

DEFICIENT RHETORICAL DELIVERIES  
IN FOURTH CENTURY AD.  
A PRELIMINARY OUTLINE\*

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ANECDOTES accentuating the somewhat ostentatious nature of rhetorical delivery (*actio* in Latin terminology, *hypókrisis* in Greek<sup>1</sup>) are easily traceable within classical literature. Quintilian, for instance, echoes a spurious anecdote about Demosthenes who, when asked to describe the most important thing in oratory, emphatically replies (*inst.* XI 3, 6) «delivery, delivery, delivery». Of course, orators and sophists knew only too well that they had to complement their theoretical training with their own eye-catching and provocative artistry, as is illustrated none more so perhaps than in an episode recounted by Aulus Gellius (I 6, 3), in which Quintus Hortensius, having been mocked for his foppishness and referred to as Dionysia – the name of a famous actress of the time – declares «I would rather be a Dionysia, Torquatus [...] yes, a Dionysia, than like you, a stranger to the Muses, to Venus and to Dionysius». Indeed one of the most striking and notably relevant texts which explores the significance of such extravagance within rhetoric is Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists*, containing numerous examples (VS 529, 571-572, 581, 618-619) which detail the consequences of inappropriate performance within the cultural milieu of the Second Sophistic.<sup>2</sup>

In this respect, modern scholarship has advanced in its exploration of the implications of rhetorical delivery. The works of Maud Gleason, Anthony Corbeill, or Erik Gunderson – to name but a few – have all contributed towards helping identify the many aspects that formed part of rhetorical delivery within the first centuries of the Roman Empire and, more specifically, within the Second Sophistic movement.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> On the difference between *actio/hypókrisis*, E. Fantham, *Orator and/et actor*, in P. Easterling - E. Hall (Eds.), *Greek and Roman Actors. Aspects of an Ancient Profession*, Cambridge 2002, 362-376, esp. 362-363.

<sup>2</sup> R. Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch*, Princeton 2007, 229-230; D.A. Russell, *Greek Declamation*, Cambridge 1983, 74, 82.

<sup>3</sup> A. Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: gesture in Ancient Rome*, Oxford 2004; M. Gleason, *Making Men*.

My concern here, however, is with determining what constituted a deficient rhetorical delivery and what implications were in place within the fourth century AD for a rather inept performance. In focusing on both verbal and nonverbal forms of representation, I intend to investigate the socio-cultural repercussions for deficient rhetorical deliveries with regards being active signs of social status. In doing so, I will be examining two main subjects, namely the social status of the cultural elites and the theatricalization of rhetoric.

#### THEMISTIUS AND THE SINGING SOPHISTS

The wide range of topics that Themistius' works focuses upon perhaps makes it difficult to label him just a philosopher, even if this title was his supreme aspiration. Indeed it was, in essence, his ambition to emphasize the propaedeutic nature of rhetoric and its submissive role in relation to his much loved field.

Hence, oration 28 (*The Disquisition on Speaking*) is central towards our understanding of what came to constitute rhetorical delivery during a period in which theatricality had permeated most areas of social life. The crux of this short oration centres around orators appearing: «vain, showy, and boastful about this learning of theirs and broadcast it to the whole human race. They often bring their eloquence out to theatres and festive assemblies, where it is arrayed in gold and purple, reeking of perfume, painted and smeared with cosmetics, and crowned with garlands of flowers. In addition to being so splendidly and lavishly adorned themselves, what they say is designed to be ingratiating. They are exceedingly courteous and gracious. They honour, extol, and salute those who gaze upon them. They emit a whole range of sounds and, like Sirens, sing songs full of pleasure».<sup>4</sup>

Themistius' punctilious description epitomizes the extent to which rhetorical deliveries were influenced by theatrical effects. First of all, the sophist's ethos had changed. The philanthropic concept of rhetoric that had developed in the works of authors such as Libanius, Basil of Caesarea, or even Themistius himself, had been replaced by a conceited, «vain, showy, and boastful» attitude.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, what made rhetorical delivery, as described by Themistius, paradigmatic of the theatricality that had apprehended the rhetorical arena, was the significance of pantomimic effects incorporated by sophists.<sup>6</sup> Themistius for one

*Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*, Princeton 1994; E. Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity: the rhetoric of performance in the Roman World*, Michigan 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Themistius' translations taken from R. Penella, *The Private Orations of Themistius*, Berkeley 2000.

<sup>5</sup> For a similar vocabulary see Lucianus *salt.* 2.

<sup>6</sup> E. Hall, *Introduction: Pantomime, a lost chord of ancient culture*, in E. Hall - R. Wyles (Eds.), *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, Oxford 2008, 1-41; J. Conolly, *Reclaiming the theatrical in the Second Sophistic*, «*Helios*» 28/1, 2001, 75-96; for the use of gold and purple see M. Reinhold, *History of Purple as a Status Symbol in Antiquity*, Bruxelles 1970, 62-70; R. Wyles, *The symbolism of costume in Ancient Pantomime*, in Hall - Wyles (Eds.), *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, cit., 61-85. For the use of perfumes and aromatic substances in theatrical performances see S. Lilja, *The Treatment of Odours in the Poetry of Antiquity*, Helsinki 1972, 39-51, 72-87, 114-122. See also *Lib. or.* 64, 50-57.

was reluctant to admit that wearing exuberant costumes or exuding perfumes and orating with an excessively euphonic tone constituted rhetorical delivery. Yet the meaningful and purposeful sense of rhetoric and philosophy that Themistius had sought after had been replaced by this very kind of theatrical entertainment, one which was devoid of the social and political content that had long taken centre-stage. In giving priority to the *logos* and advocating resistance to pantomimic gestures, Themistius, acting very much like Cicero had done previously,<sup>7</sup> tried to expose the misleading pretence of certain sophists and philosophers in an attempt to go beyond appearances.

Themistius' denunciation of the theatricality and musicalization of rhetoric however needs to be explored within the context of the educational disputes of Late Antiquity. Contamination and distortion of canonical rhetorical deliveries proved detrimental to the classical *paideia* at a most delicate moment, that is, in an era in which Christianity was gaining prominence within the cultural milieu, an era in which sophists and orators were demonstrating a far greater interest in exercising their acrobatic skills, and an era in which philosophers, according to Themistius, were starting to withdraw into a corner.<sup>8</sup>

#### LIBANIUS: RIVALRY AND MAGIC

The famous sophist Libanius of Antioch provides an endless catalogue of instances which serve to confirm Themistius' distress. In his *Autobiography* for instance, Libanius reveals that during his stay in Constantinople he quarreled with one of his numerous rivals, Bemarchius.<sup>9</sup> The background to this story is one which remained prevalent throughout the cultural milieu of the rhetorical agonies that permeated throughout the Roman Empire. After being insulted and slandered, Libanius was challenged by Bemarchius, the two exchanged a number of speeches and, according to Libanius' immodest account at least, it was he who emerged triumphant exclaiming (1, 42) «the city took my side, and all the more so since it saw me robbed of my due. Then our fine fellow – that is, Bemarchius – realized that he had disdained the art of Isocrates as well as that of Nicostratus, for he could not outstrip me in his oratory any more than he could actually outpace me».<sup>10</sup>

In having recourse to an old Greek proverb («the art of Isocrates as well as that of Nicostratus»<sup>11</sup>) Libanius refers to a master orator, Isocrates, and to a noble

<sup>7</sup> A. Corbeill, *Political Movement: Walking and Ideology in Republican Rome*, in D. Fredrick (Ed.), *The Roman Gaze: Vision, Power, and the Body*, Baltimore 2002, 182-215.

<sup>8</sup> Or. 28, 341d-342a: «they are fearful (I know not why) and wary of public assemblies, where the poet says men become famous and they cannot bear to look away from their couches and secluded corners. They have completely forgotten that their forebears used to speak to crowds of people in workshops, porticoes, baths, and theatres».

<sup>9</sup> For this episode see D. Woods, *Libanius, Bemarchius and the Mausoleum of Constantine I*, in C. Deroux (Ed.), *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History XIII*, Bruxelles 2006, 428-439.

<sup>10</sup> Libanius' translations are from A.F. Norman, *Libanius. Autobiography*, Oxford 1965.

<sup>11</sup> Norman, *Libanius*, cit., 159 says that the proverb is «unknown but probably of comic origin».

actor, Nicostratus, implying that Bemarchius had no rhetorical or theatrical aptitude to his performance. Apparent as it may seem, this reference also illustrates two important issues which were at the heart of the cultural scene of Late Antiquity. First of all, persuading and winning over the audiences' hearts and minds could not have been achieved without a proper *mise en scène*, as the examples of Themistius' orations testify, emphasizing how the sophists' ineptitude, in not being able to empathize with the public, could severely endanger their chances of being successful. Consequently, Bemarchius' inability to imitate either Isocrates or Nicostratus led to his subsequent downfall. Secondly, this story proves that rhetorical deliveries became almost like a breeding ground for excessiveness and deficiencies. A certain sense of balance and proportion was rather difficult to obtain upon delivery.

Nevertheless Bemarchius' somewhat unembellished rhetorical delivery could in fact be viewed in contrast with Libanius' letter 742: «surely you remember», writes the sophist, «how [the governor] poked fun at the splendidly dressed fellow from Athens, attacking him for his reluctance [to compete], for he wanted to reveal his weakness». <sup>12</sup> This «dressed fellow from Athens» traditionally identified as Himerius, the sophist from the region of Bithynia, bears resemblance to the overdressed sophists in Philostratus' *Life of the Sophists* in which performances centred on dazzling the audience rather than actually informing and speaking to them.

Indeed this level of over-elaboration had been overtly exploited by sophists and came to be expected by audiences, yet it was also deemed a theatrical manoeuvre, the efficiency of which, among cultural elites, did not always register as being successful. In fact, the governor who poked fun at the splendidly dressed fellow from Athens echoes one of Philostratus' account's in which the emperor Antoninus reproached the sophist Alexander also known as «Clay-Plato» declaring: «I am paying attention [...] and I know you well. You are the fellow who is always arranging his hair, cleaning his teeth, and polishing his nails, and always smells of myrrh». <sup>13</sup>

The influence of various non-verbal elements borrowed from mimes and pantomimes over rhetorical delivery can be traced as far back as several centuries ago. The inheritance of theatrical effects incorporated by the sophists in Philostratus' work was not only criticized in the fourth century AD on the grounds of eccentricity and triviality but it also ignited tensions over important issues such as the concept of the classical *paideia* in a period of increasing Christianization. Themistius' and Libanius' concern with the lack of substance in contemporary

<sup>12</sup> Ep. 742. Translation by R.J. Penella, *Man and the World: the orations of Himerius*, Berkely 2007, 6-7. On this topic, see G. Cuffari, *I riferimenti poetici di Imerio*, Palermo 1983, 102: «È il caso di Imerio, le cui orazioni sono una chiara spia del vuoto profondo che circonda ormai fatalmente la cultura pagana e, in parte prive di veri agganci con la realtà, tradiscono l'affievolimento persino di quel senso di inquietudine che serpeggia, invece, nell'opera degli altri sofisti».

<sup>13</sup> Philostr. VS 571. Translation from W.C. Wright, *Philostratus and Eunapius*, Cambridge Mass. 1952. On this passage see J. Walker, *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity*, Oxford 2000, 83-84. Further examples provided by Philostratus are VS 529, 571-572, 581, 618-619.

oratory illustrates the room for improvement that sophists could aspire to achieve through adopting actor's techniques. Such techniques however had to be coupled with political and social involvement, and with an attitude that avoided any resemblance to the actors' ethos and showiness.

Libanius' own experiences illustrate the extent to which he attempted to perfect and deliver meaningful speeches in order to try and influence high rank officials and emperors, and thus preserve his influential position in Antioch. Rivalries among sophists were so strong that spells were cast out in order to ruin rhetorical deliveries. Libanius' own long-standing relationship with magic evokes lengthy discussion within the rhetorical delivery milieu. He was often accused, for instance, of having recourse to magic to silence his enemies, most notably when he was held responsible for (*or.* 1, 98) «cutting off the heads of a couple of girls (keeping) them for use in magic». Or when yet another rival sophist (1, 50) «because of hallucinations that he was bewitched, his memory was affected and off he would go, with all sorts of queer words and actions, so that many of his audience, after his lectures, would hide one behind another for fear that, while still in his frenzy, he would fall upon someone and rend him limb from limb».

There is however one passage that has monopolized the efforts of modern scholarship. Again in his *Autobiography*, Libanius reveals a particular story involving the use of homeopathic magic. Searching for an explanation for a period in which the sophist – a self confessed hypochondriac – was suffering a relapse of a long-standing health condition and having a dream in which he (1, 245) «saw two boys sacrificed, and the dead body of one was put in the temple of Zeus, behind the door», Libanius discovered a twisted and mutilated chameleon buried in his lecture room. According to his description (1, 249), «it was an old specimen and had been dead for several months, and we saw the thing with its head tucked in between its hind legs, one of its front legs missing, and the other closing its mouth to silence it».

In the competitive environment of the rhetorical milieu this kind of spell was not uncommon as was demonstrated by countless magic papyri and *tabulae defixiones*.<sup>14</sup> Several interpretations which attempt to surmise this passage, may lead us to believe of this episode as an ill-intended attempt to try to jeopardize Libanius' career, turning his performances into deficient deliveries.<sup>15</sup> The chameleon's

<sup>14</sup> A comprehensive overview in J. Tremel, *Magica Agonistica. Fluchtafeln im Antiken Sport*, Hildesheim 2004; S. Trzcionka, *Magic and the Supernatural in fourth-century Syria*, London 2007.

<sup>15</sup> L. Cracco Ruggini, *Libanio e il camaleonte: politica e magia ad Antiochia sul finire del iv secolo*, in E. Gabba - P. Desideri - S. Roda (a cura di), *Italia sul Baetis. Studi di storia romana in memoria di Fernando Gascò*, Torino 1996, 159-166; A. González Gálvez, *Teúrgia y magia en el s. iv: el testimonio de Libanio de Antioquía*, in J. Peláez (Ed.), *El dios que hechiza y encanta. Magia y astrología en el mundo clásico y helenístico*, Córdoba 2002, 181-190; F. Maltomini, *Libanio, il camaleonte, un papiro e altri testi*, ZPE 147, 2004, 147-153; G. Marasco, *Libanio, il camaleonte e la magia*, QCSAM 1, 2002, 209-240; I. Sandwell, *Outlawing magic or outlawing religion? Libanius and the Theodosian Code as evidence for legislation against pagan practices in the fourth century A.D.*, in V.W. Harris (Ed.), *Understanding the Spread of Christianity in the First Fourth Centuries*, Leiden 2005, 86-123.

front leg used to close its mouth was thought to represent the sophist's rhetorical flow whilst the cutting-off of the chameleon's forefoot has been interpreted by Campbell Bonner as «the crippling of the hand with which the orator gesticulated».<sup>16</sup>

However besides attempting to gain an unfair advantage in the fierce, competitive world of sophists, this attempt to render Libanius speechless and unable to provide a canonical rhetorical delivery should be rightly contextualized within its given period. The historian Cracco Ruggini set this episode in an epoch in which Libanius' political and religious loyalties were under suspicion. According to Cracco Ruggini,<sup>17</sup> the election of a chameleon instead of a cat – a more commonly used animal in casting this type of spell – was influenced by Libanius' reputation as an opportunist and a backscratcher. His good relationship with the Christian emperor Theodosius and his non-aggressive attitude towards Christianity brought about criticism from some Neoplatonic circles, with Eunapius for one declaring that «he was so clever in adapting and assimilating himself to all sorts of men that he made the very polypus look foolish». Libanius however was well aware of the significance of the chameleon's episode and acrimoniously exclaimed that (*or.* 36, 3, on the magical practices) «people at some future time [...] upon hearing of sorcerers, spells, and chameleons, will conceive this as the revenge of persons who believe themselves injured by me and whose behavior, though illegal, is a natural reaction, in the resentment they feel against me».<sup>18</sup>

#### EUNAPIUS: RHETORICAL DELIVERY IN EUSTATHIUS' EMBASSY

Another example of accusations of magic linked to speech delivery can be found in Eunapius of Sardis' narration of the Roman embassy, used to persuade Shapur II, king of Persia, to cease hostilities against the Roman Empire.<sup>19</sup> Eunapius tells us that Eustathius,<sup>20</sup> a pupil of Iamblichus whose eloquence (*VS* 466) «closely did resemble the musical Sirens» (a master of persuasion – *opifex suadendi* – according to Ammianus Marcellinus, *xvii* 5, 15; *xvii* 14, 1), spellbound the king by (*VS* *vi* 5, 6-7) «the expression of his eyes which was at once amiable and proudly indifferent, in spite of the many preparations that the king had devised in order to dazzle and overawe the man. And when he heard his voice conversing so equably and with no effort, when he heard him run over his arguments so modestly and good-naturedly, he bade him withdraw; and Eustathius went out, leaving the tyrant a

<sup>16</sup> C. Bonner, *Witchcraft in the Lecture Room of Libanius*, *TPPhA* 63, 1932, 34-44, esp. 39. Similar examples in H. Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in translation: including the Demotic spells*, Chicago 1986 (in particular *vii*, 396-404; *ix*, 1-14).

<sup>17</sup> Cracco Ruggini, *Libanio e il camaleonte*, cit., 163-164.

<sup>18</sup> Translation from A.F. Norman, *Antioch as a centre of Hellenic culture as observed by Libanius*, Liverpool 2000.

<sup>19</sup> For an overall context see B. Dignas - E. Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity. Neighbours and Rivals*, Cambridge 2007.

<sup>20</sup> R. Goulet, *Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques*, *iii*, Paris 2000, 365-385; A. Lewin, *Il filosofo Eustazio nelle Vitae Sophistarum di Eunapio di Sardi*, *SCI* 7, 1983-1984, 91-100.

captive to his eloquence».<sup>21</sup> And although Eustathius' influence over Shapur II came to be so great that (VS VI 5, 8) «the king of Persia came within an ace of renouncing his upright tiara, laying aside his purple and bejeweled attire, and putting on instead the philosopher's cloak of Eustathius», the magi<sup>22</sup> at the king's court persuaded Shapur II that Eustathius was a «conjurator» (γόητα).

Eustathius, a Neoplatonic who managed to combine «eloquence with philosophical learning»,<sup>23</sup> is compared to the Sirens, a mythological example that works on two levels, as the enthralling vocal skills of the Sirens came to symbolize the mesmerizing power of rhetoric as well as the emptiness of meaningless oratorical pieces.<sup>24</sup> Indeed the following lines concentrate on Eustathius' diction as the key element that persuaded King Shapur II. The philosopher's declamation is described as ἡμέρωσ καὶ ἀλύπως, a syntagm in which ἀλύπως echoes Dionysius of Halicarnassus' characterization of Homer's (*De compositione verborum* VI 16, 8) and Pindar's style (*De compositione verborum* VI 22, 12).<sup>25</sup> Notably ἡμέρωσ is used as a common virtue referring to the gentle and clement character.<sup>26</sup>

As impressive as his performance was however, Eustathius' efforts to try and persuade King Shapur II were neutralized as the Magi accused him of being a γόητα. Apart from referring to an illogical and psychagogic conception of rhetoric,<sup>27</sup> the word γοητείας plays a number of roles in this passage. First of all, it helps elaborate *Ringkomposition* by placing γοητείας at the beginning of the episode (VS VI 5, 1 οὐκ ἔξω γοητείας ἐδόκει) and γόητα at the end (VS VI 5, 9 γόητα εἶναι τελείως τὸν ἄνδρα φάσκοντες) through which Eunapius aims to praise Eustathius' rhetorical skills. Secondly, the use of words such as γοητείας, γόητα, and θελεκτήριον «shows how philosophy, rhetoric, and magic were bound up with each other in late antiquity».<sup>28</sup> Libanius himself defined rhetoric as a powerful φάρμακον (or. 11, 141) capable of persuading and enchanting governors and emperors (no wonder he was described by Eunapius as VS XVI 2, 3 γοητεύοντος τὴν ἀκοήν). Likewise the emperor Julian tells us that the followers of Plato, Aristotle, or Pythagoras were said to be (*ad Cyn.* 197d) γόητες εἶναι λέγονται καὶ σοφισταὶ καὶ τετυφωμένοι καὶ φαρμακεῖς.

<sup>21</sup> Translations from Wright, *Philostratus and Eunapius*, cit.

<sup>22</sup> On the nature, aspect and functions of the magi, see A. de Jong, *Traditions of the Magi. Zoroastrianism in Greek and Latin literature*, Leiden 1997, 387-403.

<sup>23</sup> R. Penella, *Greek Philosophers and Sophists in the fourth century AD: studies in Eunapius of Sardis*, Leeds 1990 provides references to sources in which Eustathius' skills are praised: Lib. *ep.* 123; Amm. Marc. xvii 5, 15; Julian. *ep.* 34.

<sup>24</sup> E. Kaiser, *Odysee-Szenen als Topoi*, MH 21, 1964, 109-224; J. Leclercq-Marx, *La Sirène dans la pensée et dans l'art de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge*, Bruxelles 1997, 47-62. Original references can be found in Ath. I 14; Eunap. VS VI 5, 2; Himer. or. 30, 128; 62, 46; Iambli. VP 82; Porph. Plot. 39; Them. or. 26, 330; 28, 341.

<sup>25</sup> *Comp.* vi 16, 8 and vi 22, 12.

<sup>26</sup> See Lib. *ep.* 219; 268; 480; or. 2, 20; 11, 55; 15, 4. See also P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, Wisconsin 1992, 55.

<sup>27</sup> See Gorg. *Hel.* 10. W.W. Fortenbaugh, *Aristotle's Art of Rhetoric*, in I. Worthington (Ed.), *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, Oxford 2007, 117-118; A. López Eire, *Actualidad de la Retórica*, Salamanca 1995, 21-22; J. De Romilly, *Magic and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge-London 1975, 3-22.

<sup>28</sup> R. Marback, *Plato's dream of sophistry*, Columbia 1998, 25.

In this sense, using magic as a means of induction (or, at least, claiming to be the object of a magic spell<sup>29</sup>) in order to perform a deficient rhetorical delivery had, therefore, a number of social implications within fourth century AD. As P. Brown has pointed out, in an era in which status was determined by fighting, shame became «worse than dead [...] in a society increasingly committed to a vested hierarchy in church and state».<sup>30</sup> Of course, this kind of shame could easily lead to social death in many ways aside from magic. Failure to speak for example when the time to deliver came about was not too dissimilar to ostracism itself. In narrating a dispute between the students of two different schools for instance, Eunapius praised the eloquence of his beloved Prohaeresius and the admiration induced by his aptitude for rhetorical delivery. In contrast, Themistocles, a student of a rival faction, could not manage to utter a single word. This «Pythagorean manner» of delivery, Eunapius ironically adds, turned Themistocles into (*VS IX 2, 12*) «a scandal and a disgrace to his great name».

#### SYNESIUS' *DIO* AND THE ANXIETIES OF SOPHISTS

A much clearer description of the highly competitive nature of the sophistical milieu and a greater understanding of the extent to which social status depended on proficient deliveries is epitomized in Synesius of Cyrene's *Dio*, a speech named after Dio Chrysostom in which the bishop presents his cultural and philosophical agenda to his unborn son.<sup>31</sup> One has to assume that being a sophist had to be a most rewarding occupation as if we are to believe what follows it encompassed endless sufferings and a constant state of anxiety.

Synesius, as a bishop and a member of the cultural elites of the Western Empire at the end of the fourth century, despised the terrible garrulousness «of those who show off their eloquence before audiences». Such sophists were regarded as (*12, 26*) ὁ δοῦλος ὁ δημόσιος, that is, «the slaves of the people», and someone who borrows «appearance rather than truth» (*12, 30: δόξαν ἀντ' ἀληθείας*). Then, after an initial aphorism (*12, 27: «the sophist is a dead man if someone laughs at him»*), Synesius describes how concern and anxiety surrounding the audience's reaction was constantly at the forefront of the sophist's mind since for any sophist the worst case scenario was finding someone (*12, 32-33*) «waging his head about in all directions, as though he did not think the rhetorical display worth listening to».

However once the public felt comfortable and the appropriate mood had been

<sup>29</sup> Trzcionka, *Magic and the Supernatural*, cit., 78.

<sup>30</sup> P. Brown, *Religion and Society in the age of Saint Augustine*, Faber 1972, 127-128.

<sup>31</sup> On the nature and content of this work see J. Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene. Philosopher-Bishop*, Berkeley 1982, 127-137; R. Giannattasio, *Unità tematica nel Dione di Sinesio*, «Vichiana» 3, 1974, 82-90; A. Garzya, *Il Dione di Sinesio nel quadro del dibattito culturale del IV secolo d.C.*, RFIC 100, 1972, 32-45; C. Lacombrade, *Synésios de Cyrène. Hellène et Chrétien*, Paris 1957, 139-149. A general approach to Synesius' conception of rhetoric in D. Roques, *Synésios de Cyrène et la rhétorique*, in E. Amato - A. Roduit - M. Steinrück (Éd.), *Approches de la Troisième Sophistique: hommages à Jacques Champ*, Bruxelles 2006, 244-272. Translations from A. Fitzgerald, *The essays and hymns of Synesius of Cyrene: including the Address to the Emperor Arcadius and the political speeches*, 1, Michigan-London 1930 (reimpr. 1980).



consolidated, Synesius turned his attention to the sophist's own efforts to compose an acceptable piece of literature. The bishop, in a passage reminiscent of Lucian's *The Professor of Rhetoric*, ironically remarks that the sophist (12, 34-37) «has endured many nights without sleep, and has been on the strain many days, and has come near to distilling away his soul by hunger and anxieties, that he may compile something good». Prior to the crucial moment of delivery (12, 39-41) «he also has bathed himself before the appointment and has gone to meet it with brilliant dress and appearance in order that he too may be a noble spectacle».<sup>32</sup>

Synesius highlights how nervous and apprehensive a sophist was when delivering, for just when he enters on stage (12, 41-43) «he salutes the oratorium with a smile, and rejoices, but his soul is on the rack; and furthermore, he has been biting gum in order to speak clearly and tunefully». And if his voice happens to fail (12, 46-49) «right in the midst of the declamation he turns and asks for his flask, which the attendant, who has long had it ready, hands over to him. Then he swallows and gargles some of it, that he may put a youthful note to his melodies».

However in the volatile territory of *sophistopolis*, the sophist's pains and efforts do not always pay off as Synesius' unhappy ending reveals (12, 49-53): «Not even after all his troubles does the unlucky fellow happen upon sympathetic auditors; rather would they like him to sing himself out, for then they would have their laugh. Again, they would like him merely to open his mouth and gape with uplifted hand like a statue, and then become more voiceless than a statue, for thus they could leave, as they have long desired».

If we are to reflect upon A. Fitzgerald's translation in a more accurate sense, the audience's tiredness and boredom borders almost on maliciousness. He translates the Greek text ἀλλὰ βούλοιντο μὲν ἂν αὐτὸν ἐξῆσαι as «rather they would like him to sing himself out», but the infinitive ἐξῆσαι can also be translated as «singing one's last song» a more appropriate translation that reflects the demands of the audience and the pains that a sophist had to endure.

#### CONCLUSION

The ongoing tendency towards the theatricality of literature threatened the legacy of the classical paideia. Both Christian and pagan elites alike denounced this process of spectacularization that had become somewhat endemic. In more than one sense, the tone and content of the aforementioned examples were not a novelty. The quarrels between Demosthenes and Aeschines, or those that Cicero had against his numerous political rivals, were partly fought on rhetorical delivery grounds.<sup>33</sup> In addition Philostratus' *Lives of the Sophists* bears witness to this, consistently illustrating how an inappropriate performance equated to a complete

<sup>32</sup> K. Treu, *Synesios von Kyrene. Ein Kommentar zu seinem „Dion“*, Berlin 1958, 103: «Die den Sophisten gemeinsame Eitelkeit erstreckt sich auch auf die äußere Erscheinung».

<sup>33</sup> J. Fredal, *Rhetorical Action in Ancient Athens. Persuasive Artistry from Solon to Demosthenes*, Illinois 2006; J. Dugan, *Making a New Man: Ciceronian self-fashioning in the rhetorical works*, Oxford 2005.

professional failure. Singing rhetors, voice acrobatics and rhetorical theatricality was attached to many of the rhetorical deliveries performed in the Roman Empire, for just as E. Bowie points out: «like the provision of food and lodging in Macdonalds, Starbucks and Holiday Inns, a sophistic declamation might be expected to be similar in form and content wherever in the Greek world its audience was gathered».<sup>34</sup>

By the end of the fourth century AD however, rhetoric was growing inefficient as a means of persuasion, for its main target had been replaced by entertainment. The figure of the sophist as inheritor of the classical *paideia* and counselor of emperors was to be displaced by the bishop and within this context rhetorical deliveries helped define what a sophist could be, a charlatan whose garrulity was intended to seek the audience's approval or a committed orator taking recourse to rhetoric as the cornerstone of an educational program; a Siren or a worshipper of Calliope (Lib. *or.* 1, 102), «the most glorious of the Muses».

It should not come as a surprise then that fourth century Christian cultural elites also reprobated this state as the classical *paideia* was valued as a common possession. A recent contribution by Leonardo Lugaresi has sought to address the development of a similar emergent discourse of theatricality within Christian literature during Late Antiquity.<sup>35</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus for instance lamented churchgoers' cravings for oratory instead of the soothing words of priests (*or.* 42, 24: οὐ γὰρ ζητοῦσιν ἱερεῖς, ἀλλὰ ῥήτορας). Furthermore admonitions to refrain from applause and from all sorts of theatrical reactions became commonplace in many of John Chrysostom's homilies (see, for example, *Homilia III ad populum Antiochenum* [PG 49, 38]: τί μοι τῶν κρότων ὄφελος τούτων; τί δὲ τῶν ἐπαίνων καὶ τῶν θορύβων).

Nevertheless rhetorical deliveries were still prominent within Late Antiquity, and within an area in which educational, literary and social issues were all fiercely contested. In his contribution to the book *The Roman Gaze* A. Corbeill posed the following question: «if there really did exist some kind of political etiquette of bodily aesthetics, and if it really were so all-pervasive as I claim, then why would anyone even bother to try to violate it?».<sup>36</sup> Corbeill's inquisitiveness is partly based on rhetorical aspects from Late Republican and early Empire literature and could easily be placed within the context of Late Antique rhetoric.

Thus by violating rhetorical delivery standards, sophists, philosophers and orators transgressed the limits of the classical *paideia* and the values attached to it. In order to stigmatize the deficient rhetorical deliveries, Themistius, Libanius, Eunapius and Synesius contrasted such performances with the classical rhetorical precepts of Aristotle, Cicero or Quintilian.<sup>37</sup> Hence they were able to establish a cultural link not only between classical references but also with some authors

<sup>34</sup> E. Bowie, *The geography of the Second Sophistic: cultural variations*, in B.E. Borg (Ed.), *Paideia: the world of the Second Sophistic*, Berlin-New York 2004, 65-86, esp. 72.

<sup>35</sup> L. Lugaresi, *Il teatro di Dio*, Brescia 2008.

<sup>36</sup> Corbeill, *Political Movement*, cit., 197.

<sup>37</sup> Arist. *rh.* 1403b, 21-31; *eth. Nic.* 1125a, 13-17; Cic. *or.* 55-59; *de orat.* 221-222; Quint. *inst.* XI 3.

from the Second Sophistic movement. The authority that Dio, Plutarch or Lucian exerted upon fourth century authors suggests that there was a conceptual continuity on the grounds of a similar conception of the classical paideia, as well as in vocabulary especially when it came to censuring rhetorical deliveries full of rhetorical twists and turns.

A deficient rhetorical delivery, either as a product of hyper-characterization or induced by a magic spell, speaks volumes of what audiences demanded in Late Antiquity and may well be considered a chink in the paideia's armor and in the ethos of those sophists that regarded rhetoric as a civic instrument.

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