

The Language of Delivery and the Presentation of Character: Rhetorical Action in Demosthenes' *Against Meidias*¹

T Scholarship on the traditional canon of rhetorical delivery has traditionally worked from within a set of three related assumptions. First, delivery is understood to exist primarily as either extraneous or supplemental to the complete speech-text. Kathleen Welch notes this tendency to reduce rhetorical arts to three canons (invention, arrangement, and style) in her discussion of the "Heritage school" of rhetoric. But the argument goes back to Aristotle (III. I. 1–6), while Whately in Book III of his *Elements of Rhetoric* lays out most thoroughly the arguments against delivery being included within the scope of rhetoric. Second, delivery is said to function through what Cicero calls a "language of the body" (*De Oratore* 179, III.223). This view of delivery as a "language" of gestures, looks, and tones continues in Quintilian (*Institutes* 259, XI.III.30; 293–301, XI.III.92–109) and Bulwer (*Chirologia* and *Chironomia* 5–7), and it reappears in current redefinitions of delivery as "communication" and "media" (see, for example, the essays in Reynolds, and in Ede et al. 428–37). Third, delivery is understood to work primarily through emotional appeals. Aristotle makes this connection explicit: Delivery "is a matter of how the voice should be used in expressing each emotion" (218, 3.1.4; see also Quintilian 243–45; XI. III. 2–3), while Bulwer builds his work upon this correspondence between a gesture and an emotion (I weep, I admire, I explode in anger).

This three-part assessment has more recently been seconded in modified form by Joseph and Sonkowsky.² The "language of delivery," argues Sonkowsky, seems to have been "involved directly in [the] labors of writing in the same way as the language of words, both of which were to be expressed together in the spoken performance" (257; see also Joseph 29). In this view gesturo-vocal composition proceeds along the same lines as verbal composition because both are languages that unfold in tandem through the compositional process.

As Aristotle makes clear, the emotional appeal of delivery is tied to its linguistic structure, and both to its supplemental status: As a (secondary) language of emotions, delivery remains subordinate to language proper, that is, to verbal discourse. While appeals from character and logic accumulate to form consistent, interwoven wholes through the entirety of a speech, emotions can

be arranged in series like words, one after another, to manipulate an audience from apathy or antipathy, to neutrality, to sympathy, support, and enthusiasm. The phrase “for each particular emotion” (*pros hekaston pathos*) in Aristotle suggests a one-to-one relationship between the emotions to be aroused and the gestures appropriate to each. For Aristotle then, as for Bulwer and his followers, a speech develops through the sequential coordination of invented words and accompanying gesturo-vocal elements (gestures, expressions, tones): Clasp the breast here (for pity), slow down (patiently enduring wrongs), right arm outstretched here (accusation), more loudly (indignation), now gather up the himation and smite the thigh (passionate conviction). I want to reexamine the theory of delivery as a supplemental language of emotions in order to revise our notion of performance artistry in rhetoric—what I will refer to as action—and to argue that rhetorical performance constitutes a nonlinguistic bodily skill of character presentation. By looking at recent work on nonverbal expression by Langer,³ I will argue that rhetorical action remains a distinct symbolic medium integral to all aspects of public speaking, not just as a supplemental canon of delivery. Finally, I will discuss Demosthenes’ oration *Against Meidias* to illustrate the role of “action” as an independent art⁴ of character-presentation and to sketch out its importance in ancient Athenian rhetorical arts.

Delivering Character

Though rhetorical treatises have often emphasized the relationship between delivery and emotions, the display of character through rhetorical action is equally important. A speech must express not only pathos, it must also arise out of an appropriate, appealing, and consistent ethos.⁵ Aristotle notes as much when he differentiates the agonistic speech meant to be performed from written speeches meant to be read privately: “Written style is the most exact; the agonistic is very much a matter of action. Of the latter there are two species: for one is ethical, the other emotional” (255; 3.12.2). Here, Aristotle suggests that the agonistic speech could rely principally either on appeals to emotion or character for their effect. What did this display of ethos mean for Aristotle?

James May suggests that the Aristotelian understanding of ethos includes three separate artistic techniques. First, the orator had to construct his own ethos in terms of established moral qualities: virtue, goodwill, and practical intelligence (*Rhetoric* 121, 2.1.5). Second, he had to know and adapt his speech to the ethos of the audience (young or old, wealthy or poor, etc.) (164, 2.12.1). And third, he could actively construct a more specific ethos appropriate to the occasion (235, 3.7.6). May suggests that the first requirement may have been an Ar-

istotelian invention, while the second seems to fit most closely Plato's recommendation in *Phaedrus* that the orator know the soul of the audience and match the speech to it.

The third strategy continued and may have been borrowed from the logographic handbook tradition, itself adapted from the poetic practice of *ethopoiia*, or character-composition. The logographic tradition discussed *ethopoiia* in terms of the parts of speech in which it was to be employed. Aristotle, too, encourages the speech writer to portray the speaker's ethos in specific terms, above and beyond the more general demands of virtue, goodwill, and practical intelligence (*Rhetoric* 277, 3.17.16 and n. 247; and 271, 3.16.8). Skill at portraying character in a speech was a valued and important feature of ancient oratory. Lysias has been singled out for his skill at *ethopoiia*, but it was a skill that every logographer and orator had to concern himself with (May 4; see also Usher; Morford), for the simple reason that, as Aristotle admits, "character is almost, so to speak, the controlling factor in persuasion" (38, 1.2.4).

Unlike pathos, which is inherently passive, describing the passions aroused in an individual from outside forces, ethos results from the actively chosen words and deeds of a person. For the ancient Greeks, character developed through habituated patterns of choice—in word and action—that gradually became a sort of second nature. One became what one did and said by choice. Aristotle notes that one way to indicate character in a judicial narrative is "to make deliberate choice clear: what the character is on the basis of what sort of deliberate choice [has been made]" (271, 3.16.8). This choice is largely revealed through portrayals of actions, gestures, and tones of voice, portrayals that could easily and powerfully be presented through rhetorical performance. "As Aeschines says of Cratylus," Aristotle observes, "that he was hissing and violently shaking his hands; for these things are persuasive since they are indications that the audience knows, pointing to the character of those they do not know" (271, 2.16.10). Orators interested in portraying character could avail themselves of nonverbal means of expression to present their own character as well as the character of their opponents (see also 272; 3.16.10).

Clearly, Aristotle has in mind here just the connection between rhetorical action and ethos articulated at 3.12 in the context of agonistic speeches. Even before the actor speaks, his observed attitude gives an indication of his message. Public oratory thus required not only skill at verbal composition but also skill of another sort—a performative imagination through which character could be imagined and portrayed. The orator would have been advised to practice styles of self-presentation consistent with the character they sought to present and to become familiar with those habits they sought to denounce. But skill at character presentation in performance was neither a species of nor an analog to the *logon*

technê that described written rhetorical arts. Rhetorical action as character presentation was something else altogether.

Rhetorical Action as Presentation

In her *Philosophy in a New Key*, Langer argues that humans are by nature symbol-making beings, but the symbols that they make are not all reducible to the model of language. In fact, says Langer, language functions as something of a special case: particularly well suited for representing ideas and images in the abstract and making them available for deliberation, but analytically distinct from other symbolic forms. Language as a *discursive* form is characterized by several important features. First, “every language has a vocabulary and a syntax” whose elements can be recombined to create new meanings (86). Secondly, individual words are “equivalent to whole combinations of other words,” making it possible “to construct a dictionary” (87). Third, words are limited to linear placement according to the rules of syntax regardless of the temporal or spatial or logical relationship that they describe. Simultaneous elements in a scene must be expressed sequentially in language.

For Langer, visual forms are “just as capable of articulation, i.e., of complex combination, as are words” (86). They comprise a symbolic system as capable of expressing meaning as discourse, though they do so in a different way under a different set of constraints. The elements of an image or action—line, color, form, direction, etc.—do not exist as units with independent meaning. They exist only as features of the whole; in isolation they are meaningless. And although discreet gestural units can be described and added serially, they have no stable existence as units: no “white space” separating one from another. Images, particularly moving images, have no vocabulary, no dictionary, and cannot be translated (87). One painting or gesture cannot be defined in terms of others, or translated into sculpture, because “their equivalence rests on their common total reference, not on bit-for-bit equivalences of parts” (88). Images are taken in, if not all at once (even with images, the eye’s focal point follows a path), then beyond the syntactic constraints of discourse.

Finally, discursive forms mean through a conventional “general reference” (88). Words *represent* objects to the mind in the abstract as concepts and are therefore reiterable even when applied to distinct concrete things. Nondiscursive symbolic forms, on the other hand, *present* concrete sense objects; “there is no intrinsic generality” (89). Images refer only to unique, concrete objects. A smitten forehead is necessarily performed by a person marked by gender, age, dress, physical makeup and look, and will not mean the same coming from somebody

else. Words bear no such trace of the external features of their user; they have no physiognomy.

Langer suggests, then, that we differentiate representational or *discursive* forms from what she calls *presentational* forms, and that we recognize both as symbolic. Thus, nonverbal or presentational media function to serve thought, deliberation, expression, and judgment as well as verbal, only they do so in different ways. In Langer's terms we might say that while *delivery* finds expression as a *discursive* element of rhetorical theory, rhetorical action remains a *presentational* form of expression and involves skills distinct from those discursive skills that texts represent well. Nevertheless, rhetorical action admits of articulation and composition insofar as it remains a symbolic form.

Action constructs meaning not by stringing gestures together but through bodily skill at imagining and performing self and others as morally toned character types, and it relies on the simultaneous coordination of nonverbal, visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile, and proprioceptive skills. The speech by Demosthenes against his political opponent, Meidias, may give us a clue as to how this works.

Demosthenes as Imaginable Character

Any attempt to reconstruct rhetorical action based on theories of delivery or texts of the speech can be provisional and partial at best. But the speech *Against Meidias* by Demosthenes is a good place to discover how action may have functioned as an independent art of character presentation. Biographers and historians such as Plutarch and Lucian record traditions of Demosthenes' oratorical practice, which, if not true, at least testify to the popular traditions concerning his character as a model of powerful oratory. What these accounts show is an orator intimately concerned to cultivate his own performative skills, and a citizen equally concerned to cultivate an honorable public character.

Further, the performance of this text itself has been the subject of debate. Scholarship has questioned whether or not the historical Demosthenes actually delivered his speech, primarily because of a comment by Aeschines (a long-time foe of Demosthenes) in *Against Ctesiphon*, where Demosthenes is accused of selling "for thirty minae both the insolence to himself and the adverse vote which the people gave against Meidias in the precinct of Dionysus" (Aeschines 349; 52). This comment has traditionally been interpreted to mean that Demosthenes was paid (or bribed) 30 minae to drop the suit. Structural and stylistic evidence has also been used to support this conclusion: The speech is apparently out of order, redundant in places, and fails to fulfill its explicit plan. Scholars conclude from this textual evidence that the version we have is not the

final version, presumably because Demosthenes as author aborted the litigation midcomposition when the financial settlement (the bribe) was accepted.⁶

Scholarly consideration of the speech has thus focused exclusively on the question of whether the speech was actually delivered. This perspective remains tied to a view of delivery as an appendage, a final “element” dependent on an already finished text (and, if not finished, therefore not delivered). But the more interesting question arises out of evidence of the speech’s imaginability, seeing rhetorical action as a constitutional feature of the speech throughout the composing process. That is, the question is not whether or not it was delivered by the historical Demosthenes but whether it is *imaginable* as the performance of a Demosthenes-character. If a Demosthenes could consult his sense of effective action appropriate to the character he wanted to portray and could imagine the case as *performable*, then literary traces of his action might be discernible in the text left to us, regardless of its historical fate.⁷ Reframing the question in this way helps us to see the traces of Demosthenic action as constitutive of his rhetorical skill and political agenda.

This line of inquiry reveals that Demosthenes’ ability to imagine styles of self-presentation inform the very substance of his speech—its invention, arrangement, and stylization—and these self-stylizations are revealed in Demosthenes’ explicit and repeated references both to his own and to Meidias’s opposing styles of self-presentation. Drawing attention to action means that Demosthenes must have given careful attention in composing the speech both to his own self-presentation and the likely conduct of Meidias *whether or not the trial ever took place*. The speech presents in word and act opposing manners of speaking and acting, implicitly asking the audience to pay less attention to what Meidias (and Demosthenes) says than to *how* he says it.

What is at stake here extends beyond the Demosthenic corpus to call into question the whole notion of rhetorical artistry as located in texts and the composition of words. If Demosthenes, perhaps the orator most favorable to writing and most willing to exploit the virtues of writing, relies on action to compose his speech as a function of his public character, then how much more did less-literate orators invent and compose imaginatively through performance? To what degree did the very invention and arrangement of argument depend upon the prior discovery and shaping of “likely” character types? To what degree, that is, was discursive skill itself determined by an orator’s ability to imagine and embody an appealing character, to think “through the body”?

Demosthenes’ text does contain important clues about the way it might (or might not) have been delivered precisely because action was in his age an integral feature of political wisdom and rhetorical artistry. We can reimagine the possible ways in which Demosthenes delivered the speech precisely because it was neces-

sary for him to imaginatively rehearse the character of his rhetorical action. That is, he had to “compose” a performable ethos consistent with his political goals and rhetorical skills. In brief, I want to suggest that Demosthenes attempted in *Against Meidias* the difficult process of presenting an honorable but submissive democratic ethos, not only to prosecute Meidias and salvage his own honor but also to present a concrete model of democratic public conduct for his audience. This democratic ethos stood in opposition to a popular physiognomy of tyrannical dispositions and behaviors that the democracy respected but feared (Ober).

In composing an ethos, orators drew from the virtuous conduct of past models and current practice (of “the people” or the “noble and good” *kalokagathoi*) because model public actions and manners of self-presentation constituted the performative repertoire out of which citizens stylized their own versions of just, virtuous behavior. How individuals acted depended, in part, on the models of public activity portrayed before them by popular and successful performers (actors, singers, bards, and especially the orator-politicians called *rhetors*). These models became the paradigms that rhetorical action could shape.

Rhetorical action in this sense stood in a dialectical relationship to public conduct and political disposition. It both drew upon conventional patterns of self-presentation even as it modified those patterns of practice (Plato’s fear about the power of dramatic representation). Action was the rhetorical manifestation of a performance culture in which virtue and wisdom depended as much on presentational skills of character composition as they did on discursive skills of linguistic invention. In *Against Meidias* we see rhetorical action as the skillful composition and presentation of opposing character types, dispositions, and political ideologies (democratic and oligarchic).

Demosthenes as *Orator Imperfectus*

Demosthenes quickly became a model of powerful speaking against which subsequent oratory could be measured, and as the apex of a tradition of rhetorical action stretching back at least to Solon. According to this popular tradition, Demosthenes’ body and voice were as blemished as his career. Texts attesting to Demosthenes’ poor speech, soft physique, and sickly constitution, and relentless self-disciplining are manifold and remained popular because they attest to the possibility that rigorous self-fashioning (despite serious handicaps) could result in rhetorical success.

Demosthenes is said to have stuttered or lisped and to have suffered a weak voice and a shortness of breath. Aeschines accuses him of being “soft” and effeminate, and Plutarch suggests the sentiment was common among the well-born: “men of refinement, like Demetrius the Phalerian, thought his manner low, ignoble and

weak" (27). All these infirmities seem to be summed up by the Greek nickname that he labored under, *Batalos*, which conveyed a double-entendre that tied his speech defects to an alleged effeminacy and indecency, as well as to "one of the parts of the body which is not decent to be named" (Plutarch 9–10).

Demosthenes succeeded then—when and to the degree that he did—as a result of careful and conscious self-fashioning, and not natural aptitude. We are told by Plutarch that Demosthenes' early attempts at addressing the Assembly were far from successful, largely due to a "weakness of voice and indistinctness of speech and shortness of breath" (VI 15). He was criticized for "throwing himself away out of weakness and lack of courage, neither facing the multitude with boldness, nor preparing his body for these forensic contests, but suffering it to wither away through slothful neglect" (VII, 17). In this case, preparing one's body suggests the sort of physical self-training that sociologist Erving Goffmann says is important for any risky and competitive field of "action," but it also implies a conscious attempt to present an appealing character to his Athenian audience: to become "hard," bold, and strong. Sources differ on the details, but several report that Demosthenes studied under an actor in order to improve his action. Quintilian claims he was trained by Andronicus of Rhodes (XI.iii.7, 247) while Plutarch mentions Isaeus and Isocrates (VI, 13).

In order to succeed as a credible speaker then, Demosthenes had to cultivate his body and voice to overcome natural infirmities. The admonishments of his critics suggest, either as common perception or reality or both, what Quintilian later makes clear: that Demosthenes failed in the Assembly because he could not display the results of the strict regimen of vigorous physical self-mastery (*enkratia*) to which all (male) Athenian citizens were expected to discipline themselves (253, XI.iii.19). Winkler comments: "At all levels of morality and advice-giving we find the undisciplined person described as someone mastered or conquered by something over which he should exert control, usually conceived or conceivable as part of himself" (50). This goal of self-mastery was itself a character-trait that was imitated and practiced so as to make it a second nature. Demosthenes' exercise regimen became legendary (see Quintilian 273, XI.iii.54; and 313, XI.iii.130; Plutarch VII, 19), such that later generations understood that Demosthenes was "not a man of good natural parts, but that his ability and power were the product of toil" (Plutarch VIII, 19).

The challenge for Demosthenes' rhetoric, then, was learning to imaginatively compose an appealing stylization of self that overcame any "natural" softness or weakness but to do so in a way consistent with the democratic ideology that he had committed himself to. The difficulty with this ideology was that it demanded the surrender of some aspects of self-mastery to the Demos, the people.

Demosthenes and Meidias

According to Demosthenes, Meidias was one aristocrat who chafed under such democratic constraints. Wealthy and carrying himself in the best Homeric tradition of wealthy aristocrats and right-wing oligarchs, Meidias spoke loudly and often, getting his way with bribery when shouting didn't work and, when all else failed, with threats and intimidation.¹² The antagonism between democrats and oligarchs was an old one and often rehearsed, as was the antagonism between Meidias and Demosthenes.

When Demosthenes volunteered to act as chorus-leader of his tribe for the Dionysian festival (the *Pandia*), for example, Meidias harassed Demosthenes in every way possible. He destroyed the chorus costumes and tried to bribe Demosthenes' chorus-trainer, the judges, and the magistrate (the *archon*). When the festival day arrived, he stood on the wings, preventing Demosthenes and his chorus from entering the stage. He "bawled and threatened, standing beside the umpires as they took their oath" (Demosthenes 17), and crowned the whole thing at the performance itself. He climbed up on stage and punched Demosthenes in the face (15–19).¹³

Demosthenes didn't punch back, though it would have been permissible and even expected for him to do just that to protect his honor. Instead, he immediately initiated a pretrial hearing, of sorts (a *proboule*), at the Assembly meeting held in the theater the day after the Dionysia (7–9). He won the decision, and there matters stood for two years, until Meidias struck (metaphorically) again. This time, Demosthenes was being considered for a position on the Council (as a *Bouleuteis*, or senator). Meidias denounced Demosthenes as unfit to serve, nearly costing him the election (79–81). Finally, Demosthenes responded with a suit against Meidias, charging him with "injury at a festival," an act of impiety (*asebeia*) and "criminal insolence" (*hubris*).

The speech of that suit sheds light not only on the dispositions that separate Meidias (the oligarchic hero-character) from Demosthenes (the democratic citizen-character) but also on how these dispositions appear as visible manners of public conduct, which themselves crystallize as styles of rhetorical action. As Aristotle notes in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, "our moral dispositions are formed as a result of our corresponding activities," so that "virtue results from the repeated performance of just and temperate actions" (II.iv.3). Demosthenes will demonstrate his own virtue, and Meidias's lack, by re-presenting in his speech their opposing actions and dispositions of character.

What kind of person is a democrat, and how ought a democratic citizen act? Demosthenes will answer by *enacting* his own submissive democratic ethos and by opposing to it the hubris of Meidias. This connection between politics and

ethos is not unique to Demosthenes. Aristotle similarly notes that there are “kinds of character distinctive of each form of constitution; for the character of each is necessarily most persuasive to each” (*Rhetoric* 77; 1.8.6).¹⁴ Political constitutions, like individual dispositions, result from the specific “ends” toward which they are oriented and the actions based upon these ends. Competing political ideologies correspond to opposing character types, which themselves appear as alternative manners of rhetorical action.

Demosthenes’ politicized presentation of ethos was thus not the product of his unique rhetorical genius, or his act would not have communicated to the Athenian audience. He could only craft his performance if he could count on an audience willing and able to interpret the politically informed action he displayed. Rhetorical action draws upon a repertoire of character types recognizable to the audience (democratic/oligarchic, obedient/insolent, elite/common, etc.; see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II. 15–16) and implies a popular “physiognomy” of bodily self-presentation. Its tacit presence in Demosthenes’ speech suggests that even at the height of the Greek rhetorical consciousness, when verbal artistry was supposed to have reached its apex, the (nondiscursive) public presentation of morally toned, political character types remained crucial to rhetorical skill.

Demosthenes’ argument in this speech is fairly simple and based on widely known public events and opinions. There are different types of men in Athens, he argues, based on nature (*phusis*) and disposition (*tropos*). Some (like you jurors and me, and all good citizens) are mild, humane, prudent, and discreet. They submit themselves to the laws and the will of the people. Others, like Meidias here, are belligerent, shameless, and insolent, defying the law and intimidating the citizens. These alternative dispositions are betrayed by differing patterns of public conduct that have serious implications for the viability of a polis, particularly for this democracy. Demosthenes and Meidias thus re-present two models for public conduct particularly salient for that time and place. The loud, insolent and arrogant aristocrats behave with arrogance and contempt not only toward their inferiors but toward the laws that protect all citizens alike. Meidias chooses hubris because of his fundamental contempt for democratic rule of law and the citizenry that pretend to judge him, and this choice reveals itself in his ethos.

The problem was not simply that Meidias used his fists to get his way: Every citizen and every speaker had to stylize his self-presentation through the way that he used his body. Rather, for Demosthenes, the punch crystallized the whole of Meidias’s political philosophy and functioned, as did all his other actions, to intimidate and silence others. Demosthenes could overcome Meidias’s punch, his intimidating disposition, and the aristocratic ideology it appealed to by presenting a persuasive alternative: an appropriately masculine performance com-

patible with a democratic citizen ethos that recommended submission to the laws. Both the decision to “repay” through a speech rather than a punch, and his rhetorical action itself depended upon Demosthenes’ rhetorical skill at presenting the political consequences of a public ethos. Demosthenes will argue the *manner* of action, rather than the specific act, is what counts most for rhetoric:

To be struck is not the [most] serious thing for a free man, serious though it is, but to be struck in wanton insolence. Many things, Athenians, some of which the victim would find difficult to put into words, may be done by the striker—by gesture, by look, by tone; when he strikes in wantonness or out of enmity. . . . These are the things that provoke men and make them beside themselves. . . . No description can bring the outrage as vividly before the hearers as it appears in truth and reality to the victim and the spectators. (53)

Demosthenes goes on to enumerate (and, I suspect, act out) some of these mannerisms of Meidias’s insolence: the tone of his voice (loud-mouthed, bel-lowing, and haranguing, 135–37), his gestures (snapping his fingers at justice, 135), his stance and physical presence (breaking the doors of Demosthenes’ household, 59; standing by the judges to intimidate them, and blocking the aisles, 17) and his eyes (staring down the rowdy section of the Assembly to silence them, 133). All of these, I suggest, function not as a gestural vocabulary of discrete emotions but as an extradiscursive, *presentational* system that as Demosthenes suggests, point to a unified character, though it can be put into words only indirectly.

The way Meidias conducts himself in public, these gestures, looks and tones—like the way he delivers the punch and, the way he will deliver his speech—necessarily intersect, implicate, and signify one another, for all arise from the same disposition. Most intolerable is not the punch per se (intolerable though it was), but the indescribable, insolent character behind it. By calling attention to styles of self-presentation as symptomatic of political convictions, Demosthenes reveals rhetorical action as inherently political and artistic: Meidias has crafted an insolent manner; Demosthenes must then perform a persuasive alternative.

Demosthenes admits that Meidias’s manner of acting can be hard to describe in words, but it is visible, recognizable, and easily understood. For this reason, says Demosthenes to Meidias, even those who “have no dealings with you are exasperated by your audacity, your tones and gestures” (19). Just as Aristotle noted Aeschines’ use of tones and gestures to apply a familiar character type to an unfamiliar litigant, an audience unfamiliar with Meidias can under-

stand the insolence that Demosthenes is speaking about because this insolence is legible on his body and the manner in which he uses it. The *manner* of his actions, though most difficult to put into words, are far from being invisible or unimportant, far from being simply a set of gestures appended to an already existing political position. They are on the contrary the most *visible* and the most *powerful* in effecting the audience, victim, and bystander alike, and form the core of a speaker's political and dispositional constitution and necessarily shape his rhetoric. They are powerful because of their intimidating effect on the weakest people of Athens:

Yet this habit (ethos) of his, Athenians, . . . is not something that . . . the rest of you should overlook. Far from it. All citizens alike should be stirred to anger, when they reflect and observe that it is exactly the weakest and poorest of you that run the greatest risk of being thus wantonly wronged, while it is the rich blackguards that find it easiest to oppress others and escape punishment. (89)

What men like Meidias are trying to do, argues Demosthenes, is to return Athens to its oligarchic past by bullying commoners, keeping them fearful and, most importantly, silent. This is, in fact, exactly what happened to a less-fortunate target of Meidias's ire. An elected arbitrator, Strato, found his citizenship revoked (meaning, among other things, that he could not speak publicly before the Assembly or the courts) through the political bullying of Meidias when Strato rendered a decision against him. Demosthenes gestures (literally?) to Strato and (metaphorically) to his fate as an index of the threat faced by all: "There he stands silent, stripped not only of all our common privileges, but also of the right to speak or complain" (69).

It is important to remember that Athenian democratic ideology prided itself on citizen equality, especially the equal right to speak (*iseigoria*), and that fears about the stability of these rights were never completely extinguished. Homer modeled a world of aristocratic domination, where commoners who spoke out of place were soundly thrashed or worse. As Martin has shown, speaking length and audience tolerance were directly proportional to social rank: from Zeus to the lesser gods, from Achilles and Agamemnon to the lesser chieftains and soldiers. Aristocrats could by definition talk longest and best.

Perhaps Meidias looked to old aristocratic ideals fondly and was attempting to reassert and protect, as Odysseus had before him, the privileges that wealth and birth could provide. Demosthenes' audience of jurors almost certainly recognized this oligarchic attitude, too, and feared it. It was Demosthenes' task to demonstrate that intimidating and insolent manners of public conduct were in-

consistent with democracy. The vitality of a democracy depended upon a reliable, public physiognomy of antidemocratic character and a vigorous reaction against it.

Demosthenes works to connect Meidias's political leanings both to his public conduct and to his speaking style because rhetorical and political action alike flowed from the same disposition. The performance of a speech was simply one highly visible and high-stakes manifestation of a pattern of conduct thoroughly public and performative. Meidias's general disposition as represented by his rhetorical performance was on trial even more than the issue of the punch itself. Rhetorical action was central as the ultimate manifestation of this character physiognomic.

In portraying Meidias as the very figure of an incipient and threatening tyranny, Demosthenes does not denounce action or gesticulation in general. On the contrary, by calling attention to it, he emphasizes rhetorical action as an important feature of legal and political deliberation. In the process of making his case against Meidias, Demosthenes not only has to represent the hubris of Meidias (in tones denounce his tones, with gestures condemn his gestures), he also has to enact before the jurors an alternative manner, a deportment, a vocal tone, a gestural and facial repertoire consistent with the staunchly democratic ideal that he wants the jury to support. That is, his speech must be gesturally dialogic, representing and setting off Meidias's public character as blameworthy in contrast to his own idealized democratic character.

The performance of this ideal is no easy matter, for the conduct attributed to Meidias was, as we have seen, reminiscent of a heroic ideal that the jury no doubt remembered and respected: the privileged aristocrat who refused to submit to common (i.e., low and ignoble) opinion. By the same token, the conduct attributed to the good democrat, patient and submissive (to the laws), could also suggest softness and weakness, a particular sore spot for Demosthenes. The man who retreated to the protection of the laws might simply be seen as the "soft" coward (like the Homeric soldiers who hung back among the ranks) who could not stand up for himself, could not simply punch back.

And, as we have seen, Demosthenes did not punch back. Given his reputation for being "soft" and weak, his failure to punch Meidias back, even though it was consistent with a democratic rule of law, might have been seen in a decidedly unfavorable light. Because he did not return the punch (dragging the affair out for two years instead), Demosthenes has to act (i.e., deliver his speech) in a way that is honorable and "manly" while remaining consistent with the ideology he has constructed.

Demosthenes thus has to give thought to his own performance. If the audience already suspects him of being "soft," of using the democracy and the laws

to hide his own weakness and dishonor, then he is advised to be bold, vehement, impassioned, and indignant about his injuries and what they represent. But, on the other hand, if overdone or done poorly, Demosthenes risks displaying the same overbearing character that he has attributed to Meidias. Demosthenes was, after all, in many ways like the man he condemns, more so at least than he was like the average juror: wealthy, landed, publicly active, and influential. Unlike most jurors, both Meidias and Demosthenes were highly visible and powerful public figures. If the jury was inclined to see Demosthenes as just another aristocrat, then he must guard against a manner of self-presentation that would reinforce this impression (shouting, gesticulating, staring), a manner similar to that which he criticizes in Meidias. Such a display might make of the trial a shouting match between two indistinguishable politicians.¹⁵ What separates the impassioned and indignant aristocrat from the impassioned and indignant democrat? If Meidias's insolence is revealed in tones, gestures, looks, and poses, then Demosthenes must reply with his own alternative; and he must be careful that his strategy does not backfire.

One strategy that Demosthenes uses is to re-present Meidias's own manner of acting for the audience. This re-presentation, like Bakhtinian novelization of alternate discourses, refracts what is being said and enacted, altering and commenting on it by placing it within a larger oppositional orientation. Demosthenes makes his case by embedding within the performance his own rendition of how Meidias characteristically acts, implicitly anticipating how Meidias will present his own defense. This dialogic re-presentation within his speech of an opposing manner of acting allows Demosthenes to suggest what Meidias or any incipient oligarch must not be permitted to do. We can see the textual traces of this strategy but must rely on our own performative imagination to understand how it might have been accomplished.

First, Demosthenes paints for the jurors Meidias's typical speaking style: constantly "talking, railing, bellowing" (135): "In my opinion, if for nothing else, yet for those harangues that he delivers at every opportunity . . . he would deserve the severest penalty" (137). This tactic not only specifies insolence as an audible, tonal characteristic but prepares the jury for, and thus prevents Meidias from, employing this very characteristic: Anything like "railing" or "bellowing" would simply confirm Demosthenes' portrayal as consistent with antidemocratic hubris. This tonal repertoire thus stands alongside the gestural repertoire noted earlier: pointing fingers, gesticulating, staring, etc. Every raised tone, every stare, every large gesticulation or dramatic pose will be evidence against the man who employs it. The same conduct that in Demosthenes might be read as impassioned vehemence or righteous indignation will be refracted and reinterpreted as insolence in Meidias, and only serve to convict him.

But, on the other hand, says Demosthenes, suppose he does nothing of the sort. Suppose instead of bellowing, threatening, or denouncing, he meekly implores? Suppose in place of the closed fist, he offers the open hand? A gesture toward humility would only demonstrate that his overbearing disposition is not a simple character flaw (which might be forgiven, since given by nature) but a cultivated trait that he can put on or off as he pleases, with moral overtones. If a bully is humble and supplicating when threatened (as Demosthenes predicts Meidias will be), it just adds to the punishment his characteristic arrogance and insolence deserves, for it proves that his hubris is deliberate and malicious rather than being simply his natural manner. It becomes a consciously chosen and morally repugnant “act.”¹⁶

As a wealthy aristocrat, Meidias most likely had a text prepared for him by a speech-writer, but those words will not help him much now. Acting in character (the larger-than-life aristocrat) will convict him of insolence; out of it (the supplicating defendant), of hypocrisy. Demosthenes has made the question of Meidias’s guilt hinge upon his subsequent speaking performance: an instance of his disposition, the sign of his inner character. The performance, not just the text, becomes the measure of the man.

The matter at hand, then, turns upon an artistry located not in the mind (in Greek, *enthumemous*) or in a speech-text but in body practices and a presentational repertoire. A manner of acting is, as Demosthenes admits, just that which is almost impossible to put into words but which the jury must nevertheless carefully read in the speech of Meidias. The wrongs against Demosthenes were well attested, publicly perpetrated, and amply verified by witnesses. Demosthenes need not prove them. If successful, Demosthenes’ speech will make the very idea of opposing democratic laws to oligarchic privileges hinge upon the manner in which they make themselves seen and heard. As Demosthenes remarks: “The real composer of my speech is Meidias” (131). This was to be an action about action.

Notes

¹I thank *RR* reviewers Nan Johnson, Kathleen Welch, and Richard Leo Enos for their helpful comments and suggestions.

²See also Enders, Ede et al.

³M. Mauss, G. Bateson, R. Birdwhistell, and P. Bourdieu offer important arguments for the distinctiveness of nonverbal communication from verbal language.

⁴I use the term *art* in referring to rhetorical knowledge over the more common *theory* precisely in order to highlight the inadequacy of textual theory to account for the skills important to rhetorical action.

⁵Fortenbaugh offers a detailed discussion of Aristotle’s account of persuasion through character (1992, 1996) and delivery (1986).

⁶See MacDowell (23–28, 1990); Ober (93–94, 1996).

⁷See Bogehold for a parallel performance analysis of poetic genres.

⁸It's useful to recall here the close linguistic connection in Greek between *eoika*, resemblance (what looks alike) and *eikos*, "probability" (what is likely). Rhetorical action renders probability as character resemblance and imitation, a feature of rhetorical invention apparent in the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*.

⁹Edmunds and Wallace (1997) and Goldhill and Osborne (1999) discuss the performance features of many genres of public speech and song in ancient Greece.

¹⁰Sources include Plutarch's "Demosthenes" in *Parallel Lives*, Dionysius of Halicarnassus (Demosthenes), and the pseudo-Plutarchan "Lives of the Ten Attic Orators" in *Moralia*, as well as frequent mention in the works of Cicero and Quintilian. Among recent works Pearson (1976) reviews Demosthenes' career and speeches.

¹¹The tradition that he had fled the battle of Chaeronea adds to his reputation for physical weakness (and thus, cowardice), but it damages not at all his reputation for manly oratory. Plutarch notes that even after the battle, Philip "shuddered at the power and the ability of the orator who had forced him to hazard his entire empire and his life in the span of a single day" (XX. 3) Thanks to Rich Enos for relating this anecdote.

¹²All citations are from the text of Demosthenes' speech *Against Meidias*, Harvard UP, 1935. This speech was also retranslated, with critical introduction and notes, by Douglas MacDowell (1990).

¹³This anecdote bears remarkable similarity to the famous Thersites episode in *The Iliad*, where Odysseus strikes the misshapen Thersites to keep him from criticizing Agamemnon's leadership, with Meidias perhaps hoping to "look like" another Odysseus.

¹⁴In *Laws* Plato will go one further, suggesting that each city is itself a theater of actors attempting to perform virtue and justice.

¹⁵This is the reading given by Ober (1996).

¹⁶Acting, *hupokrisis*, was a term of disparagement among Greek rhetors as it was for Quintilian. Demosthenes had already opposed "practiced" and deliberate manners of acting from "natural" and inborn dispositions.

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