

Performing the Law:
The theatrical features of Demosthenes' *On the Crown*

“Imagine that you are not in a court, but in a theater”. With these words, Aeschines addresses the audience in his speech *Against Ctesiphon* 153. The major aim of this paper is to show that this act of imagination was not so difficult either for Aeschines' or for Demosthenes' audience. A strong connection between theater and rhetoric, court and stage exists. The old critical analysis, however, paid attention primarily (if not exclusively) to textual issues such as the recognition of grammatical points and the use of speeches as sources of information about historical and legal issues. The fact, however, that the speeches are representations of oral performances moves the interest of scholars to the study of the relationship between rhetoric and performance (Carey 1994; Bers 1994; Slater 1995; Sifakis 2002; Hall 2006). However, these works are more like a survey of ancient theories about speeches' theatrical nature. Some studies on Demosthenes' *On the Crown* appeared over the last few years (Classen 1991; Easterling 1999; Duncan 2006); however, these works include merely occasional references to the theatrical features of this masterpiece of rhetorical artistry.

This paper aims to cover this lack of a systematic argument about the theatrical nature of *On the Crown*. I will elaborate on the study of the abovementioned speech, examining Demosthenes' use of four theatrical devices in his speech: the emotive power of a rhetorical argument (*pathos*), the tragic and comic language and imagery, the construction of characters (*ēthopoia*), and delivery (*hypocrisis*). I will show that all these are effective means of persuasion.

The audience is the common evaluator of an onstage performance and of a speech in court. Demosthenes just like an actor shares the same techniques in order to elicit the hearers' sympathy. One of these techniques is the use of emotional appeals (*pathos*). In *On the Crown*, Demosthenes tries to control the emotions of the audience and gain its *eunoia* (favor). He does so by presenting himself and Athenian *demos* as heroes, who struggle to protect their fatherland and the other Greek cities from the Macedonian menace. The main emotional aim of Demosthenes' speech seems to be the same as

tragedy's aim, which is *katharsis*: the orator tries to “purge” the audience's negative emotions regarding his policy towards Philip, despite its sorry consequences for Athens.

Second, *On the Crown's* connection with tragedy remains strong throughout the speech. Perhaps the most obvious example is the description of Elatea's destruction in section 169. The orator maneuvers the narrative in such a way that allows us to imagine the Athenian assembly as a tragic orchestra with a noisy crowd coming and going, like the entrance of chorus on the stage.

Third, *On the Crown* contains a subtle construction of characters (*ēthopoiia*). Demosthenes himself is like a “stage director”; he writes one scenario for himself and another for Aeschines. He presents himself as a tragic hero, since he fought to protect his fatherland contrary to the gods' will (positive *ēthopoiia*). On the other hand, the speaker used comic language and *topoi* to attack Aeschines and vilify his life and career, showing that he is a dangerous comic buffoon, a comic impostor, a political hireling and a traitor to his *polis* (negative *ēthopoiia*).

Finally, Demosthenes' strategies of audience's manipulation include the use of *hypocrisis*. This term is multifarious; it refers to speaker's voice and gestures. It is also a means of striving to change the hearers' emotion and an effective way to persuade both the jurymen and the onlookers. As I argue, there are specific parts of this speech, which the orator may have delivered by elevating the volume of his voice or using gestures, in order to emphasize the emotional background of the context.

Selected Bibliography

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