

## Medical Imagery in Demosthenes' *On the Crown*: Hippocratic or Tragic Influence?

Both Wooten (1979) and Rowe (1966) have noted the presence of medical language in Demosthenes' speeches against Aeschines, *On the Crown* (18) and *Against the False Embassy* (19). The most striking examples are found in *On the Crown*: there, Demosthenes compares Aeschines to an old fracture or sprain that causes pain when the body is ill (§198); and he characterizes Aeschines as a charlatan physician who refuses to deliver a prognosis to his patient, but upon his death, boasts that he could have healed him (§243). Wooten argues that this medical language is Hippocratic in origin; whereas Rowe maintains that Demosthenes draws on the language of comedy to portray Aeschines as an unfit leader of Athens. This paper aims to show that the language of tragedy may have influenced Demosthenes.

As Clarke-Kosak (2004) points out, the Athenian tragedians made use of Hippocratic imagery, especially that of the incompetent healer to emphasize the danger of the transgressive individual. In this paper, I draw attention to the similarities between Demosthenes' comparison of Aeschines to a charlatan physician and Sophocles' description of Oedipus as an incompetent healer in *Oedipus Tyrannus*. I put forward two reasons for this tragic influence: namely, Demosthenes' desire to depict the trial as a potential tragedy and to allude to Aeschines' former career as a tragic actor for comic effect. I show that while Aeschines, like Oedipus, presents himself as a healer to his sick city, he is in fact the cause of the disease spreading throughout the body politic (*OT* 59-61, Dem.19.259-262). My analysis demonstrates that the idea of being contagious is peculiar to tragedy and does not appear in the Hippocratic corpus (Jouanna 2012). Thus, I argue that Demosthenes appeals to the language of tragedy to create a powerful and persuasive character assassination of Aeschines. In doing so, he persuades the jury to act like healers themselves and politically excise Aeschines from the civic body.

Works Cited:

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