

Anatomy of an Inheritance (Dem. 27 and 28)

Demosthenes began his career with the prosecution of his own guardians for losing his inheritance. And yet, even though the speeches that constitute the prosecution of his guardian Aphobos, Dem. 27 and 28, are his earliest speeches, they nevertheless exhibit the same rhetorical strategies he would use in his later speeches. In this paper I focus on Demosthenes' use of visual and proxemic language in these speeches; I argue that he uses vivid language deliberately to highlight the blatant theft and misappropriation of his estate and to make the crimes all but visible to the jurors. Demosthenes' language evokes the intimate interiority of home in the mind's eye of the jurors, making them witnesses to both the tenderness and the cruelty of family life and allowing them to experience his loss as if it were their own. His strategy of rhetorically inviting the jurors into his house inverts an attempt by the guardian's agents to forcibly enter his house while carrying out an *antidosis*, or property exchange, in order to prevent the lawsuit from going forward.

In this paper, I draw on scholarship on family life in Classical Athens (e.g. Humphreys 1983, Cox 1998, Patterson 1998), on the language and rhetoric of the Attic Orators (e.g. Carey 1994, Gagarin 2014), and Athenian property law (e.g. Gabrielson 1986, Christ 1990, Johnstone 2003). By bringing these bodies of research into communication, I demonstrate that Demosthenes emotional, rhetorical, and legal elements together in his guardian speeches for an effective, and affecting, argument.

I argue that Demosthenes uses language connected to sight, showing, and hiding, repeating words such as ἐπιδείκνυμι, φανερός/ἀφανής, and φαίνομαι/ἀφανίζω to emphasize the paradox of a manifest concealment – the guardians, in their ineptitude, left behind plentiful evidence of their theft. He uses witness testimonies – depositions brought forward and read from

physical tablets – as visible evidence, in contrast to the will that the guardians caused to disappear. Demosthenes’ visual language also allows the jurors to become witnesses themselves, inviting them into his home to take the place of the guardians, relatives who betrayed the closeness of the family bond. He then juxtaposes his own openness and vulnerability with the guardians’ devious attempt to put a stop to the trial by taking over Demosthenes’ property under the pretext of a property exchange. He connects his own and his guardians’ behavior with visible and hidden property (φανερὰ οὐσία, ἀφανῆς οὐσία), the former associated with community networks, the latter with secrecy and concealment.

An analysis of the language of Demosthenes 27 and 28 (*Against Aphobos I and II*) reveals that in this speech, Demosthenes uses words with the -φαν- and -δεικ- roots with an extraordinarily high frequency, often in close proximity to one another. This usage of language connected to seeing and showing creates a sense of *enargeia*, or vividness, a rhetorical strategy whose efficacy, particularly in Demosthenes’ later speeches, has been addressed in several recent monographs (e.g. O’Connell 2017, Serafim 2017). Demosthenes’ use of visual language draws the audience’s attention to a description of the tender moment when his father, on his deathbed, passed the seven-year-old Demosthenes into the custody of the guardians. Demosthenes contrasts the intimacy of this scene with the guardians’ betrayal of their former friend’s trust and the damage they went on to do to Demosthenes’ family and his estate. These two speeches show Demosthenes arguing in his first trial with the same proficiency and elegance that characterizes his later speeches, using compelling arguments about the importance of family, trust, and openness to transform this deeply personal issue – an interfamilial conflict – into a situation that the jurors can see, and feel, for themselves.

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