

The Counterfeit Rhetor: Class in Demosthenes' Characterization of Aeschines' Use of Oral and  
Written Communication in the *De Corona*

In 4th century Athens, we observe the gradual increase and expansion of the uses of the written word in what remains a primarily oral society (Thomas 1989: 1-94 and 1992). In the same period, there was no single, constant value attached to either technology of communication, but the value of each was rather something negotiated by every individual author, and in the case of forensic oratory, by every speaker, according to the needs of his specific context (Thomas 1989: 88-9 and Worman 2004). While authors may assert the positive value attached to both the written and spoken word, they may likewise draw attention to the more problematic aspects of each. In oratory, as in other genres, there exists a tension between the valuing of written documents as a form of evidence and aid to truth and memory (e.g. Lycurgus 1.80), on the one hand, and the virtue attached to an orator having no need of recourse to the written word, on the other hand (e.g. Dem. 9.41). The former is particularly perceptible in the expanded use of written documents in legal proceedings in Athens (Rydberg-Cox 2003: 652). So too is it apparent that both written and oral communication are potentially problematic in the *De Corona*.

In this paper, I explore Demosthenes' presentation in the *De Corona* of Aeschines' use of and relationship to both oral and written forms of communication. I proceed by surveying key passages in the *De Corona* in which Demosthenes makes overt statements regarding Aeschines' use and abuse of both modes of communication and find that throughout the speech, Demosthenes characterizes Aeschines' use of both writing and orality as the result of his failure to negotiate the class disparity that allegedly exists between himself and the world of the *καλοῦ ἀγαθός*, a world to which, according to Demosthenes, Aeschines neither properly belongs nor successfully assimilates. Demosthenes distinctly disparages Aeschines on the basis of class

and characterizes his alleged missteps as failures not merely of having disgraceful origins but of aspiring to meddle in the business of his social superiors without understanding proper deportment.

Building on Worman's analysis of Demosthenes' characterization of Aeschines' use of the spoken word in terms of excess, violence, and depravity (Worman 2004), I explore the characterization of Aeschines' alleged manipulation of speech as evidence of a servile or mercenary status (*De Cor.* 51, 284). To give a few examples, Demosthenes variously accuses Aeschines of failing to provide written documentation of his claims (e.g. 76), mutilating written documents by omitting portions of them when reading them aloud (121), and offering lines of tragedy in court in place of the appropriate written documents (267). In his descriptions of Aeschines' alleged upbringing, at 258, Demosthenes draws attention to Aeschines' alleged servility in his use of the medium of writing by claiming that Aeschines used to grind the pigment (τὸ μέλαν τρίβων) used for writing in his father's grammar school. At 259, Aeschines is depicted both reading from the sacred books in his mother's cult (τὰς βίβλους ἀνεγίνωσκες) and leading the initiates in reciting hymns, 'being proud of the fact that no one ever shrieked so loudly' (ἐπὶ τῷ μηδένα πώποτε τηλικοῦτ' ὀλολύξαι σεμνονόμενος), on which Demosthenes comments: 'And I myself believe it! For don't imagine that he announces so mightily, but doesn't shriek exceedingly splendidly' (καὶ ἔγωγε νομίζω: μὴ γὰρ οἴεσθ' αὐτὸν φθέγγεσθαι μὲν οὕτω μέγα, ὀλολύξειν δ' οὐχ ὑπέρλαμπρον). Demosthenes thus deliberately maligns Aeschines' background with specific reference to his lower class and unmanly relationship to both written and oral communication: his slave-like service grinding ink and reading out the sacred books, and the woman-like ritual shouting (ὀλολύξαι) on which he places inappropriate pride (Yunis 2001:255).

In short, Demosthenes presents Aeschines as altogether failing in his use of both spoken and written word, a failure which is part and parcel of Demosthenes' characterization of Aeschines as a false καλολόγαθος, and a counterfeit rhetor (παράσημος ῥήτωρ at 242). In this way, Demosthenes capitalizes on the tensions in 4th century Athenian society surrounding the oral and written word, as well as the fluidity of the associations attached to each.

### Bibliography

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