

The class credentials of fist-fights in Aeschin. 1.135-7  
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In *Ag. Timarchos* (1.135-6), Aeschines says the defense will bring witnesses to prove Aeschines got into quarrels and fist-fights while making a pest of himself at the gymnasium. The defense (as Aeschines reports it) characterized Aeschines as a ridiculous figure: crazed for boys, and boorish, indecent and hubristic in his pursuit (1.135-7). In response, Aeschines owns that he is often *erotikos*, and as a result has been engaged in rivalries and fights. While Aeschines does try to soften one charge (he denies that his love poetry is inappropriately suggestive, 1.136-7), he makes no attempt to soften the acknowledgment of the fisticuffs. Rather “he accepts [the allegation] as true with so little sign of shame that we can easily imagine the words spoken in a tone of pride.”<sup>1</sup> The moral evaluation of fist-fights over *eros* elsewhere in Athenian oratory ranges from embarrassing but expected and tolerated behavior to the drunken *hubris* of overweening elites.<sup>2</sup> Even in a generous assessment, a defendant against a charge of wounding (Lys.3) expresses embarrassment at the public airing of his erotic and pugilistic activities (Lys.3.3-4, 9).<sup>3</sup> Aeschines’ ready and unqualified admission requires explanation.

Timarchos’ defense likely used Aeschines’ brawling to portray him as an uncultured *hubristes* (which accusation Aeschines turns back on Timarchos, 1.137). Aeschines recasts fights over *paidika* to belong with just love and socially acceptable paederasty, upgrading it from tolerated fault to part of a laudable ideal. By giving himself a pardonable vice, Aeschines refutes his opponents’ accusations of hypocritical prudery (1.135), and reinterprets his opponents’ evidence of his brutishness as a natural consequence of the *eros* to which he as a humane fellow is susceptible (1.137). Aeschines uses the elite connotations of fist-fights over *eros* to bolster his class credentials as a cultured man, in the face of his opponents’ allegations of uneducated boorishness.<sup>4</sup> The stereotypical high class status of such battling lovers is elsewhere only articulated explicitly by the prosecutor Ariston to demonstrate his opponent’s elite *hubris*.<sup>5</sup> However, Aeschines embraces his fisticuffs because he and the jurors likewise assign an elite *caché* to the model of expected and tolerated battles over *paidika*. It behooves Aeschines to enhance his image as a gentleman by espousing a fault of the elite.

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<sup>1</sup> Aes.1.132-3, 135, Fisher p. 281, Dover p.40-2, 54 (quoted).

<sup>2</sup> The defendant against a charge of wounding with intent to kill (Lys.3) indicates fights over *paidika* are common and not a matter serious enough for the courts (Lys. 3.9, 19, 40, Cohen p. 136). Ariston, prosecuting Konon for battery (Dem. 54), paints his opponents as drunken, elite *hubristai* (Dem.54.9, 14-5, 20). While Ariston says Konon claimed the brawl was over *hetairai* (Dem.54.14), his account does not agree (54.3-9), suggesting that the jurors would have considered that circumstance a mitigating factor. Young men were thought especially prone to fights over *eros* (Lys.3.4, Dem.54.14, 21-2, Cohen p. 137). See also Dover p. 55-7, Cohen p.119-42.

<sup>3</sup> Lys. 3 and Dem. 54 depict the opponents as aggressors, and the speaker of Lys.3 expresses a reluctance to retaliate (3.9), suggesting that forbearance was the moral high road (Lys.3.6-20, D.54.3-9, Herman p.107-9,115).

<sup>4</sup> Fisher p. 276, 280.

<sup>5</sup> Dem.54.13, 14, 15, 17, 20, 24. See also Cohen p. 137.