

Ariston's Tragic Illness: Medical Language in *Demosthenes 54*

The extent to which medical knowledge permeated into ancient Greek public consciousness and popular discourse remains the subject of scholarly debate, yet Hippocratic allusions and intertexts have been identified in the literature of many genres, including comedy, tragedy, and oratory (Nutton 1992; Kosak 2004; Sternberg 2006; Das 2015; Totelin 2015). This omnipresence of medical language would suggest that audiences were expected to understand their referents, as the comedic, tragic, or rhetorical effects often rely upon an understanding of these references.

Demosthenes in particular appropriates medical language in his orations, typically doing so through elaborate metaphors that equate politics with disease or the body (Das 2015). In 54 *Against Conon*, however, Demosthenes gives a uniquely referential description of the condition that his speaker, Ariston, endured (*Dem.* 54.11-12). After describing Conon and his associates' violent attack, Demosthenes recounts the illness that Ariston developed from this bodily trauma. Ariston's symptoms serve as proof of Conon's *hybris* in this case, underscoring an important connection between the two evidence-based *technai* of oratory and medicine (cf. Holmes 2007).

While Carey and Reid (1985) have suggested that this medical language was highly technical and served to impress the audience, who would have been unfamiliar with this terminology, it seems instead to serve a more important and more nuanced rhetorical function. Through an analysis of the medical language in this section of *Against Conon* (*Dem.* 54.11-12), I will show that Demosthenes's references are too specific and intentional to be discounted as medical jargon intended to imbue the speaker with authority. Rather, the language creates productive, inter-genre dialogues between his description of Ariston's suffering, suffering in the

Hippocratic *corpus*, and tragic descriptions of suffering. The references in this passage allude both to the conditions of *apostasis* and *empyema*, as described in Hippocratic treatises, and to the symptoms of Philoctetes, described by Sophocles in his *Philoctetes*. I argue that Demosthenes uses these allusions and dialogues to disgust his audience and, ultimately, to characterize Ariston as a man who passively endures unjust suffering and heroically overcomes a gruesome, dangerous illness. In order for this characterization to have been rhetorically effective, it must have been understood, at least in part, by the audience, suggesting that they would have had some working awareness of medical terminology and writings.

Bibliography

- Carey, C. and R.A. Reid. *Demosthenes: Selected Private Speeches. Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Cirillo, Thomas. "Transferable Disgust in *Demosthenes 54: Against Conon*." *Syllecta Classica* 20 (2009): 1-30.
- Das, Allison. *Medical Language in the Speeches of Demosthenes*. Diss. Seattle: University of Washington, 2015.
- Hall, Edith. "Lawcourt Dramas: The Power of Performance in Greek Forensic Oratory." *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 40 (1995): 39-58.
- Holmes, Brooke. *The Symptom and the Subject: The Emergence of the Physical Body in Ancient Greece*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.
- Kosak, Jennifer Clarke. *Heroic Measures: Hippocratic Medicine in the Making of Euripidean Tragedy*. *Studies in Ancient Medicine*, 30. Leiden: Brill, 2004.

Sternberg, Rachel Hall. *Tragedy Offstage: Suffering and Sympathy in Ancient Athens*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.

Totelin, Laurence. "Hippocratic and Aristophanic Recipes: A Comparative Study." In *Ancient Concepts of the Hippocratic*. Ed. Lesley Dean-Jones and Ralph M. Rosen. *Studies in Ancient Medicine* 46. Leiden: Brill, 2015.

Tzanetou, Angeliki. "A Generous City: Pity in Athenian Oratory and Tragedy." In *Pity and Power in Ancient Athens*. Ed. Rachel Hall Sternberg. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005: 98-122.