack Andromache for defending herself against Menelaus. Only after she leaves the altar, do they speak on her behalf to Menelaus, with no effect. The Chorus' continued speeches about a 'double marriage' show how removed from the reality of the situation they are. However, their sympathies now clearly lie with Andromache. As is typical, their speeches have little effect apart from commenting on the action and describing events for the off-stage audience.

Roles of Invective

i) Significant Questions

After looking at the characteristics of invective in tragedy, one may ask what role invective has in Euripides' *Andromache* and whether there are different functions for invective in other fifth-century tragedies. While

tragedy is not normally associated with humor, I will consider whether invective may introduce some humor into tragedy. Other questions in the paper will focus on whether invective incites physical violence, or, conversely, may take its place. Finally: how may invective have been used to enhance both audience identification with characters, and their appreciation of the plays?

ii) Invective as a Characterization Tool

Both Andromache's and Peleus' invectives against Menelaus characterize him as being cowardly and insignificant, despite his status as one of the generals of the Greek army in the Trojan War, and one who featured significantly in some of the *Iliad*'s battle scenes.

At the end of the first invective scene between the two women (*Andr.* 222-26), Andromache comes across not only as a good and devoted wife who puts the happiness of her husband above her own, but as chaste, reminiscent of the description of a Bee Woman by Semonides of Amorgos (*fl.* seventh century BCE), who in Poem 7 depicts different types of women as having sprung from different species. The perfect woman is the one sprung from the bee. One of her main characteristics is that she is not prone to sexual engagement except for procreation. Andromache's views once again conform admirably to the Greek patriarchal ideal. Hermione is the one who falls outside the accepted Greek norms. The rivalry between Andromache and Hermione is thus not between a barbarian and a Greek, but between a barbarian reflecting Greek morality and an immoral Spartan woman.

By preaching the total submission of a wife to her husband, Andromache must have infinitely pleased the Athenian male audience (213-14). She then goes on to lob Hermione's assertions about barbarian sexual mores back at her, accusing Hermione of being so sexually insatiable and so jealous of her husband's affections that she cannot tolerate the thought of him ever having had intercourse with another woman (215-21), and that she is so possessive that she would not allow even one drop of rain to spatter on her husband's face (227-28).

Like Andromache's invectives with both Menelaus and Hermione, in *Ajax* the invectives between Teucer and the Atreidae are interesting in terms of characterization. Menelaus is the first to utter hateful invective

against the dead Ajax. As Finglass (2011: ad 1052-90) points out, Menelaus' speech is schematic, constructed by claim and its reversal: "Menelaus thought Ajax a friend, but found him an enemy (1052-54); Ajax wanted himself to live, and his enemies to die, but the god reversed this (1057-60). As a result, he must not be buried but will have his corpse exposed (1062-65). Menelaus couldn't control him alive but will now that he is dead (1067-70). Before, Ajax was *hybristes*, whereas now Menelaus can have proud thoughts (1087-88)." Menelaus claims that Ajax was a subordinate of his and should have obeyed him, but did not. A large body is not an assurance of safety, he says. Only shame and fear of authority can assure one's safety. Terror in a city can assure its survival, not acting as one pleases; these and other such despotic proclamations are uttered by Menelaus as he forbids Teucer to bury his half-brother. The invective comes to characterize Menelaus as a Spartan, who would not have aroused much sympathy amongst the Athenian audience. His binary thinking shows him as a rather inarticulate and rhetorically limited man, and his pronouncement "Formerly he [Ajax] was heated in his insolence (*hybristes*), but now it is my hour of pride" (1087-88) shows him as a small human finding delight in the death of one much greater than he is.[26]

Even the Chorus (1091-92) caution Menelaus against preventing the burial, but it is Teucer's attack on his stature and character that strikes harder. Similar to the way in which Euripides' Andromache mocks Menelaus, claiming that for all of his repute, he is actually a coward (*Andr.* 458-460), Teucer belittles the Spartan, using the same argument: that reputation and high birth do not guarantee noble deeds.

Agamemnon's invective, which is mainly directed against Teucer, but also include insults against Ajax (1226-63), serves to characterize Agamemnon more than Ajax and Teucer. In belittling the war efforts of the two half-brothers, he not only shows himself small-minded and ungrateful, he also goes against one of the more fundamental codes of Athenian society. The best warriors were not only supposed to be honored; they were also supposed to receive the choicest spoils of war. Agamemnon denies both to Ajax. Instead, his speech is vituperative and furious. He

26 The translations from Sophocles' *Electra* are by Roisman 2008/2017; of all other Sophoclean plays are by Lloyd-Jones 1988; 1997.

taunts Teucer in the beginning and end of his speech, for having an enslaved mother (ignoring the fact that she was a princess before she was enslaved), and unintelligible barbarian speech. It should be noted that *Andromache* also entails the theme of an enslaved princess, and a situation one might be able to throw in the face of Molossus, as Agamemnon does now to Teucer.

Agamemnon goes on to belittle Ajax's contribution to the war effort and equates his own prowess in battle with that of Ajax (1236-37). He also brings up again the fact that the contest for Achilles' arms was decided by a majority of judges, and accuses Teucer, and by implication Ajax, of not accepting defeat (1242-45). His complaint that Teucer will never learn *sophrosyne* (1259) is reminiscent of Menelaus' use of the related term *sophronos* (1073-76) and appears equally hollow. His claim that intelligence is more valuable than brawn is not unreasonable, but it is unclear how this applies to Ajax (1250-54). As none of Agamemnon's claims rings true, they cast him in a poor light.

Teucer's reply is by no means less castigating and disparaging (1266-1315). To his credit, he returns the focus to Ajax and Ajax's accomplishments. First, he laments the lack of gratitude of the commanders towards Ajax and describes in detail Ajax's prowess in two incidents in which he saved the Argives: first when he saved the ships (1272-81), and second when he fought Hector in a duel (1283-89). Passing elegantly now to his own defense, Teucer states that in both cases he, Teucer, was beside his half-brother. Furthermore, Agamemnon should not try to shame his, Teucer's, descent. He is the son of Telamon and Hesione, a princess, daughter of Laomedon, given by Heracles to his father as a prize for his valor.

Teucer then moves to counter-attack Agamemnon's lineage by pointing out the Phrygian origins of Agamemnon's grandfather Pelops. He goes into detail about Agamemnon's father Atreus serving his brother Thyestes, the uncle of Agamemnon, an impious meal of the flesh of Thyestes' own children. He follows this with remarks about Agamemnon's mother, Aerope, who the audience would have known was Cretan, and insinuates that her father, Catreus, caught her with her lover and sent

her to Nauplius, king of Euboea with instructions to drown her. The latter, however, spared her, and she then married Atreus, Agamemnon's father (1291-97).

Up to this point Teucer has built up his own credibility by relying on facts to counter everything Agamemnon has said. He shows himself to be brave and resolute in facing both Menelaus and Agamemnon. After his convincing rebuttal of Agamemnon's claims, Teucer brings back the issue of burial. He boldly states that having been born of two noble parents, he would not disgrace his birth and allow his half-brother to be shamed by lying unburied (1304-7). Making effective rhetorical use of the tableau formed by the dead Ajax, himself, Eurysaces, and Tecmessa, which dominates the stage (1308-9), Teucer threatens that if Agamemnon casts out Ajax, he will also have to cast out the three of them. He does not end his speech before hurling an additional insult at the Atreidae: "I am proud to die before all fighting for him [Ajax] rather than for your wife, or shall I say you and your brother" (1310-12). Finally in reply to Agamemnon's former concern for his own reputation (1241), Teucer ends his speech with bluster, rudely warning Agamemnon that if he harms him (Teucer), he will wish one day he had been a coward rather than bold at Teucer's expense (1314-15). The invectives and the counter-invective show the extent to which Teucer towers in intellect and character over the Atreidae.

In *Alcestis,* the invective between Admetus and his father Pheres serves to characterize both men, without progressing the plot action. In *Hippolytus*, Hippolytus' diatribe against women casts him as a virginal misogynist who at the same time is thinking about marriage (*Hipp*. 616-67),[27] Theseus' invective against his son characterizes the father more than the son: Theseus shows himself an insensitive father completely subsumed by his public image. The invectives uttered by Oedipus in *Oedipus the King* not only bring about his downfall but also serve to characterize him as volatile and suspicious.

27 One needs to ask oneself, however, what else could the young man have done in these circumstances. See discussion Roisman 1999a: 113.

iii) Effects of Invective: Escalation, Suicide, Physical Attack, and More

Andromache: while the tension between Andromache and Hermione must have risen during the first invective scene, there are no immediate effects, as all attention becomes focused on the arrival of Menelaus as he brings Molossus on stage. Although Andromache's desperate rhetoric with both Hermione and Menelaus would have raised sympathy for her and for her son's plight, it has little impact on the plot action. The third invective scene has a greatly different outcome. Menelaus abandons Hermione, driven away by Peleus' words and probably by the former threat of his scepter. The plot of the play turns abruptly from this point. Instead of Andromache being in danger, it is now Hermione who seems so distraught that she may take her own life.

The invectives in Euripides' *Hippolytus* also have a particularly strong effect on the progression of the plot. Hippolytus' famous diatribe against women, which certainly qualifies as an invective, delineates what Hippolytus thinks is wrong with the entire female gender. It comes as an enraged answer to the Nurse's sexual proposition on Phaedra's behalf. Hippolytus is outraged at the Nurse, and assumes Phaedra is behind her actions. He is furious that the Nurse/Phaedra could think that he not only would engage in a sexual act but that he would defile his father's bed.

Hippolytus' anti-feminist invective treats three main themes in succession: procreation, household finances, and female cleverness. The only part of the speech that can be considered violent is the last part, beginning at line 640, "I hate the clever one (*sophen*)," where Hippolytus lashes out against the 'clever' women he detests. In and of itself, his objection to clever women is well within Greek tradition, since as far back as Archilochus, clever women have been considered deceptive, especially in sexual matters. So is the suggestion that women be enclosed in their homes, which conforms with the modes of the society in which he lives. In this society women live indoors and are supposed to be faithful to their husbands; they certainly should not make sexual propositions to their stepsons. For Hippolytus, however, it would not suffice for Phaedra to return to her traditional confines. He wants her to be completely secluded. It is clear that his invective, which started as a general diatribe against the female gender, is aimed finally at Phaedra, who is listening

while standing at the door to the palace. He talks *at* her rather than *to* her:

> A servant should not ever go to a woman, the
> voiceless bites of beasts should dwell with them,
> so that women should have no one to speak to
> and no voice to receive in exchange. (645-48)

Beyond wanting to confine women to their homes, Hippolytus would relegate them to a world very unlike a household – a world without the pleasure of human voices and populated only by fanged beasts.[28] Hippolytus' vision might be extreme and excessive, but it can be effected. This section of his speech is more threatening and sinister than the beginning of his tirade, and more difficult to dismiss, disregard, or excuse. The potential for implementing his vision of how Phaedra and other clever women should be forced to live makes its insidious inhumanity emerge in full force. The home, in Hippolytus' view, is a place where women plot mischief, and their servants help them accomplish it (649-50). To prevent such plotting – and, more specifically, the plotting of which he is now the subject – he would transplant Phaedra away from the conventional female surroundings of a household, away from her familiar, sheltering palace and into a foreign and harsh realm. Moreover, he would remove from that world the very pleasure of sound that he himself so enjoys and that gives his own world much of its value for him. We recall his rhapsody at hearing – or believing he hears – Artemis' voice in the woods where he hunts (86). At the end of the denunciation, he finally mentions Phaedra. He will come back upon his father's return and "I shall see how you meet his eye, you and your mistress too" (663). The way in which he continuously ignores Phaedra while talking at her, but finally includes her as if as an afterthought, just before cursing both of them: "May you two perish!" (664), shows his deep contempt for Phaedra. He follows his curse by "I will never be satiated with hating women, not even if someone says that I always say [this]" (664-65).

28 For the irony invested in this wish see Roisman 1999a: 110-12; see also Roisman 2024: on lines 565-731, 645-48.

The invective is emotional, cruel, and biting. The words and the content are violent. The hatred is palpable. The result of this one-sided invective is Phaedra's suicide. She does not believe that he will keep silent as he has promised. Phaedra is certain that Theseus will come to know about the sexual proposition and the word will spread, which will harm her sons. Hence, she takes her own life and writes a libelous note that Hippolytus has raped her. The invective thus causes physical violence that eventually kills both Phaedra and Hippolytus.

iv) Invectives Leading Nowhere

In *Ajax,* the invectives between Teucer and first Menelaus, then Agamemnon, lead nowhere. The two invective scenes come to a close with no resolution and no following *stichomythia* to offer one. Instead, Odysseus appears and will resolve the impasse. The invectives follow the charged scenes of Ajax's suicide and Tecmessa finding his corpse. The question of Ajax's burial is looming. The invectives between those who want to prevent a burial and those who intend to continue with it, despite the prohibition, create tension on the stage and in the off-stage audience. It is clear that all Teucer and Ajax's family have is the power of words, with which they attempt to counter the Atreidae's verbal abuse. Menelaus, as usual, would prefer to use force (1159-60), but is not brave enough to do so, and chooses what he does best – to depart. Agamemnon's verbal abuse has no logical or factual substance and only presents insults *ad hominem*. Neither invective advances the plot; this is left to Odysseus, who resolves the tension, even offering to help with the burial. The invectives use dark humor and the disparaging trope of talking *at* rather than *to* someone, which belittles the opponent. The *catharsis* will occur only after Odysseus' intervention. Sophocles uses the same strategy in *Philoctetes*, where the invective essentially changes nothing, but gives vent to Philoctetes' emotions.

Euripides also uses the strategy of invectives that bring no resolution. One may claim that the invective between Admetus and Pheres in *Alcestis* relieves Admetus of some built-up tension. His harsh words to his father could, of course, equally well have been directed against himself. There is no actual violence following the scene, and Alcestis will soon return to life with the help of Heracles. The invective probably serves only for the

characterization of both son and father, since it leads to no turn in the plot. The bitter invective between Hecuba and Polymestor in *Hecuba* also leads nowhere. From the start it was unlikely that Agamemnon would punish Hecuba. Both Hecuba and Polymestor have already lost almost everything. That Hecuba will turn into a dog and die at sea, hardly seems to add to her troubles. She is beyond caring what happens to her, wanting only to see Polymestor punished for his share in her anguish. Jason's invective at the end of *Medea* likewise achieves nothing except to release his emotions following the murder of his sons.

v) Invectives as a Last Resort

Both Sophocles and Euripides use invective in this way. In *Philoctetes,* Sophocles gives Philoctetes a last-resort invective against Neoptolemus (927-62), alternating between a direct address to the young man and apostrophes to the natural surroundings: the harbors, promontories, mountain beasts and jagged rocks. He wants all of them to know that the child of Achilles, after giving him his right hand in pledge that he would take him home to Oeta, seized his bow and plans to display him before the Argives and convey him to Troy. He claims to have been deceived. He curses Neoptolemus (961) and at the same time begs the young man again and again to return the bow to him. He alternately rages at Neoptolemus as being unworthy of Achilles' heritage and beseeches him to return the bow, in keeping with the nobility of his nature (927-62, 967-68, 971-73). The address changes from a harsh and insulting invective to praise (967-78, 971-73). Ultimately Neoptolemus returns the bow to him in spite of Odysseus' threats; whether this is due to the invective is left unclear. Philoctetes' curses are the weapons of a desperate man. Indeed, invective is often the last resort of a character, like Haemon's attack on his father, Andromache's attack on Sparta, or Jason's attack on Medea, when the characters realize that the irreversible situation leaves them nothing but abusive words.

vi) Humorous Invective Denigrating the Recipient

Andromache's and Peleus' invectives against Menelaus use dark humor against him. Andromache pokes fun at Menelaus, who shows up in full

hoplite armor to oppose a woman (*Andr.* 458-60). Peleus asks if Menelaus has cruelly bound Andromache for fear that she will fight him (721-22). To show Menelaus' cowardice Peleus needles him by saying that while causing others to die, he, Menelaus, alone came back from Troy without a scratch and "took your fine armor in its fine case to Troy and brought it back in the same condition" (616-19).

In *Ajax*, when Menelaus asks whether it is right and just that his murderer (i.e., Ajax) be honored with a burial, Teucer escapes the rhetorical trap by mocking Menelaus when he says: "Your murderer? You have said a strange thing, if you have died but are alive" (1127).

The invective scene between Creon and Haemon in *Antigone* (724-65) is much more threatening and horrifying than those between Antigone and Ismene or Antigone and Creon. It is explicit, blatant, and misogynistic, but both of them use the dark humor of sarcasm in belittling each other. To Creon's statement that a city is thought to belong to a ruler, Haemon answers "You would be a fine ruler over a deserted city!" (738-39). Creon calls Haemon not only a slave of a woman but "inferior to a woman" (746).

Hecuba in *Trojan Women* pokes fun at Helen's claim of divine compulsion in the form of the goddess' beauty contest. In the spirit of fifth-century rationalization, Hecuba points to the improbability of either Hera or Athena vying with each other in a contest about beauty, which for Hecuba is important only in the case of marriage. She wonders sarcastically whether Hera sought the judgment "so that she could get a better husband than Zeus", or whether Athena, who had begged for the gift of maidenhood, would be desirous at all of marriage (978-81).[29] Hecuba warns Helen not to attribute "foolishness" to the goddesses in an attempt to excuse her own misconduct. "I fear that you will not persuade the wise," she says (982).

29 For the importance of marriage in this play, especially as a theme in the various speeches of the female characters, see McCallum-Barry 2001; Mossman 2005: 358 and bibliography.

vii) The Effect of the Invective on the Off-stage Audience

Alcestis, which has often been referred to as a problem play, is also somewhat puzzling in terms of the discussions in this chapter. As has already been stated, the invective between Admetus and Pheres seems to be used more as a characterization tool than to forward the plot, although neither character gains much sympathy. Instead, the invective scene adds an element of dark humor and could have been included purely for its entertainment value. Pheres strips Admetus' sanctimonious blame to its bare truth: Alcestis is dead because he, Admetus, wants to live. Conversely, in *Hippolytus*, the invectives of both Hippolytus and Theseus are directly involved in progressing the plot as well as in characterization. None of the play's characters, except perhaps the Nurse, is particularly sympathetic, despite their subjective descriptions of their own intense suffering and the eventual deaths of Phaedra and Hippolytus. Euripides seems to have emphasized the importance of personal choice in the characters' actions, together with the power of words, spoken and written, in this play. Choosing any extreme path, whether it be a way of life, or a way of expressing oneself, may have serious consequences. The invective scenes in *Hippolytus*, therefore, may have been thought-provoking rather than entertaining or cathartic.

A further role of invective scenes may have been to enhance the audience's empathy with some of the characters. This may be seen with characters on the receiving end of fierce invective, especially when despite their lack of power or authority, they face down their tormenters. As noted above, Andromache's courage and resourcefulness, exemplified in her skillful rhetoric opposing both Hermione and Menelaus, would have produced a sympathetic reaction. The same may have been true in *Agamemnon*, when the Chorus of old men find the courage to stand up to Aegisthus. In Sophocles' *Antigone* the invectives would have served to heighten the audience's empathy with the young heroine, and enhance the emotional impact of the tragedy. Antigone's courage in doing what she believes to be right, even if it means challenging Creon's edict against burying her brother Polyneices, would have gained her sympathy and respect. Even though Creon now holds power over the whole *polis,* he is unable to defeat Antigone in the verbal debate between them. Creon admits that what he wants most is to capture and kill her (498), and then

exposes his misogyny by declaring that no woman will ever rule (525). While misogyny in itself may not have been problematic for audience members, Antigone's spirited responses, and her insistence on doing what she felt was right (450-70; 499-507), would have impressed the spectators. Being emotionally invested in the characters, the audience would feel the plot tension to a higher degree and feel more relief or despair as the plots progressed, depending upon the characters' fates.

viii) Invective as Commentary on Politics and Social Mores

The invectives of Andromache and Peleus against Menelaus, in *Andromache*, could have a political side to them, condemning contemporary Sparta. Andromache attacks Spartans for being treacherous plotters, murderers, cheaters, and deceivers (445-64). Peleus states that a Spartan girl, even if she wanted to, could not have remained chaste. The young girls leave their houses in company of young men. They wear loose tunics that show their bare thighs and exercise together (595-601). Andromache cautions Hermione to be silent about her "troubles in love," a custom that traverses boundaries and is not limited to one nation (240-44). Tritle suggests that Sophocles' *Antigone,* which was composed while Pericles was still alive, may be interpreted through Creon as a subversive commentary on "Pericles, his leadership of Athens and his harsh suppression of Samos" (2010: 16).

Other Features of Invective in Tragedy

i) Frequent Subjects

Cowardice and *lack of military skill*: In *Agamemnon* the Chorus accuse Aegisthus of cowardice for having a woman murder Agamemnon (*Ag.* 1633-35, 1643-44). In *Ajax,* Menelaus tries to belittle Teucer for being an archer, who by his profession does not fight face to face (1120-22, cf. 1244-45). Teucer, on the other hand, reminds Agamemnon that Ajax saved him from Hector in the battle over the ships (1273-82) and when he fought Hector in a duel (1283-88). In *Andromache* the title character pokes fun at Menelaus for arriving in full hoplite armor to oppose a woman (458-60).

Peleus, too, upon his arrival berates Menelaus and calls him a coward (590), and a man who, while causing others to die, was the only one who came back from Troy without a scratch and took "your fine armor in its fine case ... to Troy and brought it back in the same condition" (616-19). Eventually, Menelaus runs away from Peleus (729-46).

Servile origins and foreignness: In *Ajax*, Agamemnon categorizes Teucer as a mere barbarian slave because his mother was a captive (1228-35, 1260-63). In response, Teucer reminds Agamemnon that Pelops, his grandfather, was by origin a barbarous Phrygian and that Agamemnon himself is the son of a Cretan mother (1290-97). Creon in *Antigone* calls Haemon "slave of a woman" in the stichomythic invective (726-65, 756). In *Oedipus the King,* when Jocasta tries to discourage Oedipus from fetching the Theban shepherd who gave the infant Oedipus to the Corinthian shepherd, Oedipus answers her sarcastically: "Do not worry! Even if I prove to be the offspring of three generations of slaves, you will not be shown to be low-born!" (1062-63). In *Andromache* Hermione calls Andromache a slave won by spear, an Asian woman, a foreigner (155-76, 243).

Accusations of conspiracy: In *Antigone,* for a brief moment, Antigone, who does not allow Ismene to take a share of the responsibility for the burial of Polyneices, accuses her sister of siding with Creon: "ask Creon, you are his champion!" (549). She also directly states that her sister is more concerned about Creon than anything else. Creon does in fact suspect both Antigone and Ismene of conspiracy (488-96, 531-35). Oedipus in *Oedipus the King* is convinced that Teiresias is conspiring with Creon to depose him (380-89, 399-403, 520-22, 532-57, 622-27, 639-43, 679-82). In *Andromache,* Hermione accuses Andromache of poisoning her womb to prevent conception as well as scheming to take possession of her house (*Andr.* 155-58).

Age: Andromache attributes Hermione's open and explicit interest in sex to her youth (*Andr.* 234-44). Menelaus on the other hand mocks Peleus, claiming that in spite of his old age he is not wise (645-46).

ii) Invective Aimed at a Third Party

In *Ajax*, when Ajax regains his sanity and with it a clear understanding of what he has done, he is mortally stricken with shame at having become a laughingstock for his comrades: "Ah, the mockery! What an insult I

have suffered!" (367). He then utters a brief invective against Odysseus (379-91), focused on the scornful laughter and mockery Odysseus directs at him. He wants Odysseus and the Atreidae dead and then to die himself (387-91). This last part will turn out to be performative. In *Hippolytus,* Theseus' denunciation of Hippolytus also occurs while Hippolytus is absent (885-90).

Conclusions

This chapter has analyzed the invective scenes found in the surviving plays of the three extant fifth-century Athenian tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides. The very fact that all three tragedians include invective scenes in more than one of their extant plays is of interest in itself. Consisting as they do of conversations between on-stage characters found in highly charged situations, invective scenes may have been considered a natural feature of the tragedies. In particular, the invective scenes in tragedy often took place in fraught 'life or death' situations, with invective used as a last resort, when all other means of self-defense are lost.

Invective scenes play many varied roles in tragedy, from characterization, to serving as an alternative to physical violence, to performative utterances with violent ends, to raising plot tension, thus intensifying eventual *catharsis*. The intention behind the invective is usually to belittle, shame or otherwise harm one's opponent. This may be done by using sarcastic humor or by threatening actual violence. We have seen that in *Andromache* the three invective scenes form an integral part of plot action. By contrast, the invective in *Alcestis* has little effect on plot progression, serving more as a diversion from the main action. The invective scenes in *Ajax, Medea* and *Antigone* enrich the characterizations of the speakers, while also possibly shocking the audience with the violence of the feelings expressed. The invective in *Philoctetes* underlines how words may replace actions, when there is no physical power, while those in *Hippolytus* and *Oedipus the King* demonstrate just how powerful those words may be. There may be added layers of meaning to invective scenes, with Peleus' and Andromache's words possibly having political significance to the external audience. Sophocles' *Ajax* has fascinating cases of reported

and imagined invective, showing the power of the mind in intensifying emotions. The dark humor introduced in some invective scenes would also have been appreciated by the audience.

Whether invective scenes serve to release or escalate tensions depends on the perspective from which the question is asked. Invective scenes undoubtedly enhanced the audience experience of the tragedies by heightening plot tension, while also intensifying sympathy with those powerless characters who suffer verbal abuse and therefore contributing to the experience of *catharsis*. On the other hand, characters may have gained some short-lived relief from tension by venting their anger, although any advantage gained is often quickly overturned. In *Andromache*, Hermione may have gained some satisfaction not only by threatening Andromache's life, but also by insulting her in every way possible, regardless of whether her words held any truth. After her father's departure, however, Hermione's despair leads her to consider suicide. In *Hippolytus*, the hate-filled invective delivered by Hippolytus against all women in general, as well as against Phaedra in particular, may have allowed him to defuse his anger when confronted by the Nurse, but it is followed shortly by Phaedra's suicide and then by his own death.

We may also ask whether invective leads to characters attaining their goals, but this also has no simple answer. While spoken violence rarely leads to physical violence by the speaker, the emotional impact of the invective is often shown to have profound effects. In *Andromache*, Menelaus does leave after Peleus flings a tirade of invective at him but tries to save face by claiming that he needs to go and attend to an insurrection. In most cases where invective causes an action or reaction, the results are disastrous. After Theseus condemns his son to death, he discovers the young man was innocent. Oedipus curses the person who brought the plague on Thebes and then discovers that he himself is that person. Creon condemns Antigone to death and then suffers the loss of his son and wife. One exception may be in *Philoctetes* where Philoctetes succeeds in persuading Neoptolemus to return his bow, but then is forced by Heracles to join the Argives at Troy.[30]

30 For the possibility that Heracles is no other but Odysseus in disguise, see Roisman 2001.

It is highly possible that the power of words was of interest to all three tragedians when they used invective in their plays. The tragedies are often thought to depict human suffering caused by the after-effects of war. The use of invectives complements this but also highlights the potential for harm from violent language as well as violent deeds. Dark humor may, on the one hand, mitigate the impact of violence, but on the other hand, individuals may experience intense shame when belittled or laughed at.

Objectively it is difficult to compare the use of invective by the three tragedians due to the uneven number of passages. However, it might be possible to propose that in Sophocles, the characters sound completely sincere in what they say in their verbal abuse against their opponents. The invective reflects their true opinions as well as their anger. If Oedipus sounds less so, it is because he has less time to contemplate what is occurring. Teiresias completely surprises him with what he reveals. Aeschylus seems to connect invective more closely with incitement to violence, but we do not have much to go on. In Euripidean invectives there is more dark humor and sarcasm. The words the characters use are intended to hurt the opponent, whether the speaker believes them to be true or not.

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VERBAL IRONY AS INVECTIVE IN ARISTOPHANES[1]

By Raquel Fornieles

Summary: This paper offers a first approach to verbal irony in Aristophanes' comedies as a linguistic resource of humour and invective. The purpose is twofold: firstly, to examine irony markers in order to explain their use in context and, secondly, to identify patterns of comic invective in passages in which verbal irony comes into play.

Introduction

In his study focusing on Greek and Roman literature, Koster (1980: 39) defines invective as a structured literary form whose aim is to use all appropriate means to publicly discredit an individual in the context of the values and norms prevailing at the time. It is common to associate invective with direct, very forceful, unkind and often rude criticism (*Cambridge Dictionary*) and especially with insult. Indeed, direct insults in the form of swear words are included amongst the many mechanisms of invective identified by Koster (1980: 104). However, there are other, less direct forms of insult and the author highlights the use of parody or of figures of thought, such as irony, a figure of mitigation or understatement, which is used to soften the expression. The latter is the one of particular interest in this paper and, as we shall see, it is closely related to the former.

Establishing a definition of irony has been approached from many different perspectives.[2] Traditional semantics has interpreted irony as a

1 This study has been conducted as part of the research project "Indirect speech acts and interaction in Ancient Greek" (PID2021-122489NB-I00).

2 For a brief state of the art, see Fornieles 2023.

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phenomenon that functions thanks to the cognitive relations of antonymy. Through the prism of rhetoric,[3] irony is a figure of thought in which a speaker – by means of words or prosodic elements, such as tone of voice or intonation – implies the opposite of what he or she is thinking.[4] From the point of view of pragmatics, irony is closely related to the situational context, the intention of the speaker, and the interpretation of the interlocutor. Irony has generated an extensive literature, and different variants of it are usually distinguished, such as tragic irony, situational irony, temporal irony and verbal irony. The latter is of most interest to us here, and has been defined by Burgers *et al.* (2011: 190), amongst others, as "an utterance with a literal evaluation that is implicitly contrary to its intended evaluation."

Irony has also been understood as a very useful device when a speaker wants to express surprise by verbally pointing out the contrast between what was expected to happen and what actually happened (Gibbs 1986; Colston & Keller 1998). This perspective is very interesting for the study

3 Ancient rhetoricians dealt with irony. In his *Ars Rhetorica*, Anaximenes explains that irony consists in saying something that one pretends not to say or naming things with the opposite words. In Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1379b), irony is referred to as a sign of disdain. However, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1127a and 1127b) it is presented as a form of expressing modesty (often feigned), since Aristotle claims that the ironist denies what belongs to him or downplays it. This offers a positive image of ironists, since – from Aristotle's point of view – they have a pleasant character and minimise their virtues to avoid ostentation. Hermogenes is the rhetorician who offers a definition closest to the specific needs of the genre we are concerned with here. He approaches irony (cf. Hermog. *Id.* 365) as a form of expression of *severity* which, based on the fact of saying the opposite of what one thinks, serves to make reproaches and often also aims at mockery. This fits in very well with comedy. In the Latin rhetorical tradition, Cicero and Quintilian break with the conception based on contraries by semantic opposition and associate it with dissimulation (*dissimulatio*).

4 In terms of expressing the opposite, Aristotle also mentions (Arist. *Poet.* 1261a25) ἀμφιβολία, although this alludes rather to a semantic ambiguity, a term that the speaker uses with a double meaning. The traditional definition of irony based on rhetorical parameters as the action of saying the opposite of what one thinks has received numerous criticisms based, above all, on the fact that the concept of 'contradiction' is insufficient to unify all ironic phenomena. See, for instance, Kaufer 1981; Haverkate 1985 and 1990: 81; and Torres Sánchez 1999: 6.

of texts such as those examined in this work, since the surprise factor is a common technique used by the poet to provoke a comic effect.

Although not always used for such purposes,[5] irony tends to be associated with mockery, contempt and criticism. For this reason, it is often associated with inciting negative effects in the interlocutor and is therefore a powerful tool in contexts of invective. In this sense, the interest that irony has aroused in studies of verbal (im)politeness is particularly relevant.

Some scholars have considered irony as a prototypical politeness strategy. However, there are also those who argue that it is a truly effective weapon for expressing impolite utterances that appear to be polite. In this regard, Culpeper 1996[6] refers to it as 'sarcasm'[7] and defines it as the use of strategies of politeness that are obviously insincere in the service of social disharmony. Therefore, according to Culpeper, we are dealing with a mechanism of *mock politeness*.[8] The speaker pretends to be polite by using specific linguistic politeness devices but is really criticizing and even humiliating his interlocutor.

Let us now look at an example. In the following passage, despite describing Demosthenes in a positive light (χρηστός) Aeschines is disparaging him (Aeschin. 2.36):

5 It is also possible to find passages in which, by resorting to irony, the speaker's words do not exclusively have a negative intention. In terms of verbal politeness, irony can sometimes also have a positive effect on the speaker's *face*. Thus, irony is a device that humiliates the interlocutor but also reinforces the speaker's *face*. There are also situations in which irony is used as a means of flattery. On other occasions, irony can be used both to criticize and to praise the speaker. This example given by Alba Juez 1995: 11 is illustrative: "Suppose that I have a friend who is not very self-confident and after an examination he says: 'I'm going to fail this exam. I did it all wrong'. After some days I meet him, and he tells me that he has passed the exam with a very good mark. Then I could ironically say: 'Oh, yes, you have failed, you did it all wrong, you are a very bad student.' In this particular context I would be criticizing and praising my friend at the same time."

6 See also Culpeper 2015.

7 It is very difficult to pinpoint the boundary between irony and sarcasm (cf., e.g. Kreuz 2020: 26-29, who defines sarcasm as a type of verbal irony). Those who have tried to make a distinction argue that sarcasm, as opposed to the feigned mockery implied by irony, aims at a biting and cruel offence.

8 See also, amongst others, Lachenicht 1990; Jorgensen 1996; and Bousfield 2008.

> Ἐπειδὴ δ' ἐφ' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ἐγενόμεθα, σφόδρα πάνυ σκυθρωπάσας **ὁ χρηστὸς οὑτοσὶ Δημοσθένης**, ἀπολωλεκέναι με ἔφη τὴν πόλιν καὶ τοὺς συμμάχους.
>
> Now when we were by ourselves, **our worthy colleague Demosthenes** put on an exceedingly sour face and declared that I had ruined the city and the allies.[9]

The audience picks up on the irony in this attack thanks, amongst other things, to their shared knowledge and the extralinguistic context. Aeschines and Demosthenes are rivals, and the audience is aware of this. It is therefore obvious that Aeschines is not of the opinion that Demosthenes is a noble, good and serviceable man (χρηστός), but quite the contrary. Verbal or linguistic context is also essential for the correct interpretation of the ironic utterance. The use of οὑτοσί with an adjective with positive connotations (χρηστός) but uttered in a mocking tone can only be understood in terms of irony. Moreover, as Serafim rightly points out in his analysis of this passage,[10] here Aeschines attempts to reveal Demosthenes' true character by describing his face as extremely grim (σφόδρα σκυθρωπάσας). This would indicate he is a cruel and violent character, far removed from what would be expected of a χρηστός man.

The studies I have carried out so far on the speeches reflecting the confrontation between Aeschines and Demosthenes[11] seem to indicate that irony does not mitigate the violence of the verbal attacks but quite the contrary. The ironist enhances or intensifies the negative and violent effect of such attacks. However, in the following pages I focus on Aris-

9 Translation taken from Adams 1919.

10 See Serafim 2022: 130.

11 Cf. Fornieles 2022, 2024 and forthcoming. In these papers, I conclude that irony is a device of impoliteness, but it is important to remember in these cases that the speaker's intention is always to belittle and discredit his opponent.

tophanes' comedy, a different genre in which another pragmatic phenomenon must be considered. I am referring to humour, a powerful tool of social and political criticism.[12]

Verbal irony and humour

In pragmatic terms, humour is explained as "the replacement of an activated semantic frame by a new one, which is unexpected."[13] It has also been understood as the overlapping of two semantic frames that are inherently opposed, which justifies its contrastive character.[14]

Although it is generally accepted that irony and humour are two different pragmatic phenomena, they are closely related. According to studies that focus on the history of the concept of irony,[15] it would have initially been linked to humour and mockery. Ballart (1994: 40) has even placed the origin of verbal irony in Greek comedy. He argues that irony originates in the stereotypical duel between the naivety of the victim (ἀλαζών, a presumptuous fool) and the dissimulation of the ironist (εἴρων,[16] a character who pretends to agree with his opponent to drag him into absurdity with the complicity of the audience).

Wolfsdorf has linked irony in Aristophanes' comedies to dissimulation[17] but also to lying and argues that it is a cunning and devious dissimulation by which the ironist shows himself to be kind, good, or simply innocent but is in fact selfish and harmful. Thus, the speaker succeeds in disarming his interlocutor with words and defeating him. In terms of verbal politeness, he or she would be saving his *face*.[18]

12 On comic invective in general see the papers included in Papaioannou & Serafim 2021. Amongst these, Konstantakos' contribution focuses on Aristophanes' *Wasps*.

13 Rodríguez Rosique & Provencio Garrigós 2012: 251.

14 See Raskin 1985 or Attardo 1994 and 2001.

15 See, for instance, Schoentjes 2003 and Jankélevitch 1982.

16 See Gil Fernández 1995: 25. Εἴρων is first attested in Aristophanes' *Clouds* as opposed to the ἀλαζών (cf. Ar. *Nub.* 449).

17 See also Luarsabishvili 2019.

18 As I have explained in previous publications, the concept of *face* (created by Goffman 1967) was taken and developed by Brown & Levinson 1987. Broadly speaking, every

Irony markers in Aristophanes' comic invective

Ancient Greek has linguistic mechanisms (amongst others, markers of evidentiality, superlatives, diminutives, repetitions, puns, rhetorical questions or lexical-semantical markers) that allow us to identify ironic utterances. These irony markers provide us with many clues. However, for an ironic utterance to be interpreted correctly, a certain shared knowledge between speaker and audience is necessary.

The following pages aim to offer a first approach to verbal irony as a mechanism of invective in Aristophanic comedy. To do so, I will look at some of these irony markers to explain them in context and to identify some patterns of comic invective.

Attacks may be carried out in the private sphere, in relationships between friends or family members, which seems to reflect a more emotional or personal invective. The initial passages place us in the prologue of *Clouds*. Strepsiades, ruined, laments and refers to his son Phidippides in these terms (Ar. *Nub*. 8-10):

> ἀλλ' οὐδ' **ὁ χρηστὸς οὑτοσὶ νεανίας**
> ἐγείρεται τῆς νυκτός, ἀλλὰ πέρδεται
> ἐν πέντε σισύραις ἐγκεκορδυλημένος.
>
> Neither does **this excellent youth** awake through the night; but takes his ease, wrapped up in five blankets.[19]

Χρηστός is a generic term for praise[20] but Strepsiades utters it ironically to describe Phidippides, for he is not 'excellent' but a useless and lazy young man. In truth, his son has led him into debt because of his excessive love of horses. Such ironic expressions are very common in Greek

individual has two *faces*, a positive one (the need to be appreciated in the community to which he or she belongs) and a negative one (the need to preserve his or her privacy).

19 Greek texts are taken from Wilson's 2007 edition of the comedies of Aristophanes except for *Birds* (from Henderson 2000). Translations of *Clouds* are borrowed from Hickie 1853.

20 *LSJ* and Olson 2021: 64.

oratory.[21] In fact, the passage is reminiscent of the example given in the introduction, where Aeschines refers to Demosthenes in the same terms (**ὁ χρηστὸς οὑτοσὶ** Δημοσθένης).

Shortly afterwards, Strepsiades curses having married his wife, the mother of his son. He alludes to her with another adjective with positive connotations (ἀγαθός) in a clearly mocking way to emphasize his bitterness against his wife's pretensions (Ar. *Nub.* 59-65):[22]

ὅτι τῶν παχειῶν ἐνετίθεις θρυαλλίδων.
μετὰ ταῦθ', ὅπως νῷν ἐγένεθ' υἱὸς οὑτοσί,
ἐμοί τε δὴ καὶ **τῇ γυναικὶ τἀγαθῇ**,
περὶ τοὐνόματος δὴ 'ντεῦθεν ἐλοιδορούμεθα·
ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἵππον προσετίθει πρὸς τοὔνομα,
Ξάνθιππον ἢ Χαίριππον ἢ Καλλιππίδην,
ἐγὼ δὲ τοῦ πάππου 'τιθέμην Φειδωνίδην.

After this, when this son was born to us, to me, forsooth, and **to my excellent wife**, we squabbled then about the name: for she was for adding *hippos* to the name, Xanthippus, or Charippus, or Callipides; but I was for giving him the name of his grandfather, Phidonides.

In the prologue of *Birds*, two friends, Peisetaerus and Euelpides are walking through a rocky spot. Each of them is holding a bird that is supposed to show them where Tereus, the hoopoe, is. Suddenly, they meet one of Tereus' servants (also a bird) and the three of them get scared. The birds carried by both friends fly away (Ar. *Av.* 86-91):

Ευ. οἴμοι κακοδαίμων, χὠ κολοιός μοΐχεται
ὑπὸ τοῦ δέους.
Πε. **ὦ δειλότατον σὺ θηρίον**,
δείσας ἀφῆκας τὸν κολοιόν.
Ευ. εἰπέ μοι,
σὺ δὲ τὴν κορώνην οὐκ ἀφῆκας καταπεσών;
Πε. μὰ Δί' οὐκ ἔγωγε.

21 Dover 1968: 93.
22 Dover 1968: 101.

Ευ. ποῦ γάρ ἐστ’;
Πε. ἀπέπτατο.
Ευ. οὐκ ἆρ’ ἀφῆκας; **ὦγάθ’, ὡς ἀνδρεῖος εἶ.**

[EUELPIDES] Oh! my god! it was sheer fear that made me lose my jay. [PEISETAERUS] **Ah! you big coward**! were you so frightened that you let go your jay? [EUELPIDES] And did you not lose your crow, when you fell sprawling on the ground? Tell me that. [PEISETAERUS] Not at all. [EUELPIDES] Where is it, then? [PEISETAERUS] It flew away. [EUELPIDES] And you did not let it go? **Oh! you brave fellow**![23]

Irony is easily identifiable in the attribution of the adjective ἀνδρεῖος to Peisetaerus, since he has been as cowardly (δειλός) as Peisetaerus had reproached Euelpides for being. Euelpides intention is to mock his friend.

Diminutives used in an ironic sense are also a common device in Aristophanes’ comedies. Strepsiades addresses Socrates in *Clouds* thus (Ar. *Nub*. 743-47):[24]

Σω. ἔχ’ ἀτρέμα· κἂν ἀπορῇς τι τῶν νοημάτων,
ἀφεὶς ἄπελθε, κᾆτα τῇ γνώμῃ πάλιν
κίνησον αὖθις αὐτὸ καὶ ζυγώθρισον.
Στ. **ὦ Σωκρατίδιον φίλτατον.**
Σω. τί, ὦ γέρον;
Στ. ἔχω τόκου γνώμην ἀποστερητικήν.

[SOCRATES] Keep quiet; and if you be puzzled in any one of your conceptions, leave it and go; and then set your mind in motion again, and lock it up. [STREPSIADES] **O dearest little Socrates!** [SOCRATES] What, old man? [STREPSIADES] I have got a device for cheating them of the interest.

The use of diminutives in appellatives is a sign of affection and trust between speaker and interlocutor. However, Strepsiades does not trust Socrates and does not use the diminutive to express affection. Instead,

23 Translations of *Birds* are taken from O’Neill 1938.
24 Cf. also Ar. *Nub*. 223.

he clearly intends to mock him through his use of irony.[25] The lexicon also favours the ironic interpretation, and the superlative φίλτατον is to be understood in the same sense. The philosopher is not dear to Strepsiades either, although he calls him 'dearest' (φίλτατον).

As we can see, the presence of several irony markers in the same passage is frequent and it is not easy to discern which of them triggers the irony. The same is true in the following example from *Acharnians*. Dicaeopolis, who has gone to borrow Telephus' beggar disguise from Euripides, speaks to the poet, who complains of being disturbed, in the following way (Ar. *Ach*. 457-79):

Ευ. ἄπελθέ νύν μοι.
Δι. μἀλλά μοι δὸς ἓν μόνον,
κοτυλίσκιον τὸ χεῖλος ἀποκεκρουμένον.
Ευ. φθείρου λαβὼν τόδ'· ἴσθ' ὀχληρὸς ὢν δόμοις.
Δι. οὔπω μὰ Δί' οἶσθ' οἵ' αὐτὸς ἐργάζει κακά.
ἀλλ', **ὦ γλυκύτατ' Εὐριπίδη**, τουτὶ μόνον
δός μοι, χυτρίδιον σπογγίῳ βεβυσμένον.
Ευ. ὦνθρωπ', ἀφαιρήσει με τὴν τραγῳδίαν·
ἄπελθε ταυτηνὶ λαβών.
Δι. ἀπέρχομαι.
καίτοι τί δράσω; δεῖ γὰρ ἑνός, οὗ μὴ τυχὼν
ἀπόλωλ'. ἄκουσον, **ὦ γλυκύτατ' Εὐριπίδη**·
τουτὶ λαβὼν ἄπειμι κοὐ πρόσειμ' ἔτι·
εἰς τὸ σπυρίδιον ἰσχνά μοι φυλλεῖα δός.
Ευ. ἀπολεῖς μ'. ἰδού σοι. φροῦδά μοι τὰ δράματα.
Δι. ἀλλ' οὐκέτ', ἀλλ' ἄπειμι. καὶ γάρ εἰμ' ἄγαν
ὀχληρός, οὐ δοκῶν με κοιράνους στυγεῖν.
οἴμοι κακοδαίμων, ὡς ἀπόλωλ'. ἐπελαθόμην
ἐν ᾧπέρ ἐστι πάντα μοι τὰ πράγματα.
Εὐριπίδιον, ὦ γλυκύτατον καὶ φίλτατον,
κάκιστ' ἀπολοίμην, εἴ τί σ' αἰτήσαιμ' ἔτι,
πλὴν ἓν μόνον, τουτὶ μόνον, τουτὶ μόνον·
σκάνδικά μοι δὸς μητρόθεν δεδεγμένος.

25 On the use of diminutives in relation to the specific pragmatic aims of the speakers, see Meluzzi 2017.

Ευ. ἀνὴρ ὑβρίζει· κλῆε πηκτὰ δωμάτων.

[EURIPIDES] Leave me in peace. [DICAEOPOLIS] Just one thing more, but one, a little tankard with a broken rim. [EURIPIDES] Here. Now be off. You trouble us; begone. [DICAEOPOLIS] You know not yet what ill you do yourself. **Sweet, dear Euripides**, but one thing more, give me a little pitcher, plugged with sponge. [EURIPIDES] Fellow, you're taking the whole tragedy. Here, take it and begone. [DICAEOPOLIS] I'm going now. And yet! There's one thing more, which if I get not I'm ruined. **Sweetest, best Euripides**. With this I'll go, and never come again. Give me some withered leaves to fill my basket. [EURIPIDES] You'll slay me! Here! My plays are disappearing. [DICAEOPOLIS] Enough! I go. Too troublesome by far am I, not witting that the chieftains hate me! Good Heavens! I'm ruined. I had clean forgotten. The thing whereon my whole success depends. **My own Euripides, my best and sweetest**, perdition seize me if I ask aught else save this one thing, this only, only this, give me some chervil, borrowing from your mother. [EURIPIDES] The man insults us. Shut the palace up.[26]

The parody is more than evident. Dicaeopolis mocks Euripides and addresses him ironically with the superlative of the adjective γλυκύς ('sweet'), which has nothing to do with the sour character depicted by the playwright. He repeats it up to three times and, on the final occasion, he also uses the diminutive Εὐριπίδιον with a clear ironic and comic intention. As in the case of Strepsiades and Socrates, Dicaeopolis has no confidence in Euripides, and diminutives are not used as an expression of affection either. The poet is not dear to Dicaeopolis either, even though he calls him 'my best' (φίλτατον) and 'sweetest' (γλυκύτατον). Both superlatives exaggerate the mockery and emphasize the contempt that Dicaeopolis really feels towards Euripides. The end of the passage is the finishing touch of the mockery, as the public knows that Aristophanes often makes jokes about Euripides' mother by calling her a greengrocer. Finally, Euripides himself clarifies the intention behind Dicaeopolis' words, as he claims that he is insulting him and his mother.

26 Translation taken from Rogers 1930.

As we can see from the examples, the presence of lexical-semantic markers (almost always adjectives with a positive connotation used with a negative intention) makes it easier to identify ironic utterances. In this respect, some of the most interesting terms in Aristophanes' comedies are the adjective σοφός and its derivatives.[27] Let us now focus on the *agon* between Aeschylus and Euripides in *Frogs*. As Dover points out[28] the contest is an ἀγὼν σοφίας (Ar. *Ran.* 882), a competition between two wise men (σοφοῖν ἀνδροῖν, Ar. *Ran.* 896) to decide who is wiser (ὁπότερος εἴη τὴν τέχνην σοφώτερος, Ar. *Ran.* 780). The winner is Aeschylus and in his valediction to Pluto, he lays claim to supremacy in σοφία by saying: 'But you hand over my throne to Sophocles to guard and preserve, if I ever come here again. For him I judge to be second in talent' (τοῦτον γὰρ ἐγὼ / σοφίᾳ κρίνω δεύτερον εἶναι, Ar. *Ran.* 1516-19). I agree with Dover that 'wise' (as well as 'clever' or 'sage') is an appropriate translation of σοφός, but that does not mean that it should always be understood literally. Σοφός can also be used ironically,[29] as in the following example (Ar. *Ran.* 1151-57):

Δι. λέγ' ἕτερον αὐτῷ· σὺ δ' ἐπιτήρει τὸ βλάβος.
Αι. "σωτὴρ γενοῦ μοι σύμμαχός τ' αἰτουμένῳ.
ἥκω γὰρ εἰς γῆν τήνδε καὶ κατέρχομαι."
Ευ. δὶς ταὐτὸν ἡμῖν εἶπεν **ὁ σοφὸς Αἰσχύλος.**
Δι. πῶς δίς;
Ευ. σκόπει τὸ ῥῆμ'· ἐγὼ δέ σοι φράσω.
"ἥκω γὰρ εἰς γῆν," φησί, "καὶ κατέρχομαι·"
"ἥκω" δὲ ταὐτόν ἐστι τῷ "κατέρχομαι".

[DIONYSUS] Recite him another one, and you watch for the mistake. [AESCHYLUS] "Be now, I pray, my ally and savior, for I've come back to this land and return". [EURIPIDES] The **sage Aeschylus** has told us the same thing twice. [DIONYSUS] How twice? [EURIPIDES] Look at

27 On this family of words, see Cavallero 2006.
28 See Dover 1993: 12.
29 See Slater 1954: 195.

> the expression, and I'll show you. "I've come back to this land", he says, "and return"; but "coming back to" is the same as "returning".[30]

Euripides does not intend to praise Aeschylus, but to criticize him by using a lexicon that implies a positive evaluation, as is the case with other adjectives such as χρηστός, καλός or δεξιός. In other words, he is insulting him in a very polite way. Shortly beforehand, Euripides had also mocked Aeschylus' skill by criticizing the obscurity of his prologues despite referring to him as a δεξιός poet (Ar. *Ran.* 1119-22):

> καὶ μὴν ἐπ' αὐτοὺς τοὺς προλόγους σου τρέψομαι,
> ὅπως τὸ πρῶτον τῆς τραγῳδίας μέρος
> πρώτιστον **αὐτοῦ** βασανιῶ **τοῦ δεξιοῦ**.
> ἀσαφὴς γὰρ ἦν ἐν τῇ φράσει τῶν πραγμάτων.
>
> Well then I'll turn me to your prologues now. Beginning first to test the first beginning of **this fine poet's plays**. Why he's obscure even in the enunciation of the facts.

In this case the invective does not occur within the family or amongst friends (real or pretended), but as part of a public confrontation staged by Aristophanes between the two poets in *Frogs*. The *agon* resembles a trial and there is much at stake. As in forensic speeches, the speaker's purpose is to convince those who are judging (in this case Dionysus) to vote in his favour. The verdict will largely depend on the contestant's skills in oratory, and it is very common for the speakers (in this case the poets) to attack their opponent's *face* and try to save their own *face*. It is therefore not unusual for the speaker to pretend to be polite when he or she really means to be impolite (*mock politeness*). Euripides' intention is thus to discredit his opponent (Aeschylus), to mock him without openly insulting him (which would be a threat to his own *face*), to undermine his

30 Translations of *Frogs* are borrowed from Henderson 2002.

ethos[31] and to ridicule him by presenting a comic caricature that causes the audience to laugh.

Another pattern of comic invective that can be identified in the speaker's use of irony is to attack the socio-economic status of others. Let us now place ourselves in *Wealth*. Chremylus talks to an old woman who has been abandoned by her now-wealthy young lover and laments the terrible injustices she has suffered (Ar. *Plut.* 974-1005):

Χρ. οὔκουν ἐρεῖς ἀνύσασα τὸν κνισμὸν τίνα;
Γρ. ἄκουέ νυν. ἦν μοί τι μειράκιον φίλον,
πενιχρὸν μέν, ἄλλως δ' εὐπρόσωπον καὶ καλὸν
καὶ **χρηστόν**· εἰ γάρ του δεηθείην ἐγώ,
ἅπαντ' ἐποίει κοσμίως μοι καὶ καλῶς·
ἐγὼ δ' ἐκείνῳ πάντ' ἂν ἀνθυπηρέτουν.
Χρ. τί δ' ἦν ὅ τι σου μάλιστ' ἐδεῖθ' ἑκάστοτε;
Γρ. **οὐ πολλά**· καὶ γὰρ ἐκνομίως **μ' ᾐσχύνετο**.
ἀλλ' ἀργυρίου δραχμὰς ἂν ᾔτησ' εἴκοσιν
εἰς ἱμάτιον, ὀκτὼ δ' ἂν εἰς ὑποδήματα·
καὶ ταῖς ἀδελφαῖς ἀγοράσαι χιτώνιον
ἐκέλευσεν ἂν τῇ μητρί θ' ἱματίδιον·
πυρῶν τ' ἂν ἐδεήθη μεδίμνων τεττάρων.
Χρ. **οὐ πολλὰ** τοίνυν, μὰ τὸν Ἀπόλλω, ταῦτά γε
εἴρηκας, ἀλλὰ **δῆλον** ὅτι **σ' ᾐσχύνετο**.
Γρ. καὶ ταῦτα τοίνυν οὐχ ἕνεκεν μισητίας
αἰτεῖν μ' ἔφασκεν, ἀλλὰ φιλίας οὕνεκα,
ἵνα τοὐμὸν ἱμάτιον φορῶν μεμνῇτό μου.
Χρ. λέγεις ἐρῶντ' ἄνθρωπον ἐκνομιώτατα.
Γρ. ἀλλ' οὐχὶ νῦν ὁ βδελυρὸς ἔτι τὸν νοῦν ἔχει
τὸν αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ πολὺ μεθέστηκεν πάνυ.
ἐμοῦ γὰρ αὐτῷ τὸν πλακοῦντα τουτονὶ
καὶ τἄλλα τἀπὶ τοῦ πίνακος τραγήματα
ἐπόντα πεμψάσης ὑπειπούσης θ' ὅτι

31 This is a very common technique in oratory. An example like the one given here can be seen in Dem. 19.126, where Demosthenes mocks Aeschines by referring to him as ὁ σοφὸς καὶ δεινὸς οὗτος καὶ εὔφωνος. On negative *ethopoiia* in Attic oratory, see Serafim 2020: 92-111.

εἰς ἑσπέραν ἥξοιμι—
Χρ. τί σ' ἔδρασ'; εἰπέ μοι.
Γρ. ἄμητα προσαπέπεμψεν ἡμῖν τουτονί,
ἐφ' ᾧ τ' ἐκεῖσε μηδέποτέ μ' ἐλθεῖν ἔτι,
καὶ πρὸς ἐπὶ τούτοις εἶπεν ἀποπέμπων ὅτι
"πάλαι ποτ' ἦσαν ἄλκιμοι Μιλήσιοι."
Χρ. **δῆλον** ὅτι τοὺς τρόπους τις **οὐ μοχθηρὸς** ἦν.
ἔπειτα πλουτῶν οὐκέθ' ἥδεται φακῇ·

[CHREMYLUS] Just what sort of banging are you talking about? [OLD WOMAN] Listen to this. I had a boyfriend, penniless but very good looking, fine, and **honest** Whenever I asked him a favor, he accommodated me in fine fashion, and I did him all the same services. [CHREMYLUS] What did he typically want from you? [OLD WOMAN] **Not much; he was extraordinarily modest.** He'd request twenty silver drachmas for a coat, and eight for a pair of shoes; and he'd want me to buy little dresses for his sisters, and a little wrap for his mother; and he'd need four bushels of grain. [CHREMYLUS] **That's certainly not very much. I agree; he was clearly being modest.** [OLD WOMAN] And he'd stress that his reason for asking was not greed but affection: when he was wearing that coat he would think of me. [CHREMYLUS] There was a fellow extraordinarily in love. [OLD WOMAN] But nowadays that shunk hasn't got the same attitude; he's completely changed his tune. You see, when I sent him this pie and the other munchies on the tray here, with a message that I'd visit him this evening— [CHREMYLUS] What did he do, I'd like to know? [OLD WOMAN] He sent it all back, along with this cheesecake, on condition that I never visit him again, and on top of that he added "One upon a time the Milesians were formidable". [CHREMYLUS] He **obviously** wasn't a person of shiftless character. Now that he's rich, he's lost his taste for lentil soup; before that poverty made him eat anything.[32]

The old woman describes her lover as a handsome (εὐπρόσωπον), good (καλόν) and honest (χρηστόν) young man. However, although she claims that the young man did not ask for much (οὐ πολλά) and that he was a

32 Translation taken from Henderson 2002.

modest man who respected her (μ' ᾐσχύνετο), it seems feasible that he was taking advantage of her by asking for too much money (almost double the price) to buy a cloak and a pair of shoes.[33] To mock the woman, Chremylus echoes her words – which in Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory is explained as an echo utterance – by assuring her that he did not, in fact, ask much of her (οὐ πολλὰ τοίνυν) and that he respected her (δῆλον ὅτι **σ' ᾐσχύνετο**). Irony is used here to ridicule the utterance echoed and, consequently, belittle the speaker.[34]

The use of the evidential δῆλον on two occasions should also be noted. Δῆλον is an expression of epistemic modality with which the speaker expresses absolute certainty. However, Chremylus' intention here is not to state that he is certain that the young man is not a miserable man (οὐ μοχθηρός), but quite the opposite. He intends, on the one hand, to belittle him and, on the other, to laugh at the woman.

Attacks on the social position of the interlocutor are often related to his or her profession, as Peisetaerus exemplifies here (Ar. *Av.* 1420-26):

Συ. πτερῶν πτερῶν δεῖ· μὴ πύθῃ τὸ δεύτερον.
Πε. μῶν εὐθὺ Πελλήνης πέτεσθαι διανοεῖ;
Συ. μὰ Δί', ἀλλὰ κλητήρ εἰμι νησιωτικὸς
καὶ συκοφάντης—
Πε. **ὦ μακάριε τῆς τέχνης.**
Συ. καὶ πραγματοδίφης. εἶτα δέομαι πτερὰ λαβὼν
κύκλῳ περισοβεῖν τὰς πόλεις καλούμενος.

[SYCOPHANT] Ask no questions. I want wings and wings I must have. [PEISETAERUS] Do you want to fly straight to Pellene? [SYCOPHANT] I? Why, I am an accuser of the islands, a sycophant... [PEISETAERUS] **A fine trade, truly! (ὦ μακάριε τῆς τέχνης)** [SYCOPHANT] ... a

33 See Sommerstein 2001: 200: "In the early 380s a cheap but respectable cloak might cost about 11 drachmas and a pair of shoes about 3½ drachmas. If the Young Man was taking as much advantage as he dared of his mistress's besotted state, it is not implausible that he might ask for roughly double these sums so as to be able to buy top-quality goods."

34 See Sperber & Wilson 1981.

> hatcher of lawsuits. Hence I have great need of wings to prowl round the cities and drag them before justice.

Peisetaerus obviously does not think that being a sycophant is a good occupation, even if he refers to it in positive terms. He is mocking his interlocutor, and irony is easily recognizable to the spectators, for they know from the prologue that the comic hero, fed up with denunciations, left Athens to build a city free of those who made life in Athens very difficult.

The attack on menial jobs is another pattern of comic invective in which irony plays an interesting role. In *Knights*, Demosthenes derides the Sausage-seller thus (Ar. *Eq*. 240-41):

> οὗτος, τί φεύγεις; οὐ μενεῖς; **ὦ γεννάδα**
> **ἀλλαντοπῶλα**, μὴ προδῷς τὰ πράγματα.
>
> What! are you for running away? Come, come, stand firm, **bold Sausage-seller**, do not betray us.

The irony marker this time is an oxymoron.[35] No matter how dignified his job may be, it is not characterized by the nobility and generosity that the adjective γεννάδας denotes ('noble', 'generous'). In fact, Aristophanes attributes this same adjective in *Assemblywomen*[36] to Myronides, a highly successful general during the Persian invasions and into the mid-450s.

Finally, I present a passage in which irony is used to discredit a statesman. In *Assemblywoman* Praxagora is asked what would happen if Cephalus (a distinguished orator who ran a pottery business) confronted her in an abusive manner. She is clear about this. If the man insults her, she will answer him with another insult (Ar. *Ec*. 249-54):

35 Similar examples can be found in other corpora. Cf., e.g., Hom. *Od*. 17.375, where Antinous refers to the swineherd Eumaeus as a 'notorious swineherd' (ὦ ἀρίγνωτε συβῶτα) or Dem. 18.129, where Demosthenes ridicules Aeschines calling him a "consummate bit-part actor" (τριταγωνιστὴν ἄκρον).

36 Cf. Ar. *Eccl*. 303-4: ἀλλ' οὐχί, Μυρωνίδης / ὅτ' ἦρχεν ὁ γεννάδας. Henderson 2002: 281 translates "Never in the good old days, with noble Myronides in charge."

Πρ. φήσω παραφρονεῖν αὐτόν.
Γυ^{α}. ἀλλὰ τοῦτό γε ἴσασι πάντες.
Πρ. ἀλλὰ καὶ μελαγχολᾶν.
Γυ^{α}. α. καὶ τοῦτ' ἴσασιν.
Πρ. ἀλλὰ καὶ τὰ τρύβλια
κακῶς κεραμεύειν, τὴν δὲ πόλιν εὖ καὶ καλῶς.

[PRAXAGORA] I'll say he's crazy. [FIRST WOMAN] But everyone knows that. [PRAXAGORA] Well, I'll say he's a dangerous psycopath. [FIRST WOMAN] Everyone knows that too. [PRAXAGORA] **Then I'll say that a man who makes such crummy crockery will do a terrific job making the city go to pot.**[37]

Some concluding remarks

The previous pages have offered a first approach to the use of irony as a mechanism of invective in Aristophanes' comedy. To this end, some markers of verbal irony have been examined in order to explain how they work and to identify some patterns of comic invective.

As I have demonstrated, it is the lexicon – usually adjectives with positive connotations used with a negative intention (to criticize, to discredit, to insult, to ridicule, etc.) – that allows us to recognize ironic utterances most easily. However, there are other irony markers in contexts of invective, such as oxymoron, evidentials, diminutives, superlatives, repetitions and echo utterances. Many of these contribute towards exaggerating the mockery or verbal attack and all are resources also used by the poet to provoke laughter. The combination of several of these markers of irony is very frequent and it is not always possible to discern which triggers the irony. In this sense, both the linguistic and extralinguistic context is fundamental, as it provides the necessary clues for the utterances to be interpreted as ironic.

From the examples examined we can see that in Aristophanes' comedies attacks involving irony can take place both in the public sphere (an

37 Translation taken from Henderson 2002.

invective more oriented to attack the opponent and undermine his *ethos*) and in the private sphere (a more emotional type of invective). In all these cases, the ironist intends to show his superiority over his or her interlocutor, and mock him or her and insult, discredit, ridicule or criticize his or her character or behaviour.

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BOUNDARIES AND LIMITATIONS: THE FEATURES OF INVECTIVE IN ATTIC FORENSIC PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SPEECHES*

By Andreas Serafim

Summary: This paper examines two forms of constraint that affect each other in the corpus of surviving speeches of Attic forensic oratory: the legal boundaries between speeches, i.e. those delivered in public and private cases, and what limitations these impose on an orator's ability to use features and forms of invective.

Classical scholarship on orators has so far suggested that the distinction between public and private speech had implications for the use of arguments and rhetorical techniques for persuasion – what I call 'rhetorics.' Although there is no consensus on how and to what extent this distinction truly differentiates 'rhetorics', important works argue persuasively in favour of some kind of differentiation. Students of oratory, for example, will benefit from the work of Rubinstein, who points out that the way in which the cognitive, and especially the emotional, state of the audience is established or changed depends, among other things, on the rhetorical character of speeches.[1] I myself argue that the legal character leads to a different frequency – but not different techniques – in the use

* I would like to thank Professor Costis Apostolakis for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this article, which is dedicated to the memory of my teacher at the University of Texas at Austin, Paul Woodruff (28 August 1943-23 September 2023). Paul was an inspiring philosopher, a devoted teacher, a prolific researcher, and a mentor who kept the light of education shining brightly in the hearts and minds of future generations.

1 Rubinstein 2004: 187-203; 2005: 129-45.

Andreas Serafim: 'Boundaries and Limitations: The Features of Invective in Attic Forensic Public and Private Speeches' C&M Supplementum 3 (2025) 101-141.

of patterns of comic invective,[2] religious discourse,[3] and imperatives and subjunctives, which, as noted in a recent article, are used in the same way in two types of generic dichotomy, i.e. public/private speech and defence/prosecution, albeit with different frequency.[4] In *Religious Discourse in Attic Oratory and Politics*, I put forward the argument that "orators use [religious discourse] in accordance with the rules and norms of the institutional context in which they give a speech because it is thought that the Athenians voted differently, according to the speaking context and institutional setting in which they were called to make decisions."[5]

The scholarly studies that emphasize the different techniques that are the result of different rhetorical matrices of the genre draw on the principles of New Institutionalism theory: different institutions have different 'logics of appropriateness' that determine the way discourses interact and influence society. Socio-cultural structures called 'institutions' create the framework within which the actions of individuals and groups take place, in accordance with the label of extroverted behaviour (i.e. both speech and action) that this framework entails. An institution, to put it another way, is

> a relatively enduring collection of rules and organized practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources that are relatively invariant in the face of turnover of individuals and relatively resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals and changing external circumstances. There are structures of meaning, embedded in identities and belongings: common purposes and accounts that give direction and meaning to behaviour, and explain, justify, and legitimate behavioural codes. Institutionalism emphasizes the endogenous nature and social construction of political institutions. Institutions are not simply equilibrium contracts among self-

2 Serafim 2021c: 65-79.

3 Serafim 2020: 23-42; 2021: 65-79; 2021a, chapters 1 and 2. On the different uses of religious discourse, depending on the character of the speeches, see also Martin 2009: 135-36, 211.

4 Serafim 2021b: 388-417 on the use of imperatives; and Serafim 2022: 299-317 on subjunctives in public and private court speeches.

5 Serafim 2021a: 64.

> seeking, calculating individual actors or arenas for contending social forces. They are collections of structures, rules, and standard operating procedures.[6]

To act appropriately is to act according to the institutionalized practices that result from a collective and mutual understanding of what is true, reasonable, natural, right, and good in a particular context, i.e. in a designated venue where any kind of behaviour and action takes place; an occasion that may have a temporal, procedural (e.g. a ceremony or a speech delivered in court), and cultural-ethical character. Rules and practices define what is normal, what is expected, what can be relied upon, and what is appropriate in a particular context or community.[7]

But we need not overdo it with the observance of boundaries in ancient literature, as I think E.M. Harris does when he fervently argues that "the Athenians took the boundaries between genres very seriously and expected them to be respected."[8] The sharp difference in style between poetry and prose/rhetoric described by Aristotle and Quintilian may not have been so sharp, definitive, and crystal clear in practice, as the ancient sources mention that an orator is always successful when he uses acting techniques to captivate and win over the target audience. This seems to indicate that acting skills and talents were not limited to the theatre.[9] I argue that the theorists of antiquity do not always accurately describe practice. A notable example of this failure can be found in the *Rhetoric to Alexander* 1441b24-29, where orators are admonished to use humour and laughter-inducing techniques only in public speeches. However, the surviving scripts of the public speeches show how widespread the use of these techniques was in the courtroom. As I argue elsewhere, "it is true that public speeches are about major issues that concern the *polis*, and this creates the necessary conditions for using prayers in them,

6 March & Olsen 2005: 4.

7 Further on New Institutionalism: Merton 1938: 672-82; Simon 1965; Pitkin 1967; Meyer & Rowan 1977; Kratochwil 1984: 695-708; Apter 1991: 463-81; Weaver & Rockman 1993; March & Olsen 1995; Egeberg 2003.

8 Harris 2017: 238-39.

9 Serafim 2017: 81-82 with references to important scholarly discussions on this topic.

with the aim of functioning as a means of engaging the divine in the enterprise of protecting the *polis*. But private cases are equally connected with public interests – thus, acquiring a heightened level of significance for the civic/political community. We should also bear in mind that public speeches (as Dem. 18 is) are also about personal matters that are inextricably woven with civic/collective affairs. As C. Ando and J. Rüpke point out in their important volume *Public and Private in Ancient Mediterranean Law and Religion*, the level of interconnectivity between public and private is heightened in antiquity."[10]

Before turning to the topic of this article, namely the way and the extent to which the distinction between public and private speech affects the means of invective available to an orator in court, it is essential to define the notion of *invective*, i.e. what it is and what characteristics scholars believe it had in the extensive corpus of ancient Greek and Roman literature. Invective is a cultural phenomenon. Invective is more than a rhetorical practice intended to serve the aims of speakers in court or in the assembly. It is an adversarial mode of behaviour with a significant cultural cache when it comes to contrasting values, norms, ideas, even civic/ethnic communities and groups of people. In my view, there is a subtle difference between *psogos* and (what is called in the international bibliography) invective, at least for the period this paper examines, i.e. Classical Athens of the fourth century BCE: the former can have an 'innocent', pedagogical, and instructive character, as when Attic orators criticize the *demos* on how to think of and act for the best interests of the *polis*.[11] A similar semantic distinction is found in Thucydides between αἰτία and κατηγορία ('accusation'), both of which are roughly translated as 'accusation' or 'blame'. The first refers to friends who err and aims to admonish them; the second refers to enemies who do wrong. That αἰτία has the tone of benign criticism instead of an authoritative or abrasive accusation against a recipient of speech is clear from Thucydides 1.69.6, where the Corinthians want to constructively criticize the

10 Serafim 2022: 98-99. Cf. Ando & Rüpke 2015; Harris 2015: 419-54 – his contribution to the volume by Ando & Rüpke.

11 Scholarship supports the idea that *psogos* corresponds to invective, or that it is actually a term used to denote and refer to invective. See e.g. Barker 2009: 1-19; Quiroga Puertas 2022: 170-91.

Spartans, saying that "and none of you should assume that these words are spoken out of hostility (ἔχθρᾳ) rather than rebuke (αἰτίᾳ). For on the one hand αἰτία is for friends who make mistakes, while on the other hand κατηγορία is for enemies who commit injustice."

A pointed distinction between *psogos* and invective, or admonition and insult, as they are referred to in the text, is offered in the treatise *On Friendship* 277 by Themistius, "not only in speaker's intent, but also in what he actually says. Stern, truthful, and frank words admonish rather than abuse, correct rather than insult. In giving admonition, you must be careful not to apply to the patient biting words that have not been tempered. You must mix into those words something soothing and mild." *Psogos* may indeed contain references to vices and accusations, as Aphthonius argues in *Progymnasmata* 10.27, but its aim is fundamentally different from that of invective. Demosthenes sounds biting when he rebukes the *demos* for his inaction against Philip II of Macedon (e.g. in 3.9, 14, and even more forcefully in 16),[12] but let us not quibble about his incentives here: let us accept that he is doing this, as he claims, to protect Athens' leading role in Greek affairs. Let us accept his claims that he is speaking freely, even if the *parrhesia* mentioned in 3.3 and 8.32 is more

12 Dem. 3.9: "But surely if anyone of you would postpone the necessary action till then, he must prefer to see danger at his very doors, rather than hear of it far away, and to beg help for himself, when he might be lending help to others now; for I suppose we all realize that that is what it will come to, if we throw away our present chances." §14: "At the same time, Athenians, you must not forget this, that a mere decree is worthless without a willingness on your part to put your resolutions into practice. If decrees could automatically compel you to do your duty or could accomplish the objects for which they were proposed, you would not have passed such an array of them with little or no result, and Philip would not have had such a long career of insolent triumph. Long ago, if decrees counted for anything, he would have suffered for his sins." §16: "Why, what better time or occasion could you find than the present, men of Athens? When will you do your duty, if not now? Has not your enemy already captured all our strongholds, and if he becomes master of Chalcidice, shall we not be overwhelmed with dishonor? Are not those states actually at war which we so readily engaged in that event to protect? Is not Philip our enemy? And in possession of our property? And a barbarian? Is any description too bad for him?" Unless otherwise indicated, the translations of ancient passages are taken from the Loeb Classical Library.

than that.[13] Free speech is not necessarily synonymous with outspoken speech;[14] it is tailored to the environment of fierce antagonism between (legal and socio-political) opponents in the Athenian public sphere and may also include profanity, bitter personal attacks, and the dissemination of lies or half-truths.

Demosthenes repeatedly emphasizes frankness as one of the characteristics that define *parrhesia*, as in 9.4 (*Third Philippic*), where he implies that he will formulate words without flattery.[15] Frankness is a fundamental quality of *parrhesia* when the relationship between the speaker and the audience is one centred on power: Demosthenes' conversation with the *demos*, who had the power to end his political career in disgrace, strip him of his political rights, or send him into exile if he was insulted, is a good example of such a relationship, as is the conversation between a servant and his master. Socrates speaking to the judges in the courtroom (as in the Platonic *Apology*) and Tiresias revealing to Oedipus (as in the Sophoclean *Oedipus Tyrannus* 341-708) that he is the cause of the destruction of the *polis* are good examples of the first and second kinds of power

13 Dem. 3.3: "I must ask you to bear with me if I speak openly (μετὰ παρρησίας ποιῶμαι τοὺς λόγους), considering only whether I am speaking the truth, and speaking with the object that things may go better in the future; for you see how the popularity-hunting of some of our orators has led us into this desperate predicament." 8.32: "But as to the reason for this – and in Heaven's name, when I am pleading for your best interests, allow me to speak freely (καί μοι πρὸς θεῶν, ὅταν εἵνεκα τοῦ βελτίστου λέγω, ἔστω παρρησία) – some of our politicians have been training you to be threatening and intractable in the meetings of the assembly, but in preparing for war, careless and contemptible."

14 There is also a matter about how we translate ancient texts: we should not invariably understand and translate *parrhesia* as "frank speech." Translation should inevitably be tailored to the expectations of the immediate context the term *parrhesia* is placed into. For Riu, for example, *parrhesia* in Isocrates' *To Demonicus* 34 means 'to speak openly', whereas in *Busiris* 1 it means 'to speak openly and frankly'. Riu 2022, online: https://brewminate.com/parrhesia-comedy-and-freedom-of-speech-in-ancient-greece/ (last access: June 2023).

15 Dem. 9.4: "Hence the result is that in the assembly your self-complacency is flattered by hearing none but pleasant speeches, but your policy and your practice are already involving you in the gravest peril. Therefore, if such is your temper now, I have nothing to say; but if, apart from flattery, you are willing to hear something to your advantage, I am ready to speak" (εἰ δ' ἃ συμφέρει χωρὶς κολακείας ἐθελήσετ' ἀκούειν, ἕτοιμος λέγειν).

relationships. But sincerity and frankness in *parrhesia* are not inevitable in power relations either. Finally, the quarrel between Aesop, the slave, and his master Xanthus, the philosopher, in which the former reviles and ridicules the latter, is an example of the reversal of the known and expected imbalance of power between higher and lower social and economic classes. As A. J. Quiroga Puertas also notes, "late antique cultural elites needed to find a balance between the outspokenness that their status and ethos entitled them to and the potential retaliations of the emperors or governing figures to whom the invectives were addressed."[16] Frankness is not Aesop's most remarkable quality and ability; mischief is, which means, among other things, that he twists the truth about what others have said and done in order to ridicule Xanthus. I will return to the *parrhesia* below.

So while *psogos* can be a harsh and biting criticism, it can be noble, even educational, depending on the target audience (e.g. if it is made up of the speaker's peers in court or in the Assembly and aims to persuade them), invective is always aggressive, a violent series of attacks against individuals or groups of rivals aimed at destroying the targets by undermining, belittling, stigmatizing, and devastating the perception that others have of them. What Aphthonius defines as *psogos* in *Progymnasmata* 10.27 is, in my opinion, the most accurate definition of invective: "a discourse that expounds bad attributes. It differs from the common topic in that the topic invites punishment, while invective contains pure disparagement alone." It is not entirely clear to me why this distinction is made between punishment and disparagement; at the Athenian court the latter almost always aims to provoke the former. But in any case, the awareness of the effort to turn bitingly against a person in order to enable 'identity murder' succinctly describes the inherent nature of invective. If we pin down its definitions that have been proposed not only in classical scholarship, but also in interdisciplinary theory, we find that one characteristic recurs: violence. Invective is inherently violent, polemical, and immeasurably aggressive.

16 Quiroga Puertas 2022: 171.

For Kennedy, "invective is a statement expressive of inherent evils."[17] Dussol understands invective as a means of demolishing the image of individuals, institutions, and social groups through an act of verbal violence.[18] Schutz eloquently argues that "invective, ridiculing or insulting someone, becomes the substitute for violence. Political adversaries can express their anger, contempt, sense of difference without disrupting the fragile peace of political societies."[19] Arena defines invective as "a literary genre whose goal is to denigrate publicly a known individual against the background of ethical societal preconceptions, to the end of isolating him or her from the community."[20] The last brief definition and explanation of the concept of invective, which relies heavily on Koster's definition, is, in my opinion, flawed in one respect: by ascribing to invective the status of a genre and thus unnecessarily limiting its meaning, application, and function in the literatures of the whole world and in different times and cultural environments (e.g. ancient and contemporary literature; ancient Greek, Roman, Christian, European, Chinese). Rather, invective is a technique that can be used in various genres to denigrate individuals or groups, undermine their credibility, and cognitively (i.e. through thoughts and emotions) turn the audience against the target.[21]

The overarching nature of invective – its wide-ranging features, its integration into a variety of texts, and the multiplicity of purposes it serves – is underlined by the research findings of an ambitious, large-scale, transcultural, and intertextual project funded by the National Science Centre of Poland (grant number 2021/41/B/HS2/00755) and conducted at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń. The project builds on and utilizes the findings of several multidisciplinary theories. It redefines invective as a cultural phenomenon that draws its meaning from the general cultural context of a given epoch (i.e. moral, legal, aesthetic, socio-economic, political, religious, and others) and examines it across a

17 Kennedy 2003: 10.

18 Dussol 2006: 164. In a similar vein, Powell 2007: 1-2; Novokhatko 2009: 12.

19 Schutz 1977: 67. On invective as a means of interpersonal violence, see also Riess 2012.

20 Arena 2007: 149.

21 There are still debates about whether invective should be considered a genre or a form of discourse, e.g. Powell 2007: 1-23.

broad spectrum – broader than in any other known project on the same topic – from extant verse and prose texts, fragments, and scholia from Homer to early Christian literature up to the fifth century AD. The project understands invective to be any form of argumentation aimed at denigrating the target and destroying identity, resulting in 'triangulation', a term that refers to how invective maintains communication between the speaker, their opponent(s) and the audience. For invective to work, a contract must be made between two parties: one who accepts the values and norms of the community the speaker is advocating in collaboration with the audience, and the other who flouts or violates them. The accusation that someone is impious capitalizes on the general hostility towards that person and the real fears people have of impiety, with the aim of turning judges and other audience members negatively against the speaker's opponents who are portrayed as impious.[22]

Several scholars have attempted to define the basic characteristics of invective. To my knowledge, Süss was the first to compile a list of these features: "servile heritage; barbarian (non-Roman) background; having a non-elite occupation; thievery; non-standard sexual behaviour; estrangement from family and community; melancholy disposition; unusual appearance, clothing, or demeanour; cowardice; bankruptcy."[23] For Craig, (Ciceronian) invective comprises the following features: embarrassing family origin; being unworthy of one's family; physical appearance; eccentricity of dress; gluttony and drunkenness, possibly leading to acts of *crudelitas* and *libido*; hypocrisy for appearing virtuous; avarice, possibly linked with prodigality; taking bribes; pretentiousness; sexual misconduct; hostility to family; cowardice in war; squandering of one's patrimony/financial embarrassment; aspiring to regnum or tyranny; cruelty to citizens and allies; plunder of private and public property; oratorical ineptitude.[24] More recently, Papaioannou & Serafim have re-examined how (Old) comedy is used in ancient Greek and Roman oratory to support attacks, focusing on particular patterns of *onomasti komoidein*,

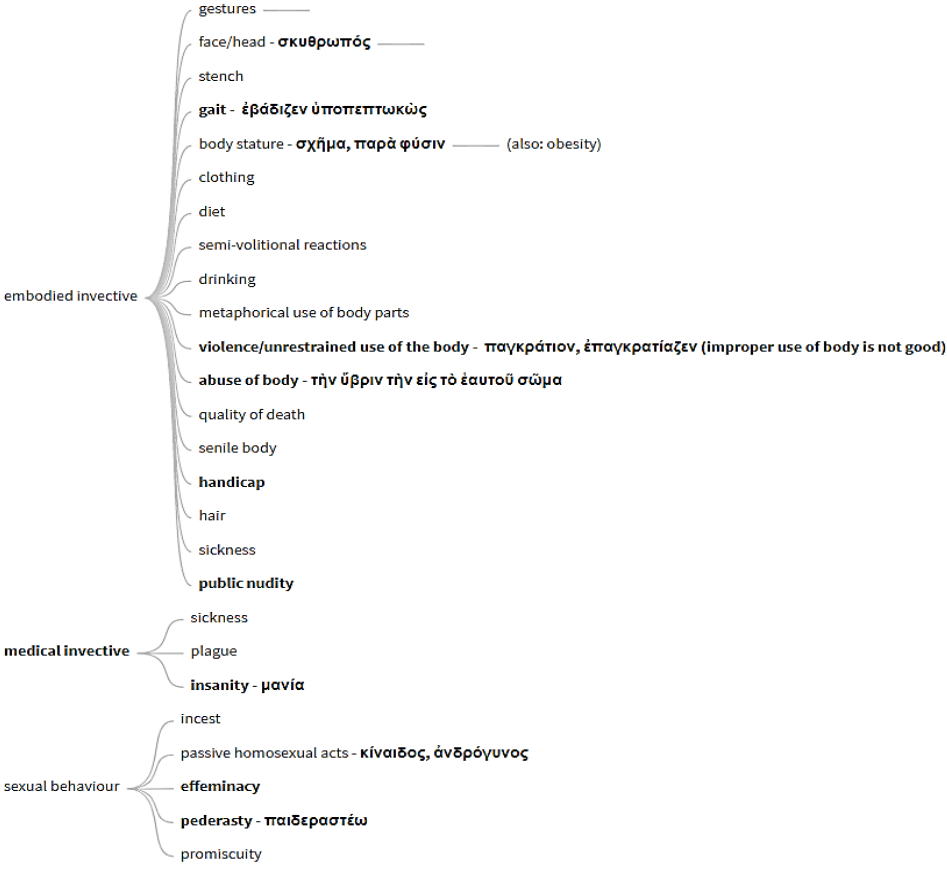
22 On impiety and the (legal, moral, and religious) reaction of the community: Serafim 2021.

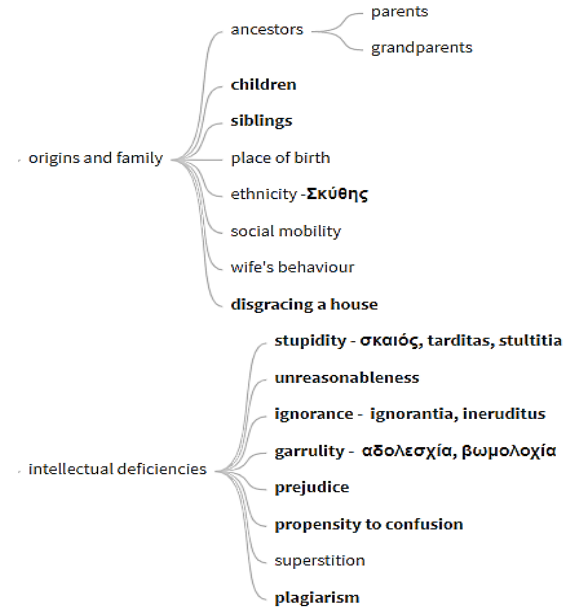
23 Süss 1920: 247-54. Also, Opelt 1965: 129; Corbeill 2002: 201.

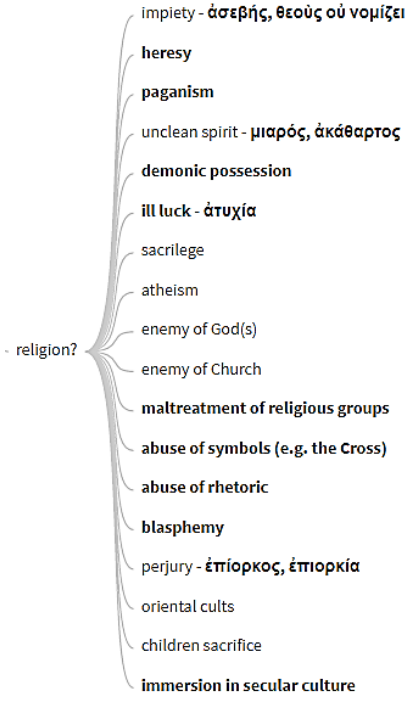
24 Craig 2004: 190-91.

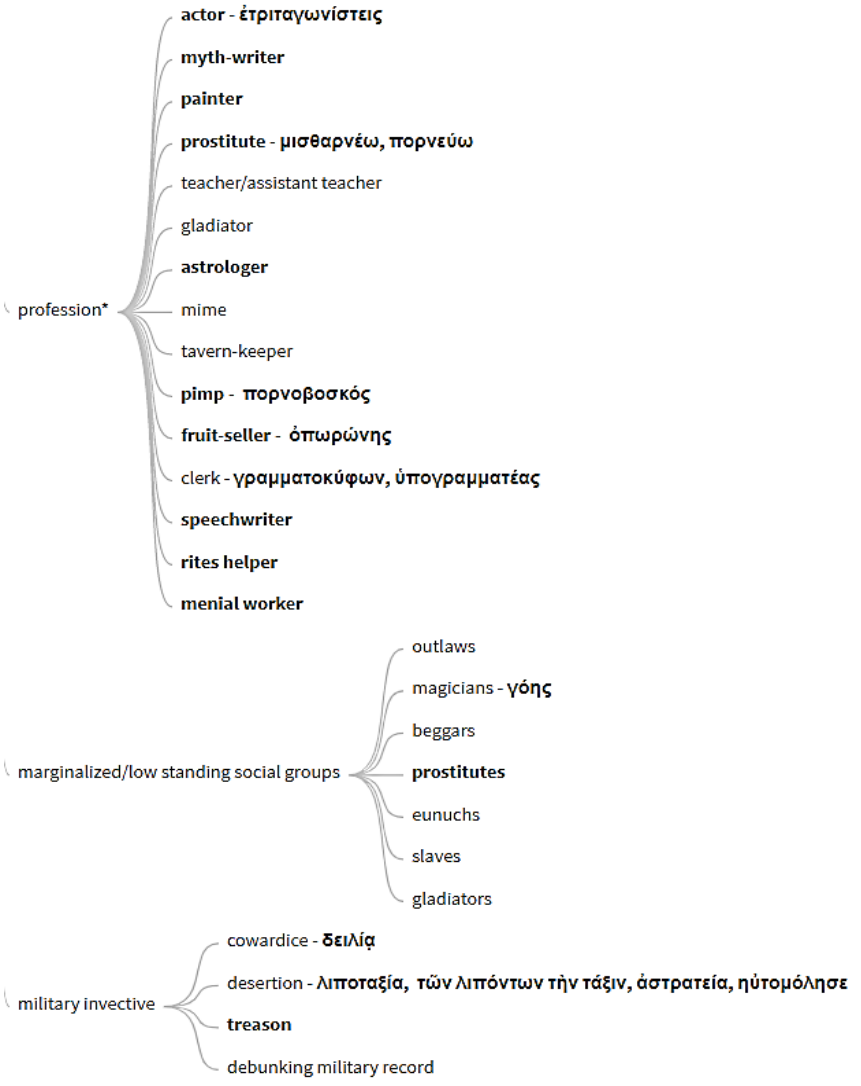
especially incongruity, language and imagery related to comedy, and stock comic characters.

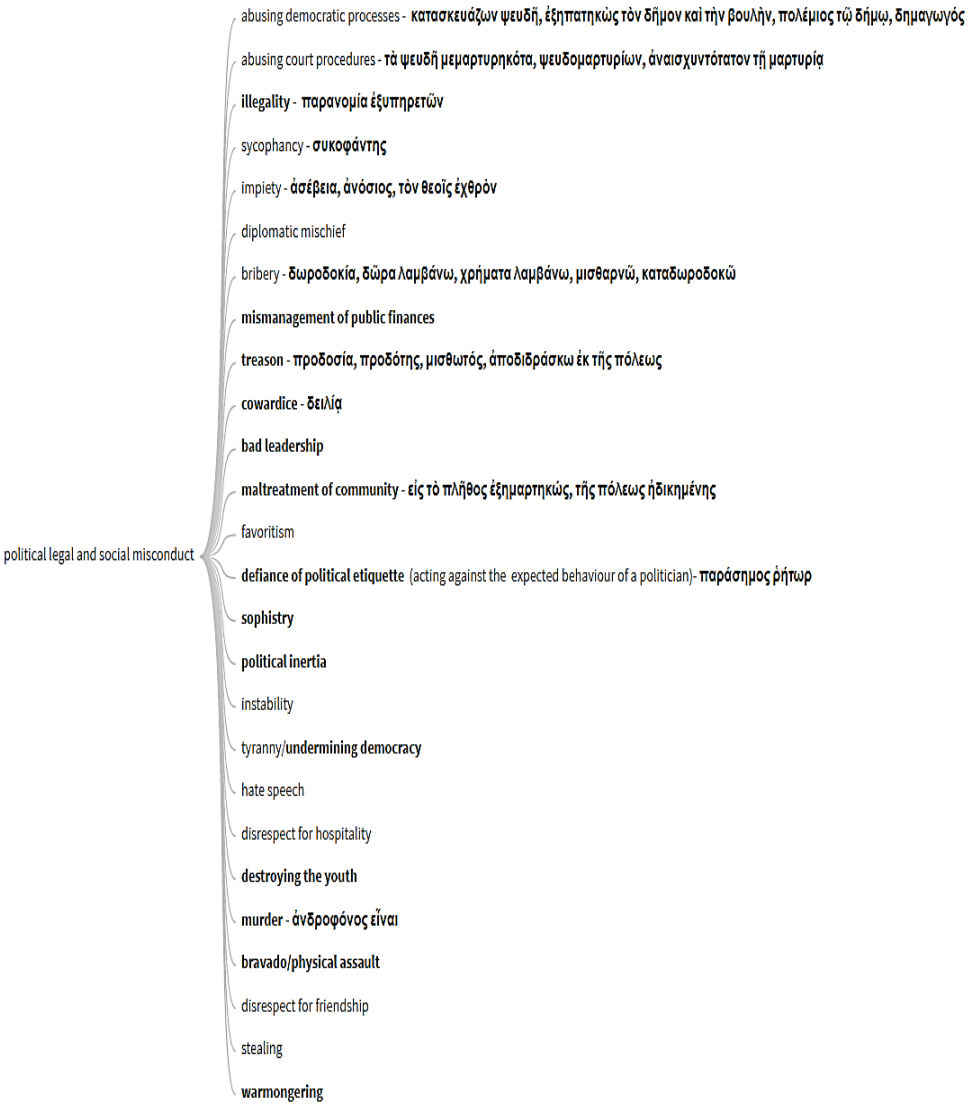
The Toruń project presents a more systematic and comprehensive list of features that fall into two overarching categories: content-based and form-based invective. The first category consists of and refers to cognitive/emotional themes and topics of invective, specifically sixteen subcategories that lead to numerous other patterns; the sixteen subcategories are, namely: embodied invective, medical invective, sexual behaviour, moral deficiencies, intellectual deficiencies, origins and family, religion, profession, marginalized/low standing social groups, military invective, political, legal and social misconduct, public perception of a person, economic invective, oratorical ineptitude, historical and mythological invective, and nature-based invective.




origins and family
ancestors
parents
grandparents
children
siblings
place of birth
ethnicity -Σκύθης
social mobility
wife's behaviour
disgracing a house
intellectual deficiencies
stupidity - σκαιός, tarditas, stultitia
unreasonableness
ignorance - ignorantia, ineruditus
garrulity - αδολεσχία, βωμολοχία
prejudice
propensity to confusion
superstition
plagiarism


religion?
impiety - ἀσεβής, θεοὺς οὐ νομίζει
heresy
paganism
unclean spirit - μιαρός, ἀκάθαρτος
demonic possession
ill luck - ἀτυχία
sacrilege
atheism
enemy of God(s)
enemy of Church
maltreatment of religious groups
abuse of symbols (e.g. the Cross)
abuse of rhetoric
blasphemy
perjury - ἐπίορκος, ἐπιορκία
oriental cults
children sacrifice
immersion in secular culture


profession*
actor - ἐτριταγωνίστεις
myth-writer
painter
prostitute - μισθαρνέω, πορνεύω
teacher/assistant teacher
gladiator
astrologer
mime
tavern-keeper
pimp - πορνοβοσκός
fruit-seller - ὀπωρώνης
clerk - γραμματοκύφων, ὑπογραμματέας
speechwriter
rites helper
menial worker
marginalized/low standing social groups
outlaws
magicians - γόης
beggars
prostitutes
eunuchs
slaves
gladiators
military invective
cowardice - δειλία
desertion - Λιποταξία, τῶν λιπόντων τὴν τάξιν, ἀστρατεία, ἠὐτομόλησε
treason
debunking military record


political legal and social misconduct
abusing democratic processes - **κατασκευάζων ψευδῆ, ἐξηπατηκὼς τὸν δῆμον καὶ τὴν βουλὴν, πολέμιος τῷ δήμῳ, δημαγωγός**
abusing court procedures - **τὰ ψευδῆ μεμαρτυρηκότα, ψευδομαρτυρίων, ἀναισχυντότατον τῇ μαρτυρίᾳ**
illegality - παρανομία ἐξυπηρετῶν
sycophancy - **συκοφάντης**
impiety - **ἀσέβεια, ἀνόσιος, τὸν θεοῖς ἐχθρὸν**
diplomatic mischief
bribery - **δωροδοκία, δῶρα λαμβάνω, χρήματα λαμβάνω, μισθαρνῶ, καταδωροδοκῶ**
mismanagement of public finances
treason - προδοσία, προδότης, μισθωτός, ἀποδιδράσκω ἐκ τῆς πόλεως
cowardice - δειλίᾳ
bad leadership
maltreatment of community - εἰς τὸ πλῆθος ἐξημαρτηκώς, τῆς πόλεως ἠδικημένης
favoritism
defiance of political etiquette (acting against the expected behaviour of a politician)- **παράσημος ῥήτωρ**
sophistry
political inertia
instability
tyranny/**undermining democracy**
hate speech
disrespect for hospitality
destroying the youth
murder - ἀνδροφόνος εἶναι
bravado/physical assault
disrespect for friendship
stealing
warmongering

The second overarching category of invective, the form-based one, consists of references to the stylistic, grammatical, and syntactic tropes through which cultural practice manifests itself in speech; the following table shows not only specific patterns of invective that lie within the broad category, but also key words that help to identify invective:

It is clear from the above that invective is inherently biting against people and has all kinds of evil intentions. It is therefore reasonable to think that despite the purely adversarial spirit of the community, as in fourth-century Athens where political and rhetorical disputes abounded in the context of public speaking, there should be limits to the practice to avoid interpersonal friction due to dishonouring individuals, which in turn would lead to general socio-political disorder. After all, *time*, roughly

translated as 'honour', was an important value in the Greek world: the opposite, 'shame', is an aversive experience that involves feelings of humiliation, inferiority, and worthlessness, and the transgression is interpreted as a reflection of a 'bad self' rather than a trivial incident."[25] *Atimia*, literally 'the lack of honour', was also "a penalty imposed on male Athenian citizens, principally if they were debtors to the state or had neglected their civic duties."[26] *Time* and the opposites are bestowed on people by others in different social contexts, from the *oikos* to the military camp and the battlefield.[27] As Mayer et al. point out, "shame [is] thought to serve as an 'emotional moral barometer' that provides feedback on one's social and moral acceptability,"[28] or, as other researchers put it just as eloquently, as "social pain" – just as severe physical pain indicates a medical condition that may threaten a person's life, social pain indicates that their social life is threatened by the anger, devaluation, and possible rejection of the population.[29] The *social identity theory* of Tajfel & Turner explains the power dynamics and effectiveness of this (and any other) technique of excluding individuals from a group or community by manipulating the cognitive/emotional response of the target group against them.[30]

So was it acceptable for an orator to make dishonourable accusations against his opponents, of the sort that Demosthenes does in 18.130, where it is implied that Aeschines' mother is a whore,[31] or of like Aeschi-

25 Mayer et al. 2021: 110.

26 Hansen 1991: 387; also: MacDowell 1978: 73-75.

27 Cairns 2021: 703-706. Cf. Cairns 1993; Konstan 2003: 601-30.

28 Mayer et al. 2016: 113.

29 Eccleston & Crombez 1999; Eisenberger et al. 2003; Miller 2007.

30 Tajfel & Turner 1979. Also: Miller et al. 1981: 494-511; Conover 1984: 760-85; Lau 1989: 220-23; Carey 1990: 49; Huddy 2003: 511-58; Hall 2006: 388; Arena 2007: 151.

31 Dem. 18.130: "Why it was only the day before yesterday when he became simultaneously an Athenian and an orator, and, by the addition of two syllables, transformed his father from Tromes to Atrometus, and bestowed upon his mother the high sounding name of Glaucothea, although she was universally known as Empousa, a nickname she owed to the pleasing diversity of her acts and experiences (ἐκ τοῦ πάντα ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν) – it can have no other origin." The name of Aeschines'

nes in speech 1, *Against Timarchus*, where the tables are turned on Demosthenes, the notorious, effeminate, and lewd Batalus, a *kinaidos* whose clothing is indistinguishable from that of a woman (1.131).[32] Timarchus lost his political rights in the trial of 343 BCE because of similar accusations. Were these extremely vile and insulting accusations acceptable or perhaps even tolerable in court, and where exactly, when public or private cases were heard? Was severe invective considered an example of *parrhesia*, and if so, were they unlimited?

The discussion about (positive and negative) free (and frank) speech in antiquity – *parrhesia* – and possible limits to this right,[33] or, as Konstan calls it, the "expectation" of a recurring socio-cultural phenomenon, which was fundamental to Athenian democracy, is not new in the study of antiquity. In an interesting parallel reading of sources that has led to different views being articulated and exchanged, Halliwell and Sommerstein present data in ancient sources on this complicated and fascinating topic in the memorable volume *Free Speech in Classical Antiquity* by Sluiter & Rosen (2004). Halliwell argues that comic theatre was the only ancient context in which performers enjoyed legal immunity from the charge of *kakegoria*, 'slander', a term similar to invective not only in terms of its aggressive and violent nature, but also in terms of its purpose, i.e., the purposeful insult and humiliation of others.[34] Sommerstein rejects this

mother is Glaucis; Glaucothea is a construction by Aeschines himself, who wanted probably to avoid the accusation that names of his parents are stock for lowly socio-economic classes in classical Athens. Empousa is a mythological monster of the underworld that changes form and, as a nickname, is usually used by prostitutes. As the monster changes form, so Aeschines' mother shows versatility in "doing and suffering everything" (ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν). See Yunis 2001: 187.

32 Aeschin. 1.131: "And well did common report name him Batalus, for his effeminacy and lewdness (Βάταλος προσαγορεύεται, ἐξ ἀνανδρίας καὶ κιναιδίας ἐνεγκάμενος τοὔνομα). For, Demosthenes, if anyone should strip off those exquisite, pretty mantle of yours, and the soft, pretty shirts that you wear while you are writing your speeches against your friends, and should pass them around among the judges, I think, unless they were informed beforehand, they would be quite at a loss to say whether they had in their hands the clothing of a man or of a woman." On sexual invective in oratory and allegations of *kinaidia*: Serafim 2016: 1-30; 2025: 37-45.

33 See Momigliano 1973: 259.

34 Halliwell 2004: 135.

argument of legal immunity and instead points to the socio-cultural tolerance of the Athenians as a reason for avoiding lawsuits against comic poets.[35] Essentially, both agree that the poets of comedy received no legal or other threats for uttering invective against (prominent) Athenian citizens in order to ridicule and belittle them in the eyes of their fellow citizens. The freedom of comedians to speak without legal or other cultural barriers thus seemed to be unlimited.

There is a point of caution here that scholars surprisingly ignore: *parrhesia* as a word is not used in comic texts or in other classical literature to describe the freedom of the comic poet to speak openly and frankly. The only classical source that makes the connection between *parrhesia* and comedy is Isocrates, *On the Peace* 14.[36] For Isocrates, *parrhesia* is a negative aspect of Athenian democracy, abused by reckless politicians and public speakers, and invoked by comic poets as a justification when accused of revealing the failure of the Athenian cultural system (this has the broadest meaning, encompassing everything that takes place in the city as a matter of constitution and general practice). In fact, Halliwell, Sommerstein, and Sluiter & Rosen should not refer to *parrhesia*,[37] but rather to 'comic license'. I am on the side of Riu when arguing "there is no indication that [the] Athenians of the classical period saw comic speech as an example of *parrhesia*, [which] does not pertain to comedy, it pertains to daily life (politics, social relations)."[38] The caricature of the divine and the use of profane and foul language is thus not an example of (socio-legal) *parrhesia*; it is the license that the comic dramatist has to

35 Sommerstein 2002: 154.

36 Isocrates, *On the Peace* 14: "But I know that it is hazardous to oppose your views and that, although this is a free government, there exists no 'freedom of speech' except that which is enjoyed in this assembly by the most reckless orators, who care nothing for your welfare, and in the theater by the comic poets. And what is most outrageous of all, you show greater favor to those who publish the failings of Athens to the rest of the Hellenes than you show even to those who benefit the city, while you are as ill-disposed to those who rebuke and admonish you as you are to men who work injury to the state."

37 In contrast, for example, to Rosen 2013: 13-28 referring to the notion of "comic *parrhesia*."

38 Riu 2022: online: https://brewminate.com/parrhesia-comedy-and-freedom-of-speech-in-ancient-greece/ (last access: June 2023).

exaggerate and distort reality and myth, a license conditioned by the character and etiquette of comedy as a genre. Even in Aristophanes' *Women at the Thesmophoria* 541, where the word *parrhesia* is used literally, this is merely an allusion to the absence of political codes and mores in women's speech. Riu successfully refutes scholastic claims about the connection between *parrhesia* and comedy, claiming that these are based primarily on the use of late sources, e.g. Demetrius, *On Style* 229, where 'outspokenness' is mistakenly understood as a reference to comedy.

What is certain is that *parrhesia* was not unlimited in public contexts of adversarial competition (including comic theatre).[39] *Parrhesia* etymologically means that one could 'say everything', but 'omni-spokenness' was limited by various exceptions and restrictions. It is Demosthenes, in the *Third Olynthiac* 4, who claims that the Athenians preferred 'pleasant speeches' (πάντα πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἀκούουσιν) to frank assessments of a deplorable situation (πάνυ φαύλως τὰ πράγματ' ἔχει); similarly, in *On the Peace* 14, Isocrates claims that there is no freedom of speech in the assembly except for the most foolish, and in the theatre for the comic poets. There were two major categories of constraint: *contextual* (in accordance with the performative contexts in which public speaking takes place and the values of the community) and *legal/constitutional*.

The *contextual constraint* on *parrhesia* corresponds to the reaction of the audience itself: both judges and audiences responded when speakers tried to explain their arguments – so said speakers on forensic and political platforms (e.g., Dem. 3.3 and 8.32, both mentioned above; Plato's *Apology of Socrates* 30c,[40] and elsewhere). That the Athenians habitually reacted negatively to the speakers whether at court (especially after incitement by the orator himself, as in Dem. 18.52)[41] or in the theatre (as in

39 See Kamen 2020: 39-41.

40 Plato, *Apology of Socrates* 30c: "Do not create a disturbance, gentlemen, but abide by my request not to cry out at what I say but to listen, for I think it will be to your advantage to listen, and I am about to say other things at which you will perhaps cry out. By no means do this."

41 Dem. 18.52: "But it is not so. How could it be? Far from it! I call you Philip's hireling of yesterday, and Alexander's hireling of today, and so does every man in this assembly. If you doubt my word, ask them; or rather I will ask them myself. Come, men of Athens, what do you think? Is Aeschines Alexander's hireling, or Alexander's friend?

Dem. 18.262)[42] is known as *thorybos*.[43] *Thorybos* is presumably what Demosthenes seems to be afraid of in 15.1, when he asks people to grant unrestricted *parrhesia* to speakers when they deliberate on measures that the *polis* should have taken: in political forums where public speaking were made, a speaker had little or no need to fear being sued, but there was a high probability that he would be booed and no longer able to explain and advise.[44] After all, as Demosthenes himself pointed out, it was the *demos* that assessed a speaker's reputation – if he was interrupted and his *parrhesia* was thus restricted, he would be considered dishonourable and would no longer be able to stand forward and speak again.[45] Heckling

You hear what they say." As the *Scholia Demosthenica* 104a-c report, the final period refers to the response of the audience: when Demosthenes mispronounced the word μισθωτός by putting the accent on the antepenult (μίσθωτος) the audience corrected him by uttering the right form of the word. Another anecdotal story about Demosthenes' strategic mispronunciation of words is recorded in Plutarch, *Lives of the Ten Orators* 845b, where we are told that the speaker mispronounced the name of the god Asclepius to note that this god is benign (Ἀσκλήπιος instead of Ἀσκληπιός). See further Couch 1944: 173-74; Tacon 2001: 178-79; Yunis 2001: 140; Serafim 2017.

42 Dem. 18.262: "You entered the service of those famous players Simylus and Socrates, better known as the Growlers. You played small parts to their lead, picking up figs and grapes and olives, like an orchard-robbing costermonger, and making a better living out of those missiles than by all the battles that you fought for dear life. For there was no truce or armistice in the warfare between you and your audiences, and your casualties were so heavy, that no wonder you taunt with cowardice those of us who have no experience of such engagements."

43 Bers describes *thorybos* as any vocal utterance (e.g. the cries of praise or censure) addressed to the speaker by the judges (*dicastic thorybos*) or by the bystanders (*coronal thorybos*). See further Bers 1985: 1-15; Thomas 2011: 175-85.

44 Dem. 15.1: "Your duty, men of Athens, when debating such important matters, is, I think, to allow freedom of speech to every one of your counsellors (διδόναι παρρησίαν ἑκάστῳ τῶν συμβουλευόντων). Personally, I never thought it a difficult task to point out to you the best policy – for, to speak plainly, you all seem to me to have discerned it already – but rather to induce you to put it into operation; for when a resolution has been approved and passed, it is no nearer accomplishment than before it was approved."

45 Dem. 18.277: "But I am sure you all know him well and will regard those epithets as more appropriate to him than to me. I am also sure that my artfulness – well, be it so; although I notice that in general an audience controls the ability of a speaker, and that his reputation for wisdom depends upon your acceptance and your discriminating favour."

seemed to be a serious problem, because not only the *demos* but also listeners who were hostile to the speakers may have reacted violently against them in order to deprive them of the opportunity to speak at all, e.g. Dem. 19.23.[46]

Another important aspect of the contextual category of the constraints of *parrhesia* is the etiquette of the performative context that the 'parrhesiastes' must follow – an etiquette defined and determined by the incentives and goals of the performers and the socio-cultural values held by the community as a whole. Demosthenes, for example, repeatedly assumes the role of counsellor to the *demos* in his speeches, claiming that his interest lies solely in advising the Athenians on how to overcome a challenge in political affairs and preserve their city's hegemonic role in Greece, especially when it came to persuading his fellow Athenians to defend themselves against foreign threats, as Philip and the kingdom of Macedon were posing. In 18.172-73, to cite just one passage that illustrates Demosthenes' tactics, he described the panicked reactions of the Athenians when the news of Philip's capture of Elatea was announced, claiming that he was the only one capable of standing up in the Assembly and advising the Athenians on how to deal with their enemy.[47] Therefore, the audience should not accuse the speaker of malice or habitual indulgence in blame and abuse. This is why Demosthenes emphatically ascribes frankness to *parrhesia*, as mentioned above: to dispel any worries and accusations of malice and to minimize the risk that *psogos* entails – it

46 Dem. 19.23: "And so, in all the glory of these disclosures, with everybody regarding him as a grand speaker and a marvellous man, he descended from the tribune in his most majestic manner. Then I rose and said that the whole story was news to me. I attempted to repeat the statement I had made to the Council; but Aeschines and Philocrates posted themselves one on either side of me – shouting, interrupting, and finally jeering. You were all laughing; you would not listen to me, and you did not want to believe anything except what Aeschines had reported."

47 Dem. 18.172-73: "But, it seems, that day and that crisis called not only for the patriot and the rich man, but for the man who had followed the course of events from the beginning and had calculated correctly the reason and purpose of Philip's actions. For anyone who had not grasped those purposes, or had not studied them long beforehand, however patriotic, and however wealthy he might be, was not the man to appreciate the needs of the hour, or to find any counsel to offer to the people. Well, I was the man who came forth on that day and addressed you." On this passage and the role of Demosthenes as an advisor to the Athenians: Serafim 2015: 103-5.

is not vituperation but pedagogical criticism, a biting speech that makes the *demos* wiser when it comes to thinking about his interests and making better decisions. But as the preceding discussion of the issue of frankness (p. 107) shows, this is not necessarily an aspect of *parrhesia*, not least because it is served up to the *demos* through rhetoric, the usual suspect when it comes to distorting truth and manipulating people for the purpose of persuasion.

The key to a proper understanding and full appreciation of *parrhesia* is the balance between what can be perceived as 'harsh sincerity', as I call it, which risks causing offence and stirring up hostility against the source, and flattery. This is what Plutarch underlines in *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*: a 'parrhesiastes' should preserve his character against the malleability of a flatterer, who changes his behaviour according to the audience he wants to attract through flattery, while a friend can be both agreeable and the opposite, depending on the interests of his counterpart that he wants to protect and promote.[48] Personal incentives and goals are again important in making this clear distinction: a friend, even when criticizing his audience, is never insulting or trying to undermine, embarrass, and over-accuse anyone; he exercises *psogos* when necessary, but never invective, in other words. References to *parrhesia* in oratory, such as those mentioned above, show that speakers were aware of the nature of socio-political and cultural practice and the risks involved, and therefore carefully weighed and articulated invective – essentially limiting *parrhesia* (to themselves) – so as not to offend and alienate the audience. Saxonhouse argued in *Free Speech and Democracy in Ancient Athens* that *parrhesia* coincides with *aidos*, 'shame', which causes people, especially public speakers, to respect the values and mores of the community that produce and manifest in public opinion.[49] So, it is the speaker and

48 Konstan 1997 offers a detailed and careful description of the behaviour and attitude of friends as opposed to flatterers.

49 Saxonhouse 2006. Cf. Tarnopolsky 2010: 99: "The recognition inherent to the feeling of being ashamed before another can consist in the acknowledgment that a deserved rebuke or reproach has been given by the other. And this kind of respectful shame is manifested in both the democratic ideal of *parrhesia* and the Socratic shaming *elenchus*."

how he understands himself in the community that contextually determines the character, the forms, and the limits of *parrhesia*.

On the legal/constitutional side, we have cases such as Lys. 10, *Against Theomnestus* (403 BCE), which conceptualize the law of *kakegoria*: the case is an accusation against Theomnestus, who had slandered the speaker by accusing him of patricide. Attic law incriminated certain sayings and gave the targets of invective and slander the right to protect themselves: accusations of murder, forms of *hybris* (including physical assault) in public places, the slander of the dead, the abuse of parents, even biting comments against those working in the agora (at least according to an obscure and enigmatic reference in Dem. 57.30).[50] The law of *kakegoria* is also mentioned in Dem. 21.32, where it is stated that assault or slander against private individuals would lead to an indictment (γραφὴν ὕβρεως καὶ δίκην κακηγορίας), while slander against a magistrate would also lead to the complete cancellation of political rights (ἄτιμος ἔσται καθάπαξ). Kamen, in a recent book on insults in classical Athens, argues that not all insults are offensive. She points out that there are "benign insults," especially those that were used in the agora between Athenians without legal consequences, and those that relate to religious and ritual customs – the so-called *aporrheta*,[51] or, in the Demosthenic language, the *arrheta*, "things that should not be uttered" (22.61). This is in line with Aeschin. 1.37-38, [52] where the speaker complains that by describing

50 Dem. 57.30: "With regard to my mother (for they make her, too, a reproach against me) I will speak, and will call witnesses to support my statements. And yet, men of Athens, in reproaching us with service in the market Eubulides has acted, not only contrary to your decree, but also contrary to the laws which declare that anyone who makes business in the market a reproach against any male or female citizen shall be liable to the penalties for evil speaking."

51 Kamen 2020.

52 Aeschin. 1.37-38: "And I beg you to pardon me, fellow citizens, if, compelled to speak about habits which by nature are, indeed, unclean, but are nevertheless his, I be led to use some expression that is as bad as Timarchus' deeds. For it would not be right for you to blame me, if now and again I use plain language in my desire to inform you; the blame should rather be his, if it is a fact that his life has been so shameful that a man who is describing his behavior is unable to say what he wishes without sometimes using expressions that are likewise shameful. But I will try my best to avoid doing this."

Timarchus' profanities, he runs the risk of being defamed himself (cf. *Rhetoric to Alexander* 1441b20-23; Dem. 21.79).

There are, however, notable departures from what scholars generally consider falling into the broad category of *aporrheta/arrheta*. If accusing an opponent of mistreating his parents is an aspect of the 'non-told', why do speakers include such accusations in their speeches? In the case of Dem. 18.130, quoted above, there is a (tacit, but nevertheless easily recognizable) reference to the (alleged) profession of Aeschines' mother, who was a prostitute. In Dem. 25.54-55 there is also a reference to the person concerned abusing his father, mother, and other family members.[53] And why was it offensive to refer to those who worked in the agora and not to a woman who is presented as a prostitute? The answer, which may indicate how the Athenians adjusted the degree of harshness attributed to the cultural phenomenon of invective, probably centres on two variables: the target and the audience. Invective seems to be (at least partly) an individual process: it depends on the extent to which the victim of invective found it dishonouring, not on the language or the nature of the attack itself; and on how the audience perceives it – whether it is persuasive or not, i.e. whether it helps the judges and spectators to form or change their opinions about the speakers and opponents. If the target was a woman, as in Dem. 18.130, she would not have been able to listen to the slanderous sayings, let alone defend herself, as there were no female political rights or voice in the Attic rule of law. Even in a male-dominated audience, no one would have felt offended by such a reference and demanded that the *kakegoria* be tried in court. Only Aeschines, the son of

53 Dem. 25.54-55: "The sequel too, men of Athens, is worth hearing. What you have just heard from Lycurgus is serious, or, rather, impossible to exaggerate, but the rest will be found to rival it and to be of the same character. Not content with abandoning his father in prison when he quitted Eretria, as you have heard from Phaedrus, this unnatural ruffian refused to bury him when he died and would not refund the expenses to those who did bury him but actually brought a lawsuit against them. Not content with offering violence to his mother, as you have just heard from witnesses, he actually sold his own sister – not indeed a sister by the same father, but his mother's daughter, whatever her parentage (for I pass that by) – yes, sold his sister for export, as is stated in the indictment of the action which was brought against him on these grounds by his good brother here, who in the present action will help to defend him."

Glaucis or Glaucothea, would have felt ashamed, but that was the purpose of Demosthenes in speech 18 anyway. He would supposedly have been able to bring a charge of *kakegoria* against Demosthenes, but after the end of the crown trial, in which he had lost overwhelmingly to his opponent, he had strength and will for nothing other than self-exile. The fact that women were not recognized as legal and political persons would greatly discourage Aeschines from taking legal action against his foul-mouthed accuser. Demosthenes rightly regards the verbal attacks against his mother as insulting and dishonouring, as Meidias' outburst in 21.79 also clearly shows (ῥητὰ καὶ ἄρρητα κάκ' ἐξεῖπον), but I doubt that he can do anything other than express his dissatisfaction or indignation at these attacks.[54] For the law of *kakegoria*, as quoted in Dem. 57.30, indicates that the right to complain is given when the accusation against men and women alike is merely the specific one of labour in the *agora*.[55]

The same applies to Androtion's fellows, who are portrayed in Dem. 22.61 as being humiliated by him and even accused of being married and fathering children with a prostitute.[56] Invective in this text is superbly

54 Dem. 21.79: "And first they forced the doors of the apartments, assuming that these became their property by the terms of the challenge; next in the presence of my sister, who was a young girl still living at home, they used foul language such as only men of their stamp would use – nothing would induce me to repeat to you some of their expressions – and they uttered unrestrained abuse of my mother and myself and all my family. But what was more shocking still, from words they proceeded to deeds, and they were going to drop the lawsuits, claiming them as their own, to oblige my guardians."

55 Dem. 57.30: "With regard to my mother (for they make her, too, a reproach against me) I will speak, and will call witnesses to support my statements. And yet, men of Athens, in reproaching us with service in the market Eubulides has acted, not only contrary to your decree, but also contrary to the laws which declare that anyone who makes business in the market a reproach against any male or female citizen shall be liable to the penalties for evil speaking."

56 Dem. 22.61: "Then do you suppose that all these men are his inveterate enemies merely because he collected this money from them? Is it not rather because he said of one of them, in the hearing of all of you in the assembly, that he was a slave and born of slaves and ought by rights to pay the contribution of one-sixth with the resident aliens; and of another that he had children by a harlot; of this man that his father had prostituted himself; of that man that his mother had been on the streets;

formulated: the attack against the target is severely dishonouring because it casts doubt on his origins, as do the accusations that Aeschines makes against Demosthenes that he is Scythian. These attacks cast doubt on the target's ethnicity, not least because of Pericles' citizenship law (451/0 BCE), according to which "a person should have citizenship only if both parents had been citizens" (*Constitution of Athens* 26.4; cf. Plutarch, *Pericles* 37.3). In view of the reference to his own mother, however, the attack was possibly unobjectionable in terms of the rule of law. Attacks against male siblings of the speakers, and even against their father, have legal consequences. The speaker in Dem. 22.2, for example, accuses Androtion of slanderously accusing him of having killed his father.[57] In §3 it is mentioned that the indictment is being judged and that Androtion did not even manage to obtain one fifth of the dicastic votes.[58]

Other suable accusations would have been those against the military records of individuals, e.g. the accusation against individuals of having thrown away their shields in battle. I echo Kamen, who argues in her book on insults that speakers are clever enough not to frame the accusation with this overly insulting wording but rather accuse their opponents of abandoning the front line. An example of this skillful rephrasing is the accusation against Demosthenes in Aeschin. 2.148.[59] Aeschines is

that he was making an inventory of one man's peculations from the start of his career, that another had done this or that, and that a third had committed every conceivable crime – slandering them all in turn?"

57 Dem. 22.2: "He accused me of things that anyone would have shrunk from mentioning, unless he were a man of the same stamp as himself, saying that I had killed my own father."

58 Dem. 22.3: "Of these charges, then, I cleared myself in your court, not by a narrow margin but so completely that my accuser failed to obtain a fifth of the votes; and upon Androtion I shall endeavor, with your help, to avenge myself today and on every other occasion."

59 Good examples of subtle phrasing of the accusation against people of being throwing shields away can also be found in comedy, particularly in Aristophanes. In *Birds* 1478-1481, for example, Cleonymus, who is said to have thrown away his shield, is described as a tree that sheds shields instead of leaves in winter (τὰς ἀσπίδας φυλλορροεῖ).

probably referring to the battle in Euboea in 350 BCE, at which his opponent was not present.[60] As Demosthenes himself reports (*Against Meidias* 103), Euctemon was instructed by Meidias to bring a trumped-up charge against him and accuse him of not having taken part in a campaign to Euboea. Demosthenes would theoretically have been able to take legal action against Aeschines, but the case would have been very risky for himself if he had been investigated; if he had been convicted of desertion, he would have lost his political rights (γραφή λιποταξίου). He himself mentions the accusation of desertion, which Meidias allegedly levelled against him, only in passing, as in 21.103.[61] It can therefore be said that the attacks on opponents were carefully articulated by the speakers, either by attacking people (e.g. women) who had no political or legal rights, or by focusing on accusations that the accused did not wish to mention further or investigate publicly. The insults thus served the speakers' purposes without the risk of being brought to court for *kakegoria*.

The case of a physical attack on the producers of insults cannot, of course, be ruled out, as Demosthenes himself informs us in 21.71.[62] The speaker in Isoc. 16.22 would be so indignant at those who dared to insult his dead father's private life and affairs that the judges would be lenient with him if he were put on trial for attacking his accusers – this is no mere act of fantasy, given what other sources tell us, e.g. Aristophanes'

60 This is not the only time that Demosthenes was accused of failing to fulfil his military duties properly: Aeschines and Dinarchus also accused him of deserting during the battle of Chaeronea (cf. Aeschin. 3.148, 152, 159, 175-176, 187, 244, 253; Din. 1.12, 71, 79, 91).

61 Dem. 21.103: "How he trumped up a charge of desertion against me and bribed another to bring the action – a scoundrel ready for any dirty job, the filthy Euctemon – that I shall pass over."

62 Dem. 21.71: "You cannot retort that such acts have never had any serious consequences, but that I am now exaggerating the incident and representing it as formidable. That is wide of the mark. But all, or at least many, know what Euthynus, the once famous wrestler, a youngster, did to Sophilus the prize-fighter. He was a dark, brawny fellow. I am sure some of you know the man I mean. He met him in Samos at a gathering – just a private pleasure-party-and because he imagined he was insulting him, took such summary vengeance that he killed him.1 It is a matter of common knowledge that Euaeon, the brother of Leodamas, killed Boeotus at a public banquet and entertainment in revenge for a single blow."

Clouds 1373-76.[63] Fear may have limited the orators' freedom to *parrhesia*, but its influence cannot be measured and recalled with certainty and universally, as it is mostly circumstantial – it is tailored to one-off (not necessarily repeated) circumstances of one-off occasions. The rule was – and rightly should be – to bring the *hybristes* before the court, as stated in Dem. 21.76 and 54.18;[64] after all, the speaker in Isoc. 16.22 would have known well himself that to insult the dead was a severe breach of the Attic law that he could exploit to the best benefit.

In what follows, I examine selective texts from forensic public and private court speeches to recognize the patterns and aims of invective and to examine whether there are strong differences that can be attributed to the different character and content of the speeches. My examination of the use of comic invective in public and private forensic speeches of Attic oratory suggests two conclusions: that the patterns and techniques are the same, unaffected by the distinction between public and private speeches, even if the examples of comic invective in private cases are somewhat more implicit and allusive than those in public cases; and that the frequency is different – higher in the former contexts and

63 Isoc. 16.22: "But my father's private life they revile with excessive indecency and audacity (λοιδοροῦσι δὲ λίαν ἀσελγῶς καὶ θρασέως), and they are not ashamed, now that he is dead, to use a license of speech concerning him which they would have feared to employ while he lived." Aristophanes, *Clouds* 1373-1376: [Strepsiades] "And he immediately sang a passage of Euripides, how a brother, O averter of ill! Debauched his uterine sister. And I bore it no longer but immediately assailed him with many abusive reproaches. And then, after that, as was natural, we hurled word upon word. Then he springs upon me; and then he was wounding me, and beating me, and throttling me."

64 Dem. 21.76: "I think that you should set up a precedent for all to follow, that no one who wantonly assaults and outrages another should be punished by the victim himself in hot blood, but must be brought into your court, because it is you who confirm and uphold the protection granted by the laws to those who are injured." 54.18: "And I am told that these [actions for evil-speaking] are instituted for this purpose – that men may not be led on, by using abusive language back and forth, to deal blows to one another. Again, there are actions for battery; and these, I hear, exist for this reason – that a man, finding himself the weaker party, may not defend himself with a stone or anything of that sort, but may await legal redress. Again, there are public prosecutions for wounding, to the end that wounds may not lead to murder."

lower in the latter.[65] In contrast to the chapter on the features of comic invective (e.g. incongruity, parody of tragic forms and patterns, use of comic characters, allusions to sexuality, body stature, origin and family), this paper offers a more comprehensive examination of the sixteen categories of invective I have mentioned above – which of them are used, where, how, and for what purpose.

Invective is very much tailored to the specific legal and historical (e.g. political, economic, or military) circumstances that each speech or group of speeches (e.g. Dem. 18 and 19 factually revolve around the same political background) have. It is noticeable, however, that in public and private forensic speeches, invectives are articulated in the same rhetorical manner, which falls into the next two broad categories:

(1) *political, legal, and social misbehaviour*: references to mistreatment of the civic/ethnic community by the speaker's opponents through actions involving bad leadership or political operations; accusations of sycophancy, treason, bribery, undermining democracy or attempting to impose oligarchy; and illegality in general; and harsh criticism of abuse of legal and democratic processes and the commission of diplomatic mischief;
(2) *moral failings:* falsity/trickery, malice, shamelessness and impudence, corruption, belligerence, selfishness, i.e. acting as a private individual rather than as *polites*, and forms of lawlessness, e.g. theft.

Other less frequently used patterns include *religion* (i.e. irreverence and hostility towards the gods, blasphemy and perjury); *origin and family* (especially references to parents' abuse); *military invectives* (especially when speakers expose the alleged military misdeeds of their opponents); *professions* (especially when allegations of menial and degrading jobs are made); *economic invectives* (i.e. greed for profit, excessive wealth, luxurious consumption, or debt to the city and mismanagement of public finances); *embodied invective* (e.g. references to face, gait, and dress, and violence/unrestrained use of the body); *historical and mythological invective* (e.g. assimilation to evildoers of the past); *intellectual deficiencies* (e.g.

65 Serafim 2021c: 65-79.

ignorance); and *nature-based imagery* (especially when opponents are compared to wild beasts or animals).

Despite remarkable similarity in the use of themes and topics of invective in both public and private forensic contexts (with a few occasional differences), the frequency varies: it is higher in the first genre category (with a rate of 35.54%) and lower in the second (33.89%). The frequency is calculated by the quotient of the number of paragraphs containing examples of invective and the total number of sections in public and private speeches: I counted 606 sections with patterns of invective out of the 1705 sections containing all of Demosthenes' public speeches and 540 examples of invective in the 1593 sections comprising the private speeches. Of course, patterns and examples of invective are not used with equal frequency in all of Demosthenes' public speeches: *On the Crown*, *On the False Embassy*, and *Against Timocrates* are the speeches in which expletives are used more frequently, almost in every single section of the surviving manuscript. However, in *Against Leptines*, the first public speech Demosthenes delivered as a secondary speaker (*synegoros*), invective is used less frequently than in any other of the public speeches. This is due to the special circumstances of the speech: the speaker is asking for the repeal of a law proposed by the defendant so that no one has the right to a special exemption from paying public dues, the so-called liturgy. Because Leptines had proposed the law in 356/5 BCE, and more than a year had passed since then until the trial in 355/4, he no longer had to answer for the accusation of having proposed an unconstitutional and inexpedient law (the trial was based on a *graphe nomon me epitedeion theinai*). This made the invectives against Leptines rather pointless, scholars argue.[66]

However, this is not entirely correct. I have found that personal insults are only used in a limited number of passages:

66 See, for example, Canevaro 2016: 19.

102	intellectual deficiencies	ignorance
104	moral deficiencies	insulting the dead
113, 119	invective is not directed specifically against Leptines (abstract subject, e.g. someone, some people)	
134	political legal and social misconduct	maltreatment of community
142	moral deficiencies	belligerence
143	intellectual deficiencies	ignorance

Invective in §104 is interesting because it falls into the general category of harsh, insulting, and deeply intolerable invective: against the dead. Let us read the text:

> καὶ μὴν κἀκεῖνος τῶν καλῶς δοκούντων ἔχειν νόμων Σόλωνός ἐστι, μὴ λέγειν κακῶς τὸν τεθνεῶτα, μηδ' ἂν ὑπὸ τῶν ἐκείνου τις ἀκούῃ παίδων αὐτός· σὺ δὲ ποιεῖς, οὐ λέγεις κακῶς τοὺς τετελευτηκότας τῶν εὐεργετῶν, τῷ δεῖνι μεμφόμενος καὶ τὸν δεῖν' ἀνάξιον εἶναι φάσκων, ὧν οὐδὲν ἐκείνοις προσῆκεν. ἆρ' οὐ πολὺ τοῦ Σόλωνος ἀποστατεῖς τῇ γνώμῃ;
>
> Again, there is another excellent law of Solon, forbidding a man to speak ill of the dead, even if he is himself defamed by the dead man's children. You do not speak ill of our departed benefactors, Leptines; you do ill to them, when you blame one and assert that another is unworthy, though these charges have nothing to do with the dead men. Are you not very far from the intention of Solon?

The focus of this passage is on Leptines himself, not on the unconstitutional law that he proposed. Demosthenes claims quite grandly that it was he who unjustly and unjustifiably insulted the dead. The fact that Leptines is an unknown figure – at least to modern students of oratory – gives the orator the freedom to attack him as harshly as he thought this attack would be persuasive. The anonymity made it necessary for the speaker to put the person in the spotlight by making him acting and active subject of the sad consequences that his law allegedly causes. This attack need not be evenly articulated, from the exordium to the peroration of the speech, to convince the judges of the inappropriateness of the

law. Invectives, if they are pointed out and well formulated, as is this case here, achieve their purpose very well. The antithesis between Leptines and Solon, and metaphorically also between present decadence and past splendour, reinforces the focus on the person of the former that Demosthenes is trying to achieve. The antithesis is probably fuelled by the fact that there were laws in Athens attributed to Solon, which forbade speaking ill of the dead (cf. Dem. 20.104, 40.49; Plut. *Sol.* 21.1). The dead were considered sacred (Plut. *Sol.* 21.1: τοὺς μεθεστῶτας ἱεροὺς νομίζειν).

Accusations against opponents of mistreating parents are not uncommon in Attic oratory. What strikes me is the accumulation of this accusation in four consecutive passages in Demosthenes' *Against Boeotus* 2 (speech 40).

Against Boeotus 2	Boeotus/ Mantitheus	Demosthenes	46	moral deficiencies	insulting the dead
Against Boeotus 2	Boeotus/ Mantitheus	Demosthenes	47	moral deficiencies	insulting the dead
Against Boeotus 2	Boeotus/ Mantitheus	Demosthenes	48	moral deficiencies	insulting the dead
Against Boeotus 2	Boeotus/ Mantitheus	Demosthenes	49	moral deficiencies	insulting the dead, shamelessness

The accumulation helps to convey a consistent and forceful message to the audience that the defendants are guilty of a devastating legal offence. In §47 and §49, note that the verb βλασφημέω is used to refer to the illegal act of insulting dead parents: "but in truth are not children of their supposed fathers, quarrel with them without scruple while they live, and think nothing of slandering them when they are dead" (περὶ τεθνεώτων αὐτῶν βλασφημοῦντες). Although the verb generally means 'to speak ill of' and 'to slander' (as in Dem. 18.10), it also has a religious dimension, as in Pl. *Resp.* 381e: εἰς θεοὺς βλασφημῶσιν. Religious undertones accompany, if only tacitly, the word in the context of Dem. 40.47. In principle, invectives with a religious flavour take all kinds of forms and are omnipresent in speeches, such as references to one's impiety. In Andocides, *On the Mysteries* 33, it is mentioned that punishment in an impiety trial leads to the revocation of the right to enter the temples of the gods. Legal

offences or crimes, such as insulting the dead for sure, are often presented as serious religious crimes.[67] This is to emphasize that the targets of criticism are destined to be punished by the gods for the offence, and that people should do their best to comply with the divine will within the framework of their rule of law. An offence, even if committed by an individual, risks the punishment of the entire community. There were therefore serious legal consequences for offenders, ranging from the death penalty to banishment, loss of political rights (*atimia*) and confiscation of property. The Athenians considered it not only their right but also their duty to punish (individual) impiety offences if they did not want to anger the gods or turn them against the entire community (Antiph. 4.1.3; Isoc. 16.6; Lys. 6.3, 10, 53; Eur. *Phoen.* 69-74; Hdt. 7.133-137; Xen. *Hell.* 5.2.32, 5.4.1).[68]

The fact that accusations of impiety are levelled against the speakers' opponents in both public and private speeches, as Dem. 40 indicates, means that, as mentioned earlier in this paper, the same patterns of invective are used in public and private speeches without any drastic distinction. This also applies to the other categories of invective that I have already mentioned in this article. The attribution of sycophantic practices to opponents is an example of invective used in both the public and private spheres, as are references to moral accusations such as the spreading of lies, the propensity for immoral company, excessive consumption, debt to the city, origin, family and disregard for familial ties, the unrestrained use of the human body as a means of physical assault, nature, and examples of formal invectives such as the use of insulting epithets. Even bad or failed leadership, which at first sight seems to fit more in the context of public speeches, also appears in private speeches, e.g. in 50.29, 37, 58, 66, where Polycles is presented as refusing to take a vessel from the speaker and fulfil his duties concerning the liturgy. The considerable overlap in the thematic features of invective suggests that,

67 The connection between legality and religiosity is particularly evident in the case where impiety is caused by the murder of a person, as in Dem. 23.40; according to Draco's homicide law (cf. *IG* I^3 104), the punishment is the cancellation of the right to enter the temples of the gods.

68 Serafim 2021a: 38.

as mentioned at the beginning of this article, the cultural differences between public and private life are not as pronounced as modern scholars claim – and this is inevitably reflected in literature.

A small and partial difference in the articulation of invective centres on the techniques used to give concrete form to the abstract accusation that opponents 'mistreat the community'. This involves a broad category of techniques; I call it protean because, like Proteus, it has many faces, depending on the context and the purpose the speaker wishes to pursue with it. It is used in both public and private speeches, but with a slight differentiation in form: in public court speeches it usually refers to legal and political matters (as in Dem. 19.284, 302, 310), as well as in private cases (e.g. 43.71-72; cf. Lys. 30.9, where the extraordinary accusation of subversion of democracy is made, which occurs frequently in public cases). In private contexts, however, it also refers to economic issues, as in Dem. 38.26 (and implicitly in other private speeches, as in Lys. 29.10). This is of course not surprising, since in private speeches economic matters between private individuals are addressed and legalized. The references to debts to the city, which occur in both public and private court speeches, may of course suggest mistreatment of the community, but in private speeches the mistreatment is even more clearly expressed, as in 38.26: "those who, while performing public services, have squandered their own property, bring the city into disrepute instead of rendering her service."

Another difference in technique concerns the way in which reference is made to people suffering from madness: in both categories of speeches, they are rarely used, but only in private speeches are they more explicit and pronounced. In public speeches, I have found only two examples of such accusations: 18.324 and 25.32. Neither of them is as emphatic and forceful as the two examples in private speeches: 36.48 and 48.52-56. The difference in the way these accusations are made arises from the use of language: in the public speeches, madness is either made implicit, as in 18.324, or not in strongly biting terms, as in 48.52-56, where the term ἀπόνοια is used, which does not necessarily mean 'madness' as such, but literally 'lack of sense' or 'loss of perception'. In private speeches, stronger and more explicit terms are used: μαίνομαι and the cognitive

noun μανία, παραφρονέω, and μελαγχολάω. In Attic law there were *graphe/dike paranoias* – so, both public and private cases in which a (usually senile) person was accused of squandering his wealth due to mental disorder. Whether the difference in the drafting and uttering of invective is due to the specific historical circumstances relating to each of the speeches, the specific contexts within the speeches in which the references are embedded, or the generic dichotomy between public and private court speeches is difficult to say. This could equally well be a topic for further and future research: how invectives that take the form of allegations of madness or mental insanity occur throughout the corpus of surviving Attic speeches.[69]

It may hopefully have become clear that the boundaries between public and private speech do not impose any significant restrictions on the rhetoric available to speakers to attack their opponents in court. Despite the differences in frequency – invectives are used more often in public speeches than in private ones – the techniques are largely the same and serve a single purpose: to castigate opponents, destroy their socio-political credibility, exclude them from the general group of Athenians and other Hellenes, marginalize them, and make the judges vote against them. The similarities in the techniques of using invective in the court speeches also extend to the specific articulation of comic invective: no noticeable difference can be identified based on the legal nature of the speeches. This means that the rhetoric is the same when it comes to persuasion through invective. And apart from the specific discussion of invective, the distinction between public and private speeches leads to some differentiation, for example in the way emotional appeals are made and how religious discourse is used, but this is not as noticeable and pronounced as scholars tend to argue. It is not even possible to distinguish between public and private speech, especially in the case of Lysias,[70] let alone to overemphasize the differences between the two worlds.

69 On paranoia and mental illness in general: Lewis 1970; Ahonen 2014; Thumiger & Singer 2018. On comic and tragic tropes of madness: Padel 1995. On mental illness in oratory and comedy: Kazantzidis 2021: 107-23.

70 Blass, for example, proposes to look at the substance of each case to determine whether it is public or private, a method that Jebb – and I agree with him – considers

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unsafe. Blass 1868: 445-660. Blass' proposed categorization contains some highly contestable suggestions, such as his argument that two speeches by Lysias, *For the Invalid* and *To His Companions*, should be regarded as "Bagatelle."

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DEMOSTHENES AND THE LANGUAGE OF INVECTIVE

By Edward M. Harris

Summary: This article compares the vocabulary of invective used by Demosthenes with that used by other orators. Demosthenes had a reputation in antiquity for using very abusive language and a study of his speeches shows that he often uses words or expressions either not used by other orators or used only sparingly. Demosthenes also employs exclamations with the names of gods and aggressive addresses to opponents more frequently than other orators. The final part of the essay examines the personality of Demosthenes to explain why his invective is more harsh than other orators'.

τὰ μιαρὰ καὶ ἀπίθανα ῥήματα (Aeschines 3.166)

In 346 BCE Aeschines, Demosthenes and eight other Athenians with one representative of the Second Athenian League were elected as ambassadors to negotiate a peace treaty with Philip II the king of Macedonia.[1] They brought back a proposal from Philip, which was ratified by the Assembly on 19 Elaphebolion (Aeschin. 2.61, 65; Dem. 19.57). The same ambassadors went back to Macedonia to take the oaths from Philip and returned to Athens in Skirophorion (Dem. 19.57-58). During this second embassy, Aeschines and Demosthenes had a serious disagreement. As a result, Demosthenes and another politician named Timarchus brought charges against Aeschines when he rendered his accounts (*euthynai*). Aeschines brought a charge against Timarchus in late 346 and won a conviction (Aeschin. 1; Dem. 19.2, 257, 284-285, 287). This discouraged Demosthenes from bringing his case to court until 343.[2] In the speech he delivered at the trial, Demosthenes accused Aeschines of mistreating an Olynthian woman, who had been enslaved when Philip's troops captured the city in 348. The account of the incident given by Demosthenes (19.196-198) is very explicit:

1 For an account of the First and Second Embassy in 346 see Harris 1995: 50-77.

2 For the date of the speech see Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Amm*. 1.4.

Edward M. Harris: 'Demosthenes and the Language of Invective' C&M Supplementum 3 (2025) 143-167.

κληθέντες γὰρ οὗτοι πρὸς Ξενόφρονα τὸν υἱὸν τὸν Φαιδίμου, τοῦ τῶν τριάκοντα, ᾤχοντο· ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ ἐπορεύθην. ἐπειδὴ δ' ἦκον εἰς τὸ πίνειν, εἰσάγει τιν' Ὀλυνθίαν γυναῖκα, εὐπρεπῆ μέν, ἐλευθέραν δὲ καὶ σώφρονα, ὡς τὸ ἔργον ἐδήλωσεν. ταύτην τὸ μὲν πρῶτον οὑτωσὶ πίνειν ἡσυχῇ καὶ τρώγειν ἠνάγκαζον οὗτοί μοι δοκεῖ, ὡς διηγεῖτ' Ἰατροκλῆς ἐμοὶ τῇ ὑστεραίᾳ· ὡς δὲ προῄει τὸ πρᾶγμα καὶ διεθερμαίνοντο, κατακλίνεσθαι καί τι καὶ ᾄδειν ἐκέλευον. ἀδημονούσης δὲ τῆς ἀνθρώπου καὶ οὔτ' ἐθελούσης οὔτ' ἐπισταμένης, ὕβριν τὸ πρᾶγμ' ἔφασαν οὑτοσὶ καὶ ὁ Φρύνων καὶ οὐκ ἀνεκτὸν εἶναι, τῶν θεοῖς ἐχθρῶν, τῶν ἀλειτηρίων Ὀλυνθίων αἰχμάλωτον οὖσαν τρυφᾶν· καὶ 'κάλει παῖδα', καὶ 'ἱμᾶντά τις φερέτω.' ἦκεν οἰκέτης ἔχων ῥυτῆρα, καὶ πεπωκότων, οἶμαι, καὶ μικρῶν ὄντων τῶν παροξυνόντων, εἰπούσης τι καὶ δακρυσάσης ἐκείνης περιρρήξας τὸν χιτωνίσκον ὁ οἰκέτης ξαίνει κατὰ τοῦ νώτου πολλάς. ἔξω δ' αὐτῆς οὖσ' ὑπὸ τοῦ κακοῦ καὶ τοῦ πράγματος ἡ γυνή, ἀναπηδήσασα προσπίπτει πρὸς τὰ γόνατα τῷ Ἰατροκλεῖ, καὶ τὴν τράπεζαν ἀνατρέπει. καὶ εἰ μὴ 'κεῖνος ἀφείλετο, ἀπώλετ' ἂν παροινουμένη· καὶ γὰρ ἡ παροινία τοῦ καθάρματος τουτουὶ δεινή.

When they were invited to the house of Xenophron, the son of Phaedimus, who was one of the Thirty, they went, but I did not go. After they got to drinking, he brought in an Olynthian woman, good-looking on the one hand, yet also free born and modest, as her conduct revealed. At first, they apparently forced her only to drink in a leisurely way and to eat, as Iatrocles related to me the next day. But as the event went on and they were getting warmed up, they ordered her to sit down and also to sing something. The slave woman got upset; she did not wish to sit down and did not know how to sing. This man here and Phrynon declared that she was arrogant and that it was unbearable for one of the god-forsaken, damned Olynthians, and a captive taken in war at that, to give herself airs. And shouted 'Call the slave boy in' and 'let him bring a whip.' A slave came with a strap (ἱμᾶντά); they were drinking, I think, and minor things were getting them stirred up. When she protested and burst into tears, the slave tore off her short *chiton* and thrashed (ξαίνει) her on the back many

> times. The woman was out of her mind with her suffering and this treatment and jumping up fell at the knees of Iatrocles, pushing over the table. If that man had not taken her away, she would have been killed from their drunken violence. The drunken abuse of this scumbag (καθάρματος) here is appalling. (My translation)

The vocabulary in this passage is very unusual for extant speeches written for delivery in Athenian courts.[3] This is the only passage in Attic oratory where we find the words νώτου ("back"), ἱμᾶντά ("whip"), ῥυτῆρα ("leather bridle"), διεθερμαίνοντο ("they were getting warmed up"), and ξαίνει, which I have translated as "thrash". The last term is interesting; it is used to describe carding wool and evokes an image of a sharp object cutting into soft material. Demosthenes could have used a more neutral term to describe the whipping, but he chose one that conveyed the image of the shape while lacerating the woman's flesh. The word ῥυτῆρα can be used to denote a bridle for a horse, which would have been humiliating for a human being. The word χιτωνίσκος is also rare in court speeches and is associated with slaves (Dem. 36.14). Demosthenes (21.216) describes himself as almost naked when his *himation* was pulled off and he was wearing only his *chitoniskos*. Other words and phrases are also striking and unusual in Attic Oratory. The expression "enemies of the gods" is never found in other court speeches except those written by Demosthenes (see below) and the adjective κατάρατος is found only in Demosthenes and Dinarchus, who is probably imitating Demosthenes (see below). The word κάθαρμα is also very strong: when Meidias is quoted using the term to insult people, Demosthenes (21.185) provides this as evidence of his abusive personality. The word is never found in other orators except Aeschines (3.211) and Dinarchus (1.16), who use it only about Demosthenes possibly as an implicit criticism for his choice of words.[4]

3 The analysis of the language in this passage is taken from Harris 2017: 234-35 with some modifications and additions. Spatharas 2019: 109-16 misrepresents my analysis of the passage. Daix 2023: 583-85 does not comment on the unusual vocabulary of Demosthenes in this passage. Daix 2023: 287 translates οἰκέτης as "serviteur." For the correct translation see Lewis 2018: 295-306.

4 On this term see Wankel 1976: 683-84 and MacDowell 1990: 399-400, who do not observe that the other orators never use the term or only in relation to Demosthenes.

In his reply as defendant at his trial in 343, Aeschines (2.157) summarises these accusations and corrects two details.[5] What is revealing is that Aeschines (2.158) criticizes Demosthenes' charges not only for being false but also for being shameful (αἰσχραῖς), that is, for exceeding the bounds of decorum usually expected in court.[6] He clearly alludes to the style of his account by recalling how Demosthenes strained his voice. Apparently, Aeschines was not the only one to find Demosthenes' language offensive. At the beginning of his speech, Aeschines (2.4) says that he was beside himself and was very hurt when Demosthenes accused him of this abuse. But Aeschines then rejoiced when the judges rejected (ἐξεβάλλετε) this charge, which apparently indicates that they shouted him down for this breach of etiquette and did not allow him to continue. Later in the speech Aeschines (2.153) returns to this incident and the reaction of the court and says that Demosthenes was "thrown out" (ἐξερρίφη) by the judges in the middle of speaking. These are not the only passages in which Aeschines objects to Demosthenes' style and choice of vocabulary. In *Against Ctesiphon* Aeschines objects to his "filthy and incredible words" (τὰ μιαρὰ καὶ ἀπίθανα ῥήματα) and to his "harsh and strange words" (πικρῶν καὶ περιέργων).[7] Other contemporaries also found his style harsh. According to Plutarch (*Demosthenes* 4.5), Demosthenes had the nickname Argas because his manners were savage and

5 Aeschines says that Xenodocus, one of Philip's Macedonian companions, was their host, and that Xenodocus was providing a feast, not a *symposion*.

6 Fisher 2024: 123 claims that "the 'shameful charges' (αἰσχραῖς αἰτίαις) must be 'shameful' for Aeschines the intended victim" but fails to observe that the judges and other onlookers expressed their disapproval of Demosthenes, not Aeschines. See Aeschines 2.4, which is ignored by Fisher and shows that the charges were shameful for Demosthenes. Note also that Demosthenes (18.130) worries that his language may be "unbecoming" to himself (οὐ προσήκοντας ἐμαυτῷ), which shows that the orator was aware that his choice of language might reflect badly on his reputation.

7 Dionysius of Halicarnassus *Demosthenes* 55 attempts to defend the orator against Aeschines' criticisms by claiming that his language is harsh only when the occasion required harshness to make the judges strict in enforcing the law. This indicates that Dionysius also found Demosthenes' language harsh, but he does not compare his vocabulary with that of the other Attic orators. In the same essay (57) Dionysius claims that even though fifty or sixty thousand lines of Demosthenes' speeches survive, he has not been able to find any vulgar or unpleasant words (φορτικὰ καὶ ἀηδῆ ὀνόματα). As this essay will show, this judgment is wildly inaccurate.

harsh (θηριώδη καὶ πικρόν) or because his way of speaking annoyed (ἀνιῶντα) his audience.[8] Argas was known for his vile and irritating songs (νόμων πονηρῶν καὶ ἀργαλέων).

In this article I will show that Demosthenes' vocabulary for his court speeches and especially those delivered in public cases differs significantly from other speeches written for delivery in Athenian courts. Some of the language Demosthenes uses to attack his opponents is similar to that used by other orators, but in several cases Demosthenes's choice of words is distinctive and unusual. This topic has not received much attention from scholars writing about the style of Demosthenes. In his *Die attische Beredsamkeit,* F. Blass has a few pages on Demosthenes' choice of vocabulary but does not compare him with other Attic orators.[9] In his book *Demosthenes the Orator* D.M. MacDowell does not discuss the topic at all in the chapter on Demosthenes' style[10] and in his commentaries on *Against Meidias* and *On the False Embassy* has little to say about Demosthenes' unusual vocabulary.[11] In their books on invective, Worman and Kamen do not observe how Demosthenes' choice of vocabulary differs from that of other orators.[12]

8 On the harshness of Demosthenes's style cf. Plutarch *Comparison of Demosthenes and Cicero* 3 (πικρίας τοῦ τρόπου καὶ στυγνότητος).

9 Blass 1887-1898.3.1: 65-225. Blass 1887-1898.3.1: 92-95 does note the unusual vocabulary ("den durch ihre Ungewöhnheit harten Worten") in *On the Crown.*

10 MacDowell 2009: 398-407.

11 MacDowell 1990 and MacDowell 2000. The same is true of Ronnet 1951.

12 Worman 2008 and Kamen 2020. On the latter see the review of Filonik 2024, who shows that her analysis of the legal charge in Demosthenes' *Against Meidias* is unconvincing. Fisher 2024: 105 n. 11 claims that different passages point in different directions about the procedure, but has not read Dem. 21.25-28 carefully, which he misrepresents. On the procedure see now Harris 2025.

Terms of Abuse

Two of Demosthenes' favourite words are the adjective βδελυρός ('disgusting') and the noun βδελυρία.[13] The adjective is not found in Andocides, Antiphon, Lysias, Isaeus, Isocrates, Dinarchus, Hyperides or Lycurgus. Aeschines (1.41, 95, 192) uses the adjective four times in *Against Timarchus* because of the unusual subject matter but never in *On the False Embassy* and only once in *Against Ctesiphon* (3.246) when alluding to Demosthenes. The noun is also rarely used outside of Demosthenes: Lysias, Antiphon, Lycurgus, Isocrates, Hyperides, and Dinarchus never use the noun, and Andocides (1.122) and Isaeus (8.42) each use it only once. Not surprisingly Aeschines (1.26, 54, 60, 70, 88, 105, 107, 189, 192) employs the noun several times in *Against Timarchus* in which the nature of the legal charge makes it appropriate but not at all in his other two speeches. The adjective is one of Demosthenes' preferred verbal weapons in *Against Meidias* where it occurs seven times (21.2, 19, 98, 107, 123, 143, 151).[14] He flings the noun twice at Androtion (22.52, 59) and the adjective once (22.66). In *On the False Embassy* Demosthenes (19.287) uses the adjective to construct a derogatory nickname for one of Aeschines' brothers-in-law and twice for Aeschines (19.175, 309 [superlative]) and three times for Philocrates (19.206 [superlative], 291, 309 [adverb]).[15] In one passage Demosthenes (19.208) uses the superlative against Philocrates and Aeschines together. In *For Phormio* he links the adjective to the term *sykophantes* (36.58). The contrast with the other orators is striking.[16]

One of the stronger terms Demosthenes uses to insult his opponents is κατάπτυστος, which literally means 'spat upon'. I translated the term as 'despicable', and MacDowell translated the term 'abominable' and notes that when Demosthenes uses the word about Meidias this is the

13 For the behaviour of the *bdelyros* see Theophrastus *Characters* 11. I owe this reference to Peter O'Connell.

14 MacDowell 1990: 437 does not list the term in the index of Greek words despite its prominence in the speech.

15 On the names of Aeschines' brothers-in-law see Harris 1986.

16 Other speeches in the Demosthenic corpus use the term less frequently: 8.68; 35.46; 36.58; 43.39; 47.81. The contrast between speeches in private cases and those in public cases is striking.

first time it is found in prose, earlier examples being found in tragedy.[17] The adjective does not occur in Andocides, Antiphon, Aeschines, Isaeus, Isocrates, Lysias, Hyperides or Lycurgus. What is curious is that the only time when Dinarchus (1.15) uses the term he applies it to Demosthenes. He implies that the term is very strong because he admits that he "cannot control himself" (ἐξάγομαι), which indicates that the word is unusually harsh. MacDowell (1990: 355) plausibly suggests that the aim of Dinarchus is "to mock his [i.e. Demosthenes'] use of the word."[18] It is a very strong term and used by Apollo about the Furies (Aesch. *Eum.* 68) and by Hecuba about Helen (Eur. *Tro.* 1024). When Demosthenes flings the term at his enemies, he makes no apology (Dem. 18.33, 43, 196; 19.15; 21.137, 167, 171).[19] Another strong term is ὄλεθρος, which MacDowell translates as 'pest' but this is too mild. I translated the word as 'wretch', which may also not do the word justice. Demosthenes uses it for Meidias (21.209), Aeschines (18.127), and Phrasierides and Polysthenes (23.202), who are also insulted as not even free men. The only other orator who uses this term as an insult is Andocides (1.53).[20] The next weapon in Demosthenes' verbal arsenal is the term βάσκανος used either as a noun or an adjective with its related noun βασκανία and verb βασκαίνω. The verb has the sense of 'begrudge' (Dem. 20.24) or 'malign' (Dem. 8.19), which would suggest that the noun should be translated as 'malice' and the adjective 'malicious.'[21] The adjective occurs six times (Dem. 18.108, 119, 132, 139, 242, 317), the verb twice (Dem. 18.189, 307) and the noun once (Dem. 18.252) in *On the Crown* where it is well suited to describe Aeschines' grudging attitude toward the honours proposed in Ctesiphon's decree. These words occur rarely in Isocrates (5.11; 12.155; 15.62) and not at all

17 MacDowell 1990: 355 says it is found in tragedy and in Middle Comedy where it is paratragic: "Slightly old-fashioned and formal, not colloquial."

18 Cf. Wankel 1976: 272: "Außer bei ihm kommt da Adjektiv in klassischer Prosa nur noch einmal bei Deinarch vor (1.15, was dessen Demosthenesimitation gehört)."

19 The term is used twice about the Megarians (Dem. 13.32; 23.212).

20 Cf. Isocrates 4.100, on the destruction of Skione; Lysias fr. 12 (Carey): Ἔρρε εἰς ὄλεθρόν τε καὶ Ἄβυδον. Wankel 1976: 678 does not see how other orators tend to avoid the term. Yunis 2001: 184 does not comment on the term.

21 MacDowell 1990: 414 considers this a term "of abuse with no very exact meaning," but this is too pessimistic.

in Aeschines, Dinarchus, Lycurgus, Andocides, Lysias, Antiphon, or Hyperides.[22]

The terms *hybris* and *hybrizein* are found in all the orators, but Demosthenes is unusual for often using the verb προπηλακίζειν and has the noun προπηλακισμός twice (Dem. 18.12, 316). The verb is derived from the noun πηλός ('mud') and can be translated 'spatter with mud' or 'thrust in the mud'. Other orators rarely use these terms and only once in a speech (Aeschin. 2.44; 3.258; Lys. 9.4; 15.6; Isaeus 2.47) or not at all (Dinarchus, Lycurgus, Isocrates, Antiphon and Hyperides). Not surprisingly, Demosthenes employs the verb eight times in *Against Meidias* (21.7, 61, 66, 72, 109, 131, 195, 219).[23] The verb and the noun are found four times in *On the Crown* (18.12, 47, 256, 316), three times in *Against Aristocrates* (23.89, 120, 201), and twice in *Against Androtion* (22.62, 58).[24] It is rarely found in private speeches (Dem. 36.47; 46.13).[25]

Another pair of words found more frequently in Demosthenes than in other orators are the verb βλασφημεῖν and the noun βλασφημία. These words are found several times in the speeches of Isocrates but not in the court speeches. They are never found in Lysias, Lycurgus, Andocides, Antiphon, or Hyperides. Aeschines (1.122, 167, 180; 2.149, 167) has them five times, Dinarchus (1.5, 9, 12) three times and Isaeus (2.43) only once. These terms occur in all parts of the Demosthenic corpus usually only once or twice in a speech, but *On the Crown* stands out in that Demosthenes (18. 10, 22, 34, 95, 123, 126, 256, 272) uses these words eight times. By contrast, the verb διασύρειν, which means literally 'to rip apart' and acquires the sense of 'to disparage' or 'to ridicule', occurs once in Aeschines (1.32), three times in Isocrates (*Antid.* 199, 300; *In Lochitem* 5; see also *Ep.* 6.11) but never in Andocides, Antiphon, Lycurgus, Dinarchus, Hyperides, Lysias, or Isaeus. Demosthenes (18.27, 126, 180, 218, 299, 317, 323 (twice)) uses this rare verb eight times just in *On the Crown*, where it is well suited

22 See Wankel 1976: 585 ("sonst nicht bei den Rednern, abgesehen von dem Verbum bei Isokrates").

23 MacDowell 1990 does not comment on Demosthenes' use of the term.

24 Note the comment of Wankel 1976: 332-33: "Haüfig ist das Verbum außer im Corp. Dem. nur bei Platon; bei Thuk. z.B. nur zweimal (...), nur einmal bei Xenophon."

25 The verb is found in several speeches by Apollodorus ([Dem.] 50.45; 59.35, 88, 93, 113). Note that the term is used by a slave to describe harsh physical abuse. See Harris 2006: 271-80.

to express Aeschines' attacks on his honours. Elsewhere it is found only once in *On the False Embassy* (Dem. 19. 313) and in one assembly speech (13.12).

Demosthenes is unique in calling his opponents 'savage' or 'harsh'. The adjective ὠμός, the adverb ὠμῶς and the noun ὠμότης are found in both public and private court speeches (Dem. 29.26, 68; 29.2; 33.34 – notably three times about his guardians) and in two assembly speeches (Dem. 9.26; 10.43). Demosthenes uses terms for harshness four times in *Against Meidias* (21.88 [noun and adverb], 97, 109),[26] where it effectively describes his opponent's abusive personality, and four times in *On the Crown* (18.212, 231, 275, 285)[27] and twice in *Against Timocrates* (24.24, 171). Aeschines (2.1) uses only the noun once and in reference to Demosthenes' savagery. These words are not found in Dinarchus, Lysias, Andocides, Lycurgus, Isaeus, Antiphon, or Hyperides, and the noun only six times in all the speeches of Isocrates. Less harsh but still insulting is the adjective ἀγνώμων, which means 'insensitive' or 'inconsiderate' and is used to describe Meidias (Dem. 21.97) and Aeschines (Dem. 18.289).[28] Demosthenes also chides Aeschines for his 'insensitivity' in *On the Crown* (18.252; at 207 he mentions the insensitivity of Fortune). Neither the adjective nor the noun are found in Aeschines, Lysias, Isaeus, Dinarchus, Hyperides, or Antiphon. The adjective is used once in the superlative by Lycurgus (1.54) when attempting to browbeat the judges into convicting Leocrates.

There are several terms or expressions in *On the False Embassy* without parallel in other orators. Demosthenes (19.199) is the only litigant in an extant court speech who claims that he is 'choked with rage' (ἀποπνίγομαι),[29] the only one to accuse his opponent of 'grovelling' (19.338: προὐκύλινδεῖτο), of "letting his cloak slip to his ankles" and "puffing his cheeks out" (19.314: θοἰμάτιον καθεὶς ἄχρι τῶν σφυρῶν... τὰς γνάθους φυσῶν), or of being hissed at by his audience (19.337:

26 MacDowell 1990 does not comment on its use.

27 Wankel 1976: 1374 does not list the word as one of Demosthenes' Schimpfwörter.

28 Twice in *Against Conon* – 54.16, 14.

29 The verb is used with the meaning 'drowned' at Dem. 32.6.

ἐξεσυρίττετε).[30] No other accuser suggests that the ancestors of the Athenians would approve if the defendants were stoned (Dem. 19.66: καταλεύσαντας).[31] One should compare Demosthenes' claim in *On the Crown* (18.133) that the Athenians should have tortured and executed Aeschines, which is also without parallel in courtroom speeches.[32] There are other unusual words and expressions in *On the Crown*. Demosthenes is unique in attacking his opponent for "jumbling the laws up and down" (111: ἄνω καὶ κάτω διακυκῶν) and in calling the arguments of his opponent the kind of ritual abuse uttered in religious processions (11: πομπείας and 122: ὥσπερ ἐξ ἁμάξης. Cf. 124: πομπεύειν) and "jokes" (15: σκώμματα).[33] When mocking his career as an actor, Demosthenes (18.242) calls Aeschines a "rustic (ἀρουραῖος) Oinomaos" and a "mumbler of iambs" (Dem. 18.139: ἰαμβειοφάγος)[34] and "deranged" (Dem. 18.242: ἐμβρόντητ'). Elsewhere Demosthenes calls his opponent a "beggar" or "scrounger" and "market-place loafer" (Dem. 18.127: σπερμολογός, περίτριμμα ἀγορᾶς),[35] compares him to a sprain or fracture (18.198: τὰ ῥήγματα καὶ τὰ σπάσματα) and a sorcerer (18.276: γόης; cf. 19.109). Demosthenes is replying to the use of the term by Aeschines (3.137, 207), calls Aeschines' comparison of their careers "rotten" (Dem. 18.227: σαθρόν),[36] and accuses him of "spitting on others" (Dem. 18.258:

30 As in the case of the Olynthian woman, Demosthenes is alone among the orators in naming parts of the body. Cf. Dem. 18.67 where he refers to the collar bone and leg of Philip.

31 Stoning was very rare and considered harsh and extreme. See Rosivach 1987. Forsdyke 2012: 144-70 claims that stoning without a trial was a legitimate form of popular justice, but see Harris 2019: 104-10 for detailed refutation.

32 Wankel 1976: 726-27 observes that torture is used for non-citizens but fails to note that Demosthenes is the only orator to propose torture for an opponent in court. Yunis 2001: 188 does not comment on Demosthenes' unparalleled demand.

33 Aeschines (1.126) uses the word for jokes told by Demosthenes but never in relation to the speeches of an opponent.

34 For discussion of the term and the readings of the manuscripts see Wankel 1976: 758-60.

35 On these terms see Wankel 1976: 677-78, who does not mention their absence from the other orators.

36 Cf. Wankel 1976: 1028 ("Diese Adjektiv findet sich bei den Rednern nur bei D.").

διαπτύων).[37] Demosthenes (18.209) mocks Aeschines' work as a secretary with the original insult "one hunched over records" (γραμματοκύφων).[38] Demosthenes (18.121) accuses Aeschines of insanity and urges him to "take hellebore" as a remedy. To crown all these insults, Demosthenes (18.242) calls Aeschines a "monkey" (πίθηκος). No other extant court speech contains such language.

Use of Religious Language

Demosthenes is also unlike the other orators in his use of insults related to religious offences like impiety and pollution.[39] Demosthenes is the only orator to call his opponents "enemies of the gods."[40] In *On the False Embassy* Demosthenes calls his fellow ambassadors (61, 223), Aeschines (95, 250), and traitors (268) enemies of the gods. In *On the Crown* Demosthenes uses the phrase about Philip's supporters (46, 61), Aeschines (119), and Philiades of Messene, whose sons Neon and Thrasylochus were traitors (295). He calls these and other traitors ἀλάστορες, those who deserve divine punishment (Dem. 18.296; cf. Aesch. *Eum*. 326; Soph. *Aj*. 374).[41] The expression "enemy of the gods" is also applied to Meidias (Dem. 21.150, 197), Cotys (Dem. 23.119), politicians who propose dishonest honorary decrees (Dem. 23.201), and Androtion (Dem. 24.6; cf. Dem. 22.59: θεοισεχθρίαν).

Other litigants use the terms related to impiety (ἀσεβεία, ἀσέβημα, ἀσεβής, ἀσεβεῖν) only for actual religious offences as in the case of Andocides (Andoc. 1 *passim*) and his accuser (Lys. 6 *passim*) discussing the mutilation of the Herms and the parody of the Mysteries, or in the case of

37 Wankel 1976: 1129 notes that this compound occurs only here. Yunis 2001: 253 does not comment on the term.

38 Wankel 1976: 967 notes that the term is "eine original Bildung" of Demosthenes, which attracted the attention of lexicographers.

39 On religious discourse in Demosthenes' forensic speeches see Serafim 2021: 41-45.

40 Cf. Wankel 1976: 327 ("nicht bei den übrigen Rednern"). Yunis 2001: 136 does not observe the contrast with other orators. In general, Martin 2009 does not note the difference between Demosthenes and other orators in their use of religious language.

41 Wankel 1976: 1297 notes that this is the first time the term is found in prose.

Aeschines (1.190; 2.176, 224; 2.176; 3.106, 107, 115, 118, 121, 224) discussing crimes of The Thirty and those of the Amphissans.[42] But Demosthenes stretches the meaning of these terms and applies them to offences not normally considered examples of impiety. When Leptines eliminated exemptions from religious duties, Demosthenes (20.126) charged him with banning honorands from rituals and calls this action "most impious" (ἀσεβέστατον). The alleged attempt of Aristocrates in his decree for Charidemus to remove one of the protections for those convicted of involuntary homicide is denounced as an act of impiety (Dem. 23.79). When Androtion had inscriptions praising Athens removed from dedications and replaced with others, Demosthenes (22.72; 24.180) calls the new ones "impious". When Androtion melted down crowns, Demosthenes (22.69 = 24.177) labels this "impiety." With characteristic hyperbole, Demosthenes (22.69; 24.177) also goes so far as to call this "temple robbery" (ἱεροσυλία) even though it was a routine matter.[43] Because Meidias called Aristarchus a murderer, then denied doing so, Demosthenes (21.114) says that he is impious. Insults to a *choregos* performing his duties are also called "impiety" (Dem. 21.55). When Meidias charged Demosthenes with the murder of Aristarchus, then allowed him to conduct rituals for the Council, this too makes his opponent impious (Dem. 21.114).[44] Demosthenes also denounces Aeschines and his opponents for being ἀλειτήριος, a term related to religious offences (Dem. 18.159; 19.259)[45] and charges Aeschines with being κακοδαίμων (Dem. 19.115) and ἀκάθαρτος "ritually unclean" (Dem. 19.199), a term not found in other orators.

Demosthenes is almost alone for calling his opponents "accursed" or "damned" (κατάρατος).[46] In *On the Crown* Demosthenes (18.209, 244, 290) addresses Aeschines with the vocative three times. Demosthenes (18.212)

42 Aeschines (106, 221) charges Demosthenes with impiety only in relation to this offense and for having Anaxinos executed after he dined with him (Aeschin. 3.224).

43 See D. Harris 1995: 31-36. The term is found in Lys. 30.21.

44 On the other hand, his charge that Meidias committed an offence against the festival uses the term impiety in its normal sense. See Dem. 21.199, 227, etc.

45 Lys. 6.53; Andoc. 1.130-31; Aeschin. 3.133-57.

46 Note that τρισκατάρατος is found at [Dem.] 25.82, a Hellenistic forgery (see Harris 2018: 193-229) and not in the rest of the Demosthenic corpus or in the rest of Attic oratory.

indignantly asks "who could be more savage and accursed than this malicious accuser (*sykophantes*)?" In this speech Demosthenes (18.287) also uses the adjective to construct the insulting nickname "damned Cyrebio" for one of Aeschines' brothers-in-law. In the speech Demosthenes (24.107, 198) wrote for Diodorus, Timocrates is addressed twice with the vocative of the adjective. In *Against Aristocrates* those who propose honours for those who do not deserve them are "damned *rhetores*" (Dem. 23.201) and the Euboeans are also said to be accursed (Dem. 23.212). In *On the False Embassy* the Euboeans are accused of deserting the Athenians (Dem. 19.75), and so is Aeschines (Dem. 19.70). Meidias is also called "damned" (Dem. 21.164). It is striking that the term is not found in Demosthenes' private speeches.[47] The only other orator who uses the adjective is Dinarchus (1.47; cf. 2.4 and 15 about Aristogeiton), who uses it twice about Demosthenes and may be paying him back in his own coin.[48]

Another one of Demosthenes' favourite terms of abuse is μιαρός, which is derived from the noun meaning μίασμα, religious pollution.[49] This term is very popular with Aristophanes for comic abuse. As Dickey observes, "μιαρέ was a low-register insult in classical Attic: the orators used it when they were willing to descend to a lower register for effect, Plato used it only as a joke but never in earnest, and no other classical prose author was willing to use it at all."[50] It may be that the religious connotations of the term may have faded over time, but the religious element is certainly present in the speech of Lysias *Against Agoratus* (13.77) where the accuser charges the defendant with murder and asks, who could be more polluted (μιαρώτερος) than Agoratus? The term also oc-

47 The word is also found at Dem. 13.32, but this speech may not be authentic. In general, there is less religious discourse in the private speeches of Demosthenes. See Serafim 2021: 69-71.

48 Cf. Wankel 1976: 967: "Von den übrigen Rednern hat es nur Deinarch (1.47; 4.4.15, aber nicht im Vokativ." Wankel does not observe that Dinarchus uses the term about Demosthenes.

49 It is interesting that the author of the forgery *Against Aristogeiton* who tried his best to imitate the style of Demosthenes, uses the term seven times ([Dem.] 25.28,32, 54, 58, 62, 79, 81).

50 Dickey 1996: 167, who does not observe that Demosthenes uses the adjective more than other orators.

curs in a passage about pollution for homicide in the *First Tetralogy* of Antiphon (2.1.10).[51] The word does not occur in the other speeches of the *corpus Lysiacum,* Andocides, Lycurgus, or Isocrates. The term appears in the speech Dinarchus composed for the accuser at Demosthenes' trial in 323 (1.18, 21, 24, 50, 92, 95; cf. 3.18 about Philocles), and one gets the impression that Dinarchus is turning one of Demosthenes' favourite words against him. At the same trial Hyperides (5.15, 21) uses the same word against his former ally but not in other speeches. In *Against Ctesiphon*, Aeschines (3.79, 101, 212) employs it against Demosthenes, but Aeschines (1.42, 54) also applies it to Timarchus when recalling his debauchery. It is telling that Aeschines (3.166) uses the adjective to describe Demosthenes' choice of words (τὰ μιαρὰ καὶ ἀπίθανα ῥήματα). The term was clearly associated with Demosthenes and viewed as characteristic of his unusual style. In *Against Meidias* Demosthenes hurls the adjective at his opponent eight times and once at one of his associates (Dem. 21.19, 69 [adverb], 103, 114, 117, 135, 195, 216, 227 [the very last section of the speech]). One starts to wonder who the real victim of abuse at this trial was. The word is found three times in *On the False Embassy* (Dem. 19.13, 113, 230), twice about Philocrates and once about the Athenian ambassador Phrynon. In *On the Crown* (18.134, 141, 289, 296) Demosthenes uses the word three times about Aeschines and once about traitors in Greece. It is curious to note that the term does not occur in the public speeches (*Against Androtion*, *Against Aristocrates*, and *Against Timocrates*) that Demosthenes wrote for others to deliver and not in *Against Leptines*, which is notable for its absence of personal attacks. Perhaps his clients in these cases exercised a restraining influence. In the private speeches in the Demosthenic corpus it is found only once or twice in a few speeches (Dem. 36.58; 37.48; 43.6, 83; 45.70; 57.38; 58.43, 49, 56 [note that scholars agree that this speech was not written by Demosthenes]).[52]

51 Parker 1983: 126 claims that fears about pollution for homicide were diminishing by the late fifth century, but this view is not convincing. See Harris 2015 and Harris 2019.

52 These passages show however that Martin 2009: 296 is wrong to claim that the term "is avoided almost absolutely in the rest of the private speeches" aside from *Against Makartatos*. He also does not contrast Demosthenes' use of the term with that of the other orators.

Another feature of Demosthenes' hyperbolic style is his use of exclamations with the particle νή followed by the name of a god. Other orators are more sparing with this exclamation: Dinarchus (2.8; 3.15) uses it twice in three speeches, Lycurgus (*Leocr.* 75, 140) twice in a long speech, Andocides (1.3, 15) in a long speech about religious matters, Isaeus (3.24, 73; 4.20; 6.61; 7.33) only five times in twelve speeches, Hyperides once in *Against Lycophron* (fr. 5) and three times in *Against Euxenippus* (4, 14, 27), and Isocrates never. In the speeches attributed to Antiphon (6.40) Zeus and all the gods are invoked only once. The only other orator to employ this exclamation many times in one speech is Aeschines (1.28, 73, 81, 88, 98, 108) in *Against Timarchus* in which he tries to create a solemn persona for himself when making his charges of prostitution against the defendant. In his other two speeches, Aeschines (2.130; 3.172, 217, 228) uses the exclamation four times. In cases on public charges, Demosthenes goes overboard: five times in *On the Crown* (18.101, 117, 129, 251, 294), twelve times in *On the False Embassy* (19.24, 46, 52, 149, 158, 188, 215, 222, 235, 262, 272, 285), eight times in *Against Leptines* (20.3, 20, 38, 56, 58, 75, 151, 161), thirteen times in *Against Meidias* (21.2, 3, 41, 88, 98, 99, 109, 149, 160, 198 (twice), 222), six times in *Against Aristocrates* (23.61, 64, 107, 124, 166, 194) and eight times in *Against Timocrates* (24.37, 94, 99, 121, 125, 126, 176, 202). These exclamations occur less frequently in the private speeches in the Demosthenic corpus with two exceptions. In most cases they are found only once or twice, which is partly but not entirely due to the shorter length of these speeches.[53] Demosthenes also uses the exclamation in speeches delivered to the assembly but in most cases less frequently. It is no accident that aside from Lycurgus (*Leocr.* 1-2) Demosthenes (18.1, 8) is the only orator to begin a court speech with a prayer to the gods (cf. 141-142, 324 where he also invokes the gods).[54]

A similar expression is the particle μά followed by name of a god or the word 'gods'. This is never found in Antiphon, Andocides, Lycurgus,

53 Once in Dem. 31.10; 35.48; 38.11; 41.12; 45.11; 49.64; 52.26; 54.34; 58.64. Twice in Dem. 32.28; 33.25, 37; 37.27, 50; 40.26, 32; 42.6, 7; 55.6, 7. The only exceptions are Dem. 33.6. 39, 55, 61; 39.7, 9, 13, 14, 32; 44.33, 50, 55 (twice).

54 Cf. Wankel 1976: 105: "Doch auch ohne die Wiederholung und die ganze Proömium umgreifende Funktion wäre das Eingangsgebet ungewöhnlich. Von den erhaltenen attischen Reden beginnt nur noch Lykurgs Leocrates mit einem Gebet."

Hypereides, or Isocrates. The expression occurs in Dinarchus (1.40, 77; 2.3) only three times. In the Lysianic corpus (Lys. 6.7, 32, 38; 8.18) the expression is found three times in a speech about impiety, once in another speech and nowhere else. Aeschines (1.52, 55, 61, 69, 76, 88; 3.182, 212, 255) has the expression nine times in two speeches with six in *Against Timarchus* which, as noted above, is in keeping with its more solemn tone. Isaeus (3.25, 39, 49; 4.24; 8.29; 11.35, 36) has the expression in only four speeches. Once more, Demosthenes' use of the expression is much more frequent in his speeches for public cases, above all in *Against Meidias* where it occurs five times (18. 261, 307; 19.67, 141, 212, 285; 20.21; 21.25, 58, 139, 205, 207; 22.33; 23.48, 188; 24.28, 125, 157, 199). The expression is also found in speeches to the assembly and in fourteen private speeches in the Demosthenic corpus but not as frequently, often only once or twice. There is certainly a difference between Demosthenes and the other orators, but it is not as great as in the case of exclamations preceded by νή.

Addresses to Opponents

In his *On Types of Style* (255-264) Hermogenes discusses harshness (*trachytes*) and vehemence (*sphodrotes*) but admits that the diction that produces vehemence is like that which produces harshness. Hermogenes observes that "in a vehement passage one must make reproaches openly and clearly and in a straightforward manner without including in the passage any sentiments that tone down its severity." One of the figures that creates vehemence is apostrophe or direct address. To illustrate vehemence, Hermogenes quotes passages only from Demosthenes, including eight from *On the Crown,* and the speech *Against Aristogeiton*, which is a Hellenistic forgery but imitates Demosthenes' style, and from no other orator.[55]

55 Cf. Ronnet 1951: 125: "La violence y éclate notamment quand l'apostrophe s'adresse, non à l'assemblée, mais à l'adversaire, dans les plaidoyers; c'est alors un cri de haine ou de mépris."

Demosthenes is not the only orator who uses apostrophe in forensic speeches, but he uses these addresses more frequently than other orators. Speakers in orations attributed to Lysias use them in *Against Andocides* (6.49), *On the Olive Stump* (7.20-22), *Against Theomnestus* (10.8-9; 12-14; 11.4, 6), and *Against Nicomachus* (30.5, 19). When questioning Eratosthenes Lysias (12.25-26) addresses him directly several times and concludes by using the superlative and the vocative to call him "the most wicked person in the world" (ὦ σχετλιώτατε πάντων).[56] This exclamation is unique in the *corpus Lysiacum* and is found only in a speech in which Lysias is accusing the defendant of responsibility for his brother's death. Despite the severity of Eratosthenes' crimes, Lysias (12.32, 34) addresses him only twice more in the rest of the speech. The accuser of Agoratus also addresses the defendant when questioning him (Lys. 13.32) and later addresses him when recounting his actions (Lys. 13.26-28, 53, 61). But this accuser never couples the vocative with an insulting adjective. It is striking that these addresses are found only in prosecutions for homicide (*Against Eratosthenes*, *Against Agoratus*), in a prosecution for slander about homicide (*Against Theomnestus*), in one case in which the defendant is threatened with very serious penalties (*On the Olive Stump*), and in two cases in which the defendant is charged with impiety (*Against Andocides*). This use of the apostrophe is not found in other kinds of speeches, especially in those where the charges are less serious. Even in the speeches containing these addresses, they do not take up much space. The speeches of Antiphon all concern trials for murder, but only one speaker addresses his opponents directly and very briefly (Antiph. 5.15-16).

In *On the Mysteries* Andocides (1.95, 99-100) addresses Epichares and calls him "a malicious accuser and a damned fox" (ὦ συκοφάντα καὶ ἐπίτριπτον κίναδος), but this passage is unique in the speech. When attacking the personal life of Callias (1.124-131) and the shady business

56 The second person singular of the personal pronoun is found in direct speech several times: Lys. 1. 16, 18, 21, 26; 12.14; 28.6; 32.13, 15, 16. Reiske proposed to emend the reading of the manuscripts τοιαύτας οἵας at Lys. 26.20 to τοσαῦτά σοι, but Carey retains the reading of the manuscript in the *OCT*.

deals of Agyrrhius (1.133-136), however, Andocides does not address them but refers to them in the third person singular.[57]

Isaeus is sparing in his use of apostrophes which occur once or twice in only three of eleven speeches (5.43, 46; 6.25, 26; 11.4).[58] These are mostly in rhetorical questions. It is striking that Lycurgus never addresses Leocrates with the second person when accusing him of treason.

In *Against Timarchus* Aeschines (1.121-124, 127, 131, 157) addresses Timarchus twice and Demosthenes twice but in all but one case (121-124) very briefly. In *On the False Embassy* Aeschines addresses Demosthenes in around fifteen sections, about once every twelve sections, which is above the norm.[59] There are far fewer in *Against Ctesiphon*.[60]

In most of his speeches Demosthenes is not very different from the other orators. In *Against Leptines* he addresses his opponent six times (20.63, 98, 102, 129, 144, 149 (someone else), 160), but in *Against Meidias* only in two sections (Dem. 21.133-135, 204; at 207 he addresses Eubulus) and in *Against Androtion* five times (Dem. 22.29, 54, 64, 66, 68). In *On the False Embassy* Demosthenes does not address Aeschines directly in the first part of the speech, but addresses him twenty times in the second part of the speech.[61] In *On the Crown*, however, Demosthenes outdoes himself: in roughly three hundred sections of the speech Aeschines is di-

57 As in the *corpus Lysiacum* the second person singular of the personal pronoun is found in direct reported speech several times in *On the Mysteries*: 22, 41, 49, 50, 63, 116, 119, 120.

58 This excludes addresses to the clerk and to the judges. At Isae. 8.24 there is an address in direct speech.

59 2. 59, 78, 79, 96, 123, 138, 140, 142, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 163 (2x), 165-66. There are several addresses in reported direct speech and several addresses to the judges.

60 Aeschin. 3.131, 200 (Ctesiphon), 209-210, 239, 242 (Ctesiphon).

61 Dem. 19.189, 191, 199-200, 222, 237-38, 240, 241, 242, 243, 245, 250, 255, 290-93 (Eubulus), 335-36. In 20 sections, all concentrated in the second half of the speech – 20 out of 180.

rectly addressed in sixty-nine sections, that is, about once every 4.3 sections.[62] This is without parallel in Attic oratory. *On the Crown* is the most aggressive speech in Attic oratory.[63]

It is one thing to analyse Demosthenes' choice of vocabulary, but it is another to feel the emotional effect of this torrent of abuse. To give an impression of his style in action, I give a translation of a passage from *On the Crown* (18.129-130) about Aeschines' family. Scholars have studied these passages for their use of comic terms, but I cannot recall any scholar observing that one can find nothing similar to this abuse in the other orators.

> I am at no loss for information about you and your family; but I am at a loss where to begin. Shall I relate how your father Tromes was a slave in the house of Elpias, who kept an elementary school near the Temple of Theseus, and how he wore shackles on his legs and a timber collar round his neck? or how your mother practised daylight nuptials in an outhouse next door to Heros the bone-setter, and so brought you up to act in tableaux vivants and to excel in minor parts on the stage? However, everybody knows that without being told by me. Shall I tell you how Phormio the boatswain, a slave of Dio of Phrearrii, uplifted her from that chaste profession? But I protest that, however well the story becomes you, I am afraid I may be thought to have chosen topics unbecoming to myself. I will pass by those early days and begin with his conduct of his own life; for indeed it has been no ordinary life, but such as is an abomination to free people. Only recently—recently, do I say? Why it was only the day before yesterday when he became simultaneously an Athenian and an orator, and, by the addition of two syllables, transformed his father from Tromes to Atrome-

62 18.11 (you are malicious), 41, 66 (I ask you), 69-70 (question), 73, 76, 82, 97, 113 (you sycophant), 120 (you are stupid), 121-22, 124-25, 128 (*katharma*), 129-31 (family), 140 (you will never wash out), 162 (*kinados*), 180 (you were useless), 191, 196-97, 199-200, 209, 217 (I would like to ask Aeschines a question), 222, 256-67, 270-73, 280-86, 289-90, 297-99, 309-13, 315-20. In 69 sections out of 324, but one has to deduct the documents.

63 This point is missed by Yunis 2001 and MacDowell 2009.

> tus, and bestowed upon his mother the high sounding name of Glaucothea, although she was universally known as the Banshee, a nickname she owed to the pleasing diversity of her acts and experiences – it can have no other origin. (Trans. Vince & Vince 1926)

Demosthenes slanders Aeschines' father by calling him a slave, insinuates that his mother was a prostitute, and casts doubt on his rights to Athenian citizenship. The level of verbal violence is almost without parallel in Attic oratory. There are other terms I could discuss in Demosthenes' arsenal such as his accusations of using deception or his use of terms meaning 'to hire' (18.21) or the language of buying and selling (19.13, 16, 118, etc.), all used as metaphors for bribery and treason. As Wankel observes, "Als Schimpfwort der politischen Diabole findet sich μισθωτός in der klassischen Literatur außer bei D. (...) nur bei Deinarch, in Anlehnung an D.'s Stil."[64] Here too Demosthenes goes far beyond the other orators. But I hope that I have provided enough evidence to show that Demosthenes' style is unusual for its offensive vocabulary and aggressive tone.

A Speculative Conclusion

At this point readers are probably asking themselves, what is wrong with this man? Why is he so angry? What is bothering him? We cannot explain this invective by saying that this was simply the way the Athenians spoke in court because most other litigants do not express themselves in this fashion. Like other populist politicians, Demosthenes took pleasure in breaking the rules or at a minimum pushing the envelope. To understand Demosthenes' style, we need to understand the personality of Demosthenes. The best place to start is with his statue, which was erected in Athens around 280 BCE and probably was the work of Polyeuktos, and exists in several copies, the best known being in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen, which my wife and I visited in December 2023. Gisela Richter has very well described how the sculptor has brilliantly conveyed the personality of Demosthenes:[65]

64 Wankel 1976: 290.

65 Richter 1984: 112-13. Cf. von den Hoff 2009 on the realism of the statue.

> "The physiognomy in all the authentic portraits of Demosthenes is always the same. They show a man between 50 and 60 years old, with an oval face, becoming pointed below; lean and lined cheeks; hair carved in short, thick curls; a clipped beard; a high forehead marked by three horizontal, undulating furrows; a long, slightly curved nose; bushy, contracted eyebrows; several deep wrinkles above the bridge of the nose; deep-set eyes, placed rather close together; three crow's feet at the outer corner of the eyes; a straight, thin-lipped, closed mouth, the lower lip drawn in, the upper covered by a thick moustache; ears protruding in their upper part. The expression is harsh, unhappy, determined – that of a noble fanatic, corresponding to what is known of Demosthenes' appearance and life. And the nervous and dignified character is brought out also in the extant statues, with their simple, diffident pose, and the harmonious composition of the folds, suggestive of his nobility. In both these respects the statue of Aeschines forms an instructive contrast."

About the portrait of Aeschines, Richter remarks:

> "His placid expression is in marked contrast to the nervous, unhappy countenance of Demosthenes."[66]

To understand his personality, we need to examine his youth and background. Demosthenes was born in 385/4 into a wealthy family but not a prominent one.[67] He does not appear to have had famous ancestors, and his father was not politically well connected. His father died when Demosthenes was eight years old.[68] His father's large estate – Demosthenes (27.9-11) estimates its value at fourteen talents – was placed in the control of three guardians, his father's nephews Aphobus and Demophon, and his friend Therippides (Dem. 27.13-15; 29.45). When Demosthenes reached the age of eighteen in 367/6 and gained control of his inheritance, he discovered that the estate was worth only one tenth of its original value (Dem. 30.15-17). After two years study with Isaeus, he brought

66 Richter 1984: 74.

67 For his date of birth see Dem. 30.15, 17 with Harris 1989: 121.

68 On the family of Demosthenes see Davies 1971: 113-23.

a case against Aphobus and won a judgment for ten talents (Dem. 29.3). Aphobus tried to strike back by claiming that one of Demosthenes' witnesses submitted false testimony (Dem. 29). After losing again, Aphobus tried to defraud him of the award by disposing of his property and fleeing to Megara. Demosthenes then brought a case against Onetor, who he claimed was holding the property of Aphobus (Dem. 30, 31). In the middle of this Thrasylochus challenged him to an exchange of property for a liturgy, which Demosthenes then had to undertake to keep his estate (Dem. 28.17).[69]

This legal ordeal must have been traumatic. Demosthenes was betrayed by members of his family and appears to have found little support. It also left him with several enemies, one of whom was connected with Meidias, an associate of the powerful politician Eubulus, who was in control of Athenian finances starting in the late 350s (Dem. 21.205-207). He then proceeded to make more enemies by helping to prosecute Cephisodotus in 359 (Dem. 19.180; 23.5, 167-168; Aeschin. 3.52) and in 355/4 to prosecute Leptines, who was defended by Leodamas, Aristophon, Cephisodotus, and Deinias (Dem. 20.146-153).[70] He also wrote speeches for clients attacking Charidemus (Dem. 23), Timocrates (Dem. 24), and Androtion (Dem. 22). By the year 350 Demosthenes had succeeded in alienating many important people. One can also see his isolation in his prosecution of Meidias in 346 where he admits that he could find no one to testify for him (Dem. 21.136-142). Demosthenes allied himself with Timarchus to attack Aeschines when he presented his accounts for the Second Embassy in 346, but Aeschines was able to convict Timarchus, who lost his rights as a citizen. When Demosthenes brought his case against Aeschines to court in 343, it is clear that he had the support of none of the other ambassadors who went to Macedon for the negotiations with Philip (Dem. 19.116-117). By contrast, Aeschines had the support of several prominent politicians such as Phocion, Nausicles and Eubulus (Aeschin. 2.170, 184). And perhaps the best evidence for Demosthenes' lack of confidence was the attack of nerves he had when addressing

69 Demosthenes (21.78-79) gave another version of the event in 346. One should not try to reconcile the two versions – see Harris 2008: 114 n. 132 (*pace* MacDowell 1990: 297).

70 On these politicians see Canevaro 2016: 409-14.

Philip during the First Embassy in 346, which is described by Aeschines (2.34-35).

> At last came Demosthenes' turn to speak. All were intent, expecting to hear a masterpiece of eloquence. For, as we learned afterwards, his extravagant boasting had been reported to Philip and his court. So, when all were thus prepared to listen, this creature mouthed forth a proem – an obscure sort of thing and as dead as fright could make it; and getting on a little way into the subject he suddenly stopped speaking and stood helpless; finally, he collapsed completely. Philip saw his plight and bade him take courage, and not to think, as though he were an actor on the stage, that his collapse was an irreparable calamity, but to keep cool and try gradually to recall his speech, and speak it off as he had prepared it. But he, having been once upset, and having forgotten what he had written, was unable to recover himself; nay, on making a second attempt, he broke down again. Silence followed; then the herald bade us withdraw. (Trans. Adams 1919)

There is no reason to question his account, which is supported by the testimony of the eight other ambassadors present at the meeting (Aeschin. 2.44-46).[71] Demosthenes was deeply insecure, and his political isolation only deepened his sense of paranoia. Demosthenes was also embarrassed by his weak voice, which Aeschines frequently mocked. As a result, Demosthenes was hyper-sensitive and prone to overreact emotionally. As Buffon wrote, "le style, c'est tout l'homme" – he saw that "on peut connoître l'humeur d'une personne dans son stile." His paranoia also shaped his policy toward Philip of Macedon, which led to the disastrous defeat at Chaeronea. But a discussion of Demosthenes' policy errors and their consequences would take me far beyond my topic in this essay.[72]

71 *Pace* Worthington 2013: 23-24, who tries to dismiss the account as 'fake news' and ignores the testimony of the other ambassadors.

72 An early version of this talk was given to an audience at the University of Katowice. I would like to thank Jakub Filonik and Peter O'Connell for reading a draft and offering very helpful comments.

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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.[1] One example is invective, characterized primarily by verbal violence.[2] 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.

Priscilla Gontijo Leite: '*Hybris* in Demosthenes' *Against Conon*' C&M Supplementum 3 (2025) 169-187.

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'.[3] *Hybris* is characterized by violence in which there is a clear intention to harm another person and the perpetrator feels a sense of superiority.[4] Therefore, it is not clear, even in legislation,[5] 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*,[6] where it occurs 131 times.[7] In general, *hybris* is used by the orators to negatively characterize opponents and point out inappropriate social behaviour.[8] 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:*[9]

> 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 not evil. (Arist. *Rh.* 1378b)[10]

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.[11] 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.[12] 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.[13] The attack was so severe that he was bedridden for several days (Dem. 54.1-25) and suffered from fever due to haemorrhaging,[14] 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.[15] 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.[16] This is an example of comic invective that evokes malicious laughter at the expense of Ariston's identity, which is consequently belittled.[17]

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,[18] 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.*[19] The choice of procedure is presented in the very first paragraph:

> [1] I was assaulted (ὑβρισθείς), 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* (ὕβρεως 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 *aikeia* 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.[20]

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.[21] 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 *traumatos 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.[22] 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.[23]

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 explores 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.[24] 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 (ὑβρίσμην). 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).[25] 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.[26] 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.[27] 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).[28]

> [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.[29] 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.[30] 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.[31] 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.[32] 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.[33] 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.[34] 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 (ὕβρεως) 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.[35] 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*.[36] 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 phallocentric Athenian culture[37] 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.[38]

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.[39]

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*.[40] 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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ALL ROADS LEAD TO *PSOGOS*: RHETORICAL STRATEGIES IN LATE ANTIQUE INVECTIVE*

By Alberto J. Quiroga Puertas

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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