The Mind’s Theatre: Envy, Hybris and Enargeia in Demosthenes’ Against Meidias

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Introduction

In recent years, scholars have done much to elucidate the ways in which speakers manipulated envy in the public communication of classical Athens. Relevant discussions, especially Cairns (2003), Fisher (2003), Konstan (2006), Sanders (2014) and Spatharas (2014) emphasise the ideological uses of the emotion rather than address the empirical and, hence, insoluble question of whether the masses of citizens fostered sentiments of envy towards the elites of wealth. At the same time, in an important cultural study, Cairns has shown that envy (along with erotic love) is an emotion which ancient thinking associates with vision, a sense that ancient folk psychology and science construes as particularly haptic. The present contribution rests on a notion which is well-established in ancient rhetorical theory as early as Gorgias, namely that, by virtue of its representational qualities, speech induces mental images and, thereby, arouses emotions. In Gorgias’ eyes (cp. Helen 9–14 on logos and 15–19 on vision), visual logos causes emotional reactions whose impact on human behaviour is commensurate with the impact of sentiments caused by the products of visual arts—especially statues and paintings. Notably, Gorgias’ discussion seems to construe the emotive responses elicited by poetry and visual arts as comparable to the sentiments generated by the sights that we perceive in real life situations (Helen 16–17). Furthermore, in his Poetics (1453b1–12) Aristotle famously postulates that the tragic emotions of fear and pity can be elicited by opsis, but they should properly be aroused by the narrative itself. Aristotle thus seems to indi-

* I wish to extend my warmest thanks to Brenda Griffith-Williams for reading my paper and improving the style and argument. I would also like to thank the editors of this volume for offering useful suggestions. Naturally, I am the only responsible for the remaining mistakes.

1 See especially Cairns (2003); Fisher (2003); Saïd (2003); Sanders (2014); Spatharas (2011) and (2014).

cate that through the activation of audiences’ imagination, verbal narratives yield mental images and thereby cause the emotions, which are characteristic of tragic poetry.\(^3\) Even a cursory reading of Greek tragedy shows that the most unsettling events, events which would provide modern Hollywood producers the opportunity for fast-paced action movies, are described in messengers’ speeches.\(^4\)

As I propose to show in the pages that follow, visual narratives rather than just the ‘dramatic’ aspects of forensic oratory to which modern scholarship usually turns its attention are extremely important for what ancient rhetoricians describe as *pathopoiía*. A full understanding of these ‘dramatic’ aspects of forensic speeches requires discussion of the visual qualities of forensic storytelling rather than just intertextual approaches emphasising the interfaces between oratory and tragedy or approaches that focus solely on the performative features that oratory shares with drama.\(^5\) My cognitive approach emphasises that the visual qualities of forensic narratives enhance significantly the “emotion scripts”\(^6\) that speakers construct as a way of directing judges’ attention to their opponents’ transgression of social norms. These scripts, I argue, are so constructed as to induce judges to use their social knowledge and, thereby, urge them to supply the normative meaning of speakers’ stories.

Because of the limitations of the present contribution, I turn my attention to two significant passages from Demosthenes’ *Against Meidias* (72–73 and especially 158–159) which I use as test cases. This chapter, thus, finds its focus in Demosthenes’ use of visual storytelling as a means of determining the hybristic aspects of Meidias’ conduct and delineating the misuse of his wealth, thereby appealing to jurors’ legitimate envy.\(^7\) *Enargeía* (‘vividness’), I suggest, is an

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\(^3\) See Blundell et al. (2013) 13–14. Systematic approaches to “mental images” involve the notion of *phantasia*, which is foreshadowed in Gorgias’ understanding of both speech and sights as material “engraved” or “stamped” on our minds. See Webb (2009b), ch. 5. Blundell et al. (2013) discuss modern scientific evidence indicating that our responses to verbal and visual narratives are different in degree but not in kind from our responses prompted in our real life interactions. This evidence casts doubt on the descriptive accuracy of the term “aesthetic” emotions.

\(^4\) See Zanker (1981); Fantuzzi and Hunter (2004) 443 rightly point out that Longinus’ examples of *enargeía* in poetry derive mainly from messengers’ speeches.

\(^5\) See for example, Bers (1994); Hall (1995); Fantham (2002). As the editors of this volume point out in the Introduction (p. 3), “performance encompasses the possibility of more subtle communication between the speaker and the audience than mere delivery”.

\(^6\) On emotion scripts see Cairns (2008).

\(^7\) The question of whether the speech was actually delivered in an Athenian court remains open. On this point see MacDowell (1990) 23–28.