

## It isn't difficult to praise Athenians in Athens .....

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ἐπεὶ δὲ συμβαίνει καὶ χωρὶς σπουδῆς καὶ μετὰ σπουδῆς ἐπαινεῖν  
πολλάκις οὐ μόνον ἄνθρωπον ἢ θεὸν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄψυχα ...  
Ar., *Rhet.* I 9 1366a 28-30

Twice Aristotle quotes the same passage from Plato's *Menexenos*, in his *Rhetoric*:

I 9 1367b 7-9: σκοπεῖν δὲ καὶ παρ' οἷς ὁ ἔπαινος· ὥσπερ γὰρ ὁ Σωκράτης ἔλεγεν, οὐ χαλεπὸν Ἀθηναίους ἐν Ἀθηναίοις ἐπαινεῖν.<sup>1</sup>

III 14 1415b 28-32: ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἐπιδεικτικοῖς οἴεσθαι δεῖ ποιεῖν συνεπαινέσθαι τὸν ἀκροατὴν, ἢ αὐτὸν ἢ γένος ἢ ἐπιτηδεύματ' αὐτοῦ ἢ ἄλλως γέ πως· ὁ γὰρ λέγει Σωκράτης ἐν τῷ ἐπιταφίῳ, ἀληθές, ὅτι οὐ χαλεπὸν Ἀθηναίους ἐν Ἀθηναίοις ἐπαινεῖν, ἀλλ' ἐν Λακεδαιμονίοις.<sup>2</sup>

What is the context of the Platonic passage (235d) and what the purpose of the Aristotelian quotations?

Menexenos is criticizing Socrates who often makes fun of orators, in a friendly way. This time, he notices, the selected orator will have to improvise. But Socrates immediately corrects his friend: εἰσὶν ἐκάστοις τούτων λόγοι παρεσκευασμένοι, καὶ ἅμα οὐδὲ αὐτοσχεδιάζειν τά γε τοιαῦτα χαλεπὸν. εἰ μὲν γὰρ δέοι Ἀθηναίους ἐν Πελοποννησίῳ εὖ λέγειν ἢ Πελοποννησίους ἐν Ἀθηναίοις, ἀγαθοῦ ἂν ῥήτορος δέοι τοῦ πείσοντος καὶ εὐδοκιμήσοντος· ὅταν δέ τις ἐν τούτοις ἀγωνίζεται οὐσπερ καὶ ἐπαινεῖ, οὐδὲν μέγα δοκεῖν εὖ λέγειν.<sup>3</sup>

If we replace "speaker" with "poet" (or, better, λέγειν with ποιήματα ποιεῖν), we can read a very serious judgment about the to-order-poetry (but this is another question).

Well, I think that in raising the question of audience, Plato seems to be opening the way to the classification of the speech at the beginning of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (I 3 1358a 36 - b 8):

Ἔστιν δὲ τῆς ῥητορικῆς εἶδη τρία τὸν ἀριθμὸν· τοσοῦτοι γὰρ καὶ οἱ ἀκροαταὶ τῶν λόγων ὑπάρχουσιν ὄντες. σύγκειται μὲν γὰρ ἐκ τριῶν ὁ λόγος, ἕκ τε τοῦ λέγοντος καὶ περὶ οὗ λέγει καὶ πρὸς ὃν, καὶ τὸ τέλος πρὸς τοῦτον ἐστίν, λέγω δὲ τὸν ἀκροατὴν.<sup>4</sup>

Speaker, topic, audience. It's the audience who plays different roles, connected with the three types of speech.<sup>5</sup>As Aristotle writes, it is necessary for the listener to be either a spectator or a judge (jury-man or member of a democratic assembly).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>«Consider also the audience before whom the praise [is spoken]; for, as Socrates used to say, it is not difficult to praise Athenians in Athens»(transl. G.A. Kennedy).

<sup>2</sup>«In epideictic, however, one should make the hearer think that he shares the praise, either himself or his family or his way of life or at least something of the sort; for what Socrates says in the funeral oration is true, that it is not difficult to praise Athenians in Athens, but among the Spartans [is another matter]». I don't agree with the remark of G.A. Kennedy (p. 264, n. 201 of his translation): «The modern equivalent is 'trying to sell refrigerators to Eskimos'». I don't think that it is a particularly appropriate equivalent. However, as we'll see, reference to selling has something to do with my analysis.

<sup>3</sup>«Whenever one makes the effort to praise in the presence of those whom one is praising, it is not at all difficult to appear a fine speaker»(transl. W.M.A. Grimaldi).

<sup>4</sup>«The species of Rhetoric are three in number; for such is the number of [classes] to which the hearers of speeches belong. A speech [situation] consists of three things: a speaker and a subject on which he speaks and someone addressed, and the objective [*telos*] of the speech relates to the last (I mean the speaker)».

<sup>5</sup>ὥστ' ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἂν εἴη τρία γένη τῶν λόγων τῶν ῥητορικῶν, συμβουλευτικόν, δικανικόν, ἐπιδεικτικόν.

In the second of the quotations mentioned at the beginning of this paper (*Rhet.* III 14 1415b 28-32), Aristotle is subtler than in the first. In the case of epideictic speech, whose main topic is praise or blame, the audience, he writes, must be involved in the praise, even if there is another subject. We are not far from the well-known rule: *attentum, benevolum, docilem facere*, in this case *benevolum*, which we find in almost every *techne* or *ars rhetorica*. This kind of *captatio benevolentiae*, applied to praise - that is to say to the main topic of the epideictic speech - is quite different, in my opinion, from the other types of ordinary *captatio benevolentiae*. In fact, the topic itself, in this case, achieves two goals, to cause the speech to be a praise-speech, and the audience (the listeners) to agree with the speaker.

The same thing we cannot say about other types of speech-topics: for instance, it would have been a nonsense to accuse or to defend the judges (respectively, topic and audience of a forensic speech). On the other hand, it's a fact that a deliberative (symbolleutic) speech is made with the aim of persuading or dissuading (topic) the members of an assembly (audience), but to do or from doing something - which is the main goal -, not only to agree with the speaker. If the audience shares the view of the speaker: this is the *sine qua non* condition for every speech to be successful or persuasive.

We can summarize these introductory remarks with the aid of the following scheme:

Type of speech	-	Topic	Ø	Audience
deliberative	-	to persuade / to		to do sth.
dissuade				
forensic	-	to accuse / to defend		to judge
epideictic	-	to praise / to blame		to be a persuaded [and praised] audience

This is the reason why, as Aristotle says (I 3 1358b 813-20), the *chronos* (both, time and tense, on my opinion) of the epideictic speech is the present (*vs* the past of the forensic, and the future of the deliberative speech: the not-marked present, therefore, past and future too), because the present is the time of the audience, who realizes the new ideas the speaker is suggesting.

If we have a look at other rhetorical treatises, we do not find so many remarks about praise and audience. All the encomium-sections in the treatises edited by Walz, Spengel, Rabe, etc. (the authors are well known: Hermogenes, Athonios, Theon, Menander etc.) contain, obviously, many remarks about objects of praise: gods, heroes, men (few women), animals, plants, cities, objects; about the difference between *epainos* and *enkomion* and so on.<sup>7</sup>

However, there are at least two passages, in which we can find other interesting remarks about the relationship between encomium and audience: in the first, Quintilian (III 7,23, the chapter *de laude et vituperatione*) explicitly mentions Aristotle:

*Interesse tamen Aristoteles putat, ubi quidque laudetur aut vituperetur. Nam plurimum refert qui sint audientium mores, quae publice recepta persuasio.*

We find here the more general question of the audience's opinions, which especially applies to epideictic speech, whose audience doesn't play a specialized role. *Mores* and *publice recepta persuasio* (public opinion) form a part of the system of belief which the audience, so to say, takes from home and takes back strengthened or changed, after they have listened to a speaker.

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ἄναγκη δὲ τὸν ἀκροατὴν ἢ θεωρὸν εἶναι ἢ κριτὴν, κριτὴν δὲ ἢ τῶν γεγενημένων ἢ τῶν μελλόντων. ἔστιν δ' ὁ μὲν περὶ τῶν μελλόντων κρίνων ὁ ἐκκλησιαστικὸς, ὁ δὲ περὶ τῶν γεγενημένων [οἶον] ὁ δικαστικὸς, ὁ δὲ περὶ τῆς δυνάμεως ὁ θεωρὸς.

<sup>7</sup>For an exhaustive, recent state-of-the-art of encomium, we are indebted to L. Pernot, *La Rhétorique de l'éloge dans le monde gréco-roman*, 2 vols., Paris 1993. See also M. Vallozza-A. Katzemberger, *Enkomion*, in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. by G. Ueding, II, Tübingen 1994, 1152-1160).

The second passage is concerned with the same topic: Alexander Numenius (*Rh.G.* III 2.5-7 Sp.) briefly analyzes, as Aristotle already did, the difference between the three topics of the so called *politikoi logoi*. With regard to the audience, he writes: τὸ δὲ τῶν ἐγκωμίων εἶδος οὔτε ἀθέντας ἔχει οὔτε κριτάς, ἀλλὰ μόνον ἀκροατάς.<sup>8</sup> Also this quotation shows that, through an apparent lack of role, the audience of an epideictic speech has, so to say, a strong power inside the speech itself. Other audiences listen to the speaker in order to do something, they do so only to listen to him.

This is the reason why the speaker feels more secure if the audience is involved in the praise. But, is it really easy? Can the speaker persuade the audience, by merely linguistic means? For instance, making cunning use of personal pronouns (I, You or We), if he wants to emphasize, respectively, individual or collective responsibilities, individual or collective praises.<sup>9</sup>

If we turn our attention to the words of Pericles (or, better, Thucydides), in the II book of *The Peloponnesian War* (35.2), we'll find at least another complication:

Μέχρι γὰρ τοῦδε ἀνεκτοὶ οἱ ἔπαινοί εἰσι περὶ ἐτέρων λεγόμενοι, ἐς ὅσον ἂν καὶ αὐτὸς ἕκαστος οἴηται ἰκανὸς εἶναι δρᾶσαί τι ὧν ἤκουσεν· τῷ δὲ ὑπερβάλλοντι αὐτῶν φθονοῦντες ἤδη καὶ ἀπιστοῦσιν.<sup>10</sup>

This is the case of Aristides' ostracism (s. Plut., *Life of Aristides* 7.5-6): the illiterate fellow who asked Aristides, without knowing him, just to write 'Aristides' on his ostrakon, was bored with the continual praises of his fairness.

So, it was difficult indeed, even among Athenians, to praise *only one* Athenian, but, on the contrary, it wasn't difficult to praise only one Lacedaemonian among Athenians. The collective sense of identity doesn't admit exceptions.

Let's, now, return to the beginning of this paper, before completely switching channels, so to say.

The main topic of an epideictic speech is encomium, praise, both of someone (or something) and audience. There is a two-way relationship between speech-context and speech-topic. The audience likes to be praised, collectively, and only a *parrhesiastes* speaker, a speaker who loves *parrhesia*, freedom of speech, can disregard this rule (Pericles, or Socrates, or Demosthenes, for instance, for different reasons).<sup>11</sup> So, the critical remarks by Socrates reflect a commonplace. The identity of a community is the idealised counterpart of a more intricate society.

Anyway, what about the encomium legacy? I'd like to start with objects' encomium and with speaking objects. It's well known that, at least since the Cup of Nestor, maybe the first set (object plus advertisement),<sup>12</sup> Greeks and Romans were used to make objects with first person inscriptions. They were the so called speaking objects, saying, for instance: "I was made by (hardly ever made in!) ....", or "I am the tomb of...." and so on. A sort of prosopopea, an everlasting figure of thought.

We often find in advertisements the same question we have above examined: praise of a product, epideictic speech (slogan is sometimes a short enthymematic and perlocutive epideictic speech), audience. The use of the same words used in the previous analysis,

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<sup>8</sup>«Encomium-speech doesn't involve politicians nor judges, but *only* hearers».

<sup>9</sup>See E.M. Ariemma, M. Grimaldi, R. Palmisciano, L. Spina, *L'identità dell'oratore antico, fra singolare e plurale*, in M. Bettini - E. Cantarella - G. Guidorizzi (eds.), *Essere io, essere noi: identità individuali e collettive*, Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Antropologia ed Antichistica (Milano 3-4 maggio 1995), forthcoming.

<sup>10</sup>«One can accept that someone else is praised in so far as he thinks he'll be able to do the same things; but whatever goes beyond that, at once excites envy and unbelief».

<sup>11</sup>See L. Spina, *Il cittadino alla tribuna. Diritto e libertà di parola nell'Atene democratica*, Napoli 1986.

<sup>12</sup>«I am the cup of Nestor, a joy to drink from. Whoever drinks this cup, straightway that man the desire of beautiful-crowned Aphrodite will seize» (transl. B. Powell).

however, should not hide, under linguistic or lexical continuity, cultural, historical, social discontinuity. So, I intend to compare ancient encomium with modern advertising only to find rhetorical contact points, nothing more.<sup>13</sup>

If I define the advertisement a to-order-praise, I am certainly simplifying. But It's not so far from the truth to remark that the advertising system runs roughly as follows: a company orders an advertising campaign to an ad-man, or agency (first-degree-speaker, that is writer or graphic, almost a *logographos*), the ad-man makes an advertisement, introducing, for instance, a testimonial (second-degree-speaker), in order to make people to buy that product. If the ad-man is not very creative, *the praise* is close at hand; it's the simplest way to say that a product is very good.

And, if our not so brilliant ad-man opts for praise, also ancient treatises are close at hand. Aristotle too (*Rhet.* I 9 1366a 28-30):

ἐπεὶ δὲ συμβαίνει καὶ χωρὶς σπουδῆς καὶ μετὰ σπουδῆς ἐπαινεῖν πολλάκις οὐ μόνον ἄνθρωπον ἢ θεὸν ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄψυχα ...<sup>14</sup>

He can read how to praise (*Ar., Rhet.* I 9 1367b 22-36): genealogy, or background, virtues and so on.

And what about audience? In reality, with regard to audience, the ad-man is twice responsible: there are company and consumers. And, *if it isn't difficult to praise products among producers, it isn't so easy to persuade consumers.*

Unless, maybe, he praises them too. This is the reason why consumers in the advertisements are always portrayed as intelligent, attractive, pleasant, rich, healthy: and not as result of those products. On the contrary, only because they are this kind of people, they can use those products. And this is the message to the audience: "you don't know, but you are like these people, so you can buy these products".

Our consumers collective identity, stronger than ethnic one, gives new room to rhetorical praise, to modern encomium. Unfortunately, flattery will increase. There will be no place for real life, for difference and distinctions.

If goods make us equal, this happens only in advertisements. In real life, there are things and people to praise, and things and people to blame, as Gorgias said in his *Encomium of Helen* (1):

ἄνδρα δὲ καὶ γυναῖκα καὶ λόγον καὶ ἔργον καὶ πόλιν καὶ πρᾶγμα χρῆ τὸ μὲν ἄξιον ἐπαινῶ ἐπαινῶ τιμᾶν, τῷ δὲ ἀναξίῳ μῶμον ἐπιθεῖναι. ἴση γὰρ ἁμαρτία καὶ ἁμαθία μέμφεσθαι τε τὰ ἐπαινέτα καὶ ἐπαινεῖν τὰ μωμητά.<sup>15</sup>

But who or what will decide the difference? Rhetoric, again. And freedom of speech.

Let's read Plutarch again, *Life of Demosthenes* (16.2): during the embassy of ten (346 b.C.) at the court of Philip, the king was praised by Aeschines and Philocrates: ὅθεν ἐπαινούντων ἐκείνων τὸν Φίλιππον ὡς καὶ λέγειν δυνατώτατον καὶ κάλλιστον ὀφθῆναι καὶ νῆ Δία συμπιεῖν ἰκανώτατον, ἠναγκάζετο βασκαίνων ἐπισκώπτειν ὡς τὸ μὲν σοφιστοῦ, τὸ δὲ γυναικός, τὸ δὲ σπογγίας εἶη, βασιλέως δ' οὐδὲν ἐγκώμιον.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>See G. Raskin, *Handelsreclame en soortgelijke praktijken bij Grieken en Romeinen*, Leuven 1936; O. Reboul, *Le slogan*, Bruxelles 1975 (= *Lo slogan*, Roma 1977); L. Spina, *La sententia nell'epoca della sua riproducibilità tecnica*, in A. Pennacini (ed.), *Retorica e comunicazione. Teoria e pratica della persuasione nella società contemporanea, Atti del Congresso internazionale (Torino, 4-6 ottobre 1990)*, Torino 1993, pp. 153-166.

<sup>14</sup>«but since it often happens, both seriously and in jest, that not only a man or a god is praised but inanimate objects...».

<sup>15</sup>«A man, a woman, a speech, a deed, a city, and an action, if deserving praise, one should honour with praise, but to the undeserving one should attach blame. For it is an equal error and ignorance to blame the praiseworthy and to praise the blameworthy » (transl. D.M. Mac Dowell).

<sup>16</sup>«When they praised Philip as most powerful in speaking, most fair to look upon, and, indeed, as a most capable fellow-drinker, Demosthenes had to say in bitter raillery that the

If we turn our attention to Aeschines, who tells the same story except that he ridicules Demosthenes (*On the embassy*, 52,112), maybe the real meaning of the answer of Demosthenes is questionable, but I prefer to believe Plutarch. For, and these are my closing remarks, if we are able to distinguish, to recognize praiseworthy and blameworthy, both people and things, and, therefore, to debate it, among ourselves, rhetoric of our age will be an effective and *peaceful weapon* in order to understand, and accept, every difference.

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first encomium was appropriate for a sophist, the second for a woman, and the third for a sponge, but none of them for a king».