Hecuba Revisited: Euripidean Echoes in Libanius *Or.* 22.22

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IN THE AFTERMATH of the 'Riot of the Statues' in Antioch in 387, John Chrysostom and Libanius devoted time and effort to composing rhetorical pieces with two main purposes in mind: to defend the Syrian city after its misdeeds and to disseminate their cultural and religious agendas. John Chrysostom composed and delivered twenty-four homilies (*De statuis*) as events were evolving after the riot,[1] whilst Libanius' orations 19–23 (despite their pose of contemporaneity with the events) were produced after the emperor Theodosius had forgiven the city. The two sets of texts constitute a paradigmatic case study of how a prominent Christian like John Chrysostom—at the time, a priest under the tutelage of the bishop Flavian in Antioch—and an influential figure of late paganism like the sophist Libanius dealt with a situation that required a determined display of their rhetorical prowess.

In this historical setting, it is particularly interesting that both authors used the same episode (a mother's plea to an imperial emissary to save her son's life) from opposing ideological positions. In what follows, I will pay particular attention to Libanius' narrative of the episode, since it is my working assumption that the sophist adapted it as narrated by John Chrysostom and literaturized it by assimilating a real (or at least likely given the circumstances) event to characters and imagery in Euripides' *Hecuba*. Thus, after a brief account of the

[1] Traditionally only twenty-two were included in this corpus. For the new number of homilies see A. Valevicius, "Les 24 homélies *De Statuis* de Jean Chrysostome. Recherches nouvelles," *REAug* 46 (2000) 83–91.

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events of the Riot of the Statues and of Chrysostom's description of it, I turn to Libanius' literaturized version of the same incident, exploring how he assimilated the situations and characters of *Hecuba* to the actual event. Finally, I will argue that his flexible use of a well-known piece of classical literature is a dynamic and distinctive example of the social and cultural ends toward which he employed classical paideia.

The Riot of the Statues

One of the most famous uprisings of Late Antiquity took place in Antioch, a city in which pagans, Jews, and Christians had been cohabitating for more than three centuries. We have numerous sources on the riot but lack a definite and unbiased account as the sources responded to diverse religious and cultural agendas.[2] Although the different intentions behind the choice of issues addressed by Libanius' orations 19–23 and by some of John Chrysostom's *De statuis* (especially his homilies 3, 17, and 21) make it difficult to reach a consensus, agreement on basic facts has yielded a fairly exact idea of how events developed. In February 387, an extraordinary tax was imposed by the emperor Theodosius.[3] After the *honorati* and *curiales* of Antioch found out about it, a multitude gathered in a spontaneous demonstration that culminated in desecrating and destroying the images and statues of the imperial family.[4] Ar-

[2] Other sources are Ambr. *Ep.* 74; Soz. *HE* 7.23; Theodoret *HE* 5.20, *HRel* 13.7; Zos. 4.41.

[3] There are different interpretations regarding the nature, intent, and amount of the tax. See R. Browning, "The Riot of A.D. 387 in Antioch. The Role of the Theatrical Claques in the Late Empire," *JRS* 42 (1952) 14; J. H. G. W. Liebeschuetz, "The Finances of Antioch in the Fourth Century," *BZ* 52 (1959) 344, 355; N. Q. King, *The Emperor Theodosius and the Establishment of Christianity* (London 1961) 60; H. Chadwick, *The Church in Ancient Society* (Oxford 2001) 479.

[4] On the responsibility for the violent actions Libanius (*Or.* 19.29–30: ὁ κακὸς/πονηρὸς δαίμων) and John Chrysostom (*De statuis* 21, *PG* 49.215: οἱ δαίμονες) blamed demons who orchestrated the riot, using the theatrical claque and foreigners to carry out the misdeeds. See P. Petit, *Libanius et la vie municipale à Antioche au IV*e *siècle* (Paris 1955) 238–241; L. Cracco Ruggini,

rests and executions of some of the participants followed, while two emissaries—Caesarius the *magister officiorum* and Ellebichus the *magister militum*—were sent by the emperor to investigate the affair. The punishments (loss of the status of metropolis, imprisonment of *curiales*, closure of public spaces, and cessation of the distribution of food) led Antioch to send an embassy to appease the imperial wrath, which finally obtained the imperial pardon and the annulment of the punishments.

Among the many episodes that occurred before the city was forgiven by Theodosius, John Chrysostom and Libanius[5] put special emphasis on the sufferings and bold actions of the mother of a young citizen whose liturgies and services had benefited Antioch. Both authors narrated how this mother interceded for her son's life before Ellebichus. As we shall see, her courage and the desperation of her plea are the only points on which Libanius and Chrysostom agree. Their narratives differ greatly in the description of the mother, in the addressee of their praises, and, especially, in the literary strategy adopted.

Praising the monks: John Chrysostom *De statuis* 17

Chrysostom's version of this episode attempted to cast a hagiographical light on the monks who inhabited the mountains around Antioch by eulogizing their actions on behalf of the city.[6] According to the priest, they went to the city to per-

"Poteri in gara per la salvezza di città ribelli: il caso di Antiochia," in *Studi tardoantichi* I *Hestíasis: Studi di tarda antichità offerti a Salvatore Calderone* (Messina 1988) 265–290; D. R. French, "Rhetoric and the Rebellion of A.D. 387 in Antioch," *Historia* 47 (1998) 468–484; H. Leppin, "Steuern, Ausfstand und Rhetoren: Der Antiochener Steueraufstand von 387 in christlicher und heidnischer Deutung," in H. Brandt (ed.), *Gedeutete Realität* (Stuttgart 1999) 103–123; P. L. Malosse, "Comment arrêter un massacre: une leçon de rhétorique appliquée (Libanios, *Discours* XIX)," *REG* 120 (2007) 107–140.

[5] On Chrysostom as Libanius' student see P. L. Malosse, "Jean Chrysostome a-t-il été l'élève de Libanios?" *Phoenix* 62 (2008) 273–280; cf. A.-J. Festugière, *Antioche païenne et chrétienne* (Paris 1959) 409–410; C. Spuntarelli, "I logoi e l'agorà in Giovanni Crisostomo," *AnnSE* 29 (2012) 183–186.

[6] For the relationship of Chrysostom with monasticism see Festugière,

suade the imperial emissaries to forgive the Antiochenes for their momentary frenzy.[7] It is in the context of this effort to protect the city that Chrysostom narrates how

> when the mother of one of the accused, uncovering her head, and exposing her grey hairs, laid hold of the horse of the judge by the bridle, and running beside him through the forum, thus entered with him the place of justice, we were all struck with astonishment, we all admired that exceeding tenderness and magnanimity. Ought we not, then, to have been much more impressed with wonder at the conduct of these men? For if she had even died for her son, it would have been nothing strange, since great is the tyranny of nature, and irresistible is the obligation arising from the maternal pangs! But these men so loved those whom they had not begotten, whom they had not brought up, yea rather, whom they had never seen, whom they had not heard of, whom they had never met, whom they knew only from their calamity, that if they had possessed a thousand lives, they would have chosen to deliver them all up for their safety.[8]

The physical description of the mother is rhetorically articulated to increase the pathos of the scene. Her unveiling of her head and her grey hair contribute to the creation of the literary persona of a suffering suppliant mother in keeping with Christian standards.[9] However, the final purpose of these lines

Antioche 181–210; F. van der Paverd, *St. John Chrysostom, the Homilies on the Statues* (Rome 1991) 266–288.

[7] On the monks see Festugière, *Antioche* 245–403; D. G. Hunter, *A Comparison between a King and a Monk, Against the Opponents of the Monastic Life* (Lewiston 1988) 11–17; J. M. Leroux, "Saint Jean Chrysostome: les Homélies des Statues," in C. Kannengiesser (ed.), *Jean Chrysostome et Augustine* (Paris 1975) 126–129.

[8] *De statuis* 17.4 (transl. Stephens).

[9] On the multiplicity of significations of hairstyles in early Christianity, L. L. Coon, *Sacred Fictions: Holy Women and Hagiography in Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia 1997) 32–34. Habits and occasions of veiling practices were changing and diverse: Dion. Hal. *Ant.Rom.* 15.9.2; Plut. *Mor.* 267A–C; Dio Chrys. 33.48. For an appraisal of the casting off of the veil in mourning see L. Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite's Tortoise. The Veiled Woman in Ancient Greece* (Swansea 2003) 303–305. On the different meanings of veiling in the early

was to praise the monks' intervention, on the day of the tribunal when Antioch was in need of spiritual comfort, by turning the prisoner's mother into the point of departure for a contrast.[10] Her bold behaviour, Chrysostom details, was motivated by her motherly nature, a natural instinct that ruled her (ἡ τῆς φύσεως τυραννίς) and against which nothing could be done as it arose from motherhood (ἄμαχος ἡ τῶν ὠδίνων ἀνάγκη).[11] Her display of magnanimity and tender love (πάντες ἐθαυμάσαμεν τὴν φιλοστοργίαν, τὴν μεγαλοψυχίαν), therefore, was instinctively bound to protect her son.

What interests us is the marked contrast in the wording used by Chrysostom: while the anonymous mother acted as she did because she was carried away by a natural tendency, the monks Chrysostom was praising would *choose* to die instead of the prisoners (ἑλέσθαι πάσας ὑπὲρ τῆς τούτων ἐπιδοῦναι σωτηρίας). Their actions were not motivated by the link that motherhood entails nor was there an urge stronger than their will to act. These monks helped *because* they chose to. As Frans van der Paverd has shown, the underlying rhetorical strategy of

Christian milieu see Coon 33–38; A. D. DeConick, *Holy Misogyny. Why the Sex and Gender Conflicts in the Early Church Still Matter* (London 2011) 57–63, 70–76; R. A. Lambine, *Le voile des femmes. Un inventaire historique, social et psychologique* (Bern 1999); R. MacMullen, "Women in Public in the Roman Empire," *Historia* 29 (1980) 216–218; K. Upson-Saia, *Early Christian Dress* (London 2011) 60–69. See e.g. Clem. Al. *Paed.* 2.10.114; Greg. Naz. *Or.* 8.10; Greg. Nys. *V.Macrin.* 29; Tert. *Cult.fem.* 2.

[10] Van der Paverd, *St. John Chrysostom* 64–73. For the role of the mother Theodoret *HRel* 13.7 substituted a monk named Macedonius.

[11] On the role of women in Chrysostom's work see his homilies *De Maccabeis*. Cf. C. Militello, *Donna e chiesa. La testimonianza di Giovanni Crisostomo* (Palermo 1985) 143–155; E. A. Clark, "Sexual Politics in the Writings of John Chrysostom," in D. M. Scholer (ed.), *Women in Early Christianity* (New York 1993) 235–240; G. Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford 1993) 100–101; A. M. Hartney, *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City* (London 2004) 85–102; B. Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives: John Chrysostom's Attack on Spiritual Marriage* (Berkeley 2001) 143–182.

Chrysostom's homily intended to credit the monks with the postponement of the decision of the imperial emissaries in order to undermine the actions that pagans could have undertaken to help Antioch. If we are to believe Chrysostom, they even managed to send a written petition to the emperor to be read in Constantinople (17.2).[12] Central to the larger strategy intended to support the Meletian faction of the Antiochene church in the context of an important religious schism,[13] Chrysostom's corpus of homilies on the Riot of the Statues deployed the episode of the brave mother confronting the emperor's emissaries in order to support an *a fortiori* argument that the monks' intervention was an important moment in the overall political and religious strategy to obtain the imperial pardon.[14]

Hecuba revisited: Libanius *Or*. 22.22

To a teacher of rhetoric steeped in classical literature and with a fondness for Euripides,[15] the scene of a *mater dolorosa* begging for her son's life to an authority figure in the aftermath of a violent conflict would have provided a tempting opportunity to portray the event in a Euripidean style.[16] The ease of

[12] Van der Paverd, *St. John Chrysostom* 19, 68–80, 148–149.

[13] The development and implications of this schism fall outside the scope of this paper. See J. N. Guinot, "Evêque et pasteurs à Antioche sous l'empereur Théodose: L'engagement chrétien dans la défense de la cité après la sédition des statues," in *Vescovi e pastori in epoca teodosiana* (Rome 1997) 461–467.

[14] This strategy was not alien to John Chrysostom, for whom "a woman's figure is used to comment on the customary activity of men" (Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows* 180).

[15] Lib. *Ep*. 255.9. See R. Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch* (Princeton 2007) 165; B. Schouler, *La tradition hellénique chez Libanios* (Lille 1984) 497–498.

[16] C. Morenilla, "Hécuba: apuntes para el estudio de una figura archidramática," in F. de Martino and C. Morenilla (eds.), *El fil d'Ariadna* (Bari 2001) 317–337; L. Romero Mariscal, "Hécuba," in A. Pociña and J. M. García González (eds.), *En Grecia y Roma* III *Mujeres reales y ficticias* (Granada 2009) 483–493.

such a comparison was positively sanctioned by the friendly connection that Libanius had with the addressee, the *magister militum* Ellebichus, who was himself acquainted with Greek literature and for whom the sophist had already composed an encomium (*Or*. 22.2).[17]

Compared with Chrysostom's *De stat*. 17, Libanius' *Or*. 22.22 offers a more complex account of the scene. First, Libanius provides us a glimpse of the young man's achievements: "among those to be examined was a fine young man who had won renown in many embassies and all forms of public service, and had taken his father's place in fulfilling civic duties." After he was imprisoned, his mother, overcome, "bared her head and loosed her aged hair, ran to his bosom, took her hair in her hands and clasped it about him, pleading for her son with pitiful cries. Her tears flowed over the general's feet, his over her head. No one dragged her away, nor yet did he himself repulse her." Finally, it is Ellebichus who is praised by Libanius: "He so devoted himself to her long-drawn prayers that he seemed to be superhuman. From every side there rose prayers for the preservation of his daughter, since he so conducted himself to people in distress and had expelled all harshness and severity from his mind" (transl. Norman).

Libanius drew on the vocabulary and narrative pattern used in Chrysostom's version, as the stylistic and linguistic similarities between the two texts show: both are divided into two sections, praising the anonymous mother and those who assisted her (the monks/Ellebichus), and in both accounts μήτηρ is accompanied by several participles that describe her and the desperate acts she undertook to attract Ellebichus' attention.[18]

[17] See also Lib. *Ep*. 2 and 898. Scholars disagree on the religious affiliation of Ellebichus. Van der Paverd, *St. John Chrysostom* 58, considers him a Christian, unlike *PLRE* I 277–278 and A. Norman, *Libanius. Selected Works* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1977) 374, labelling him as pagan.

[18] Chrys.: γυμνώσασα τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ τὰς πολιὰς δείξασα, τοῦ μέλλοντος δικάζειν κατασχοῦσα τὸν ἵππον ἀπὸ τοῦ χαλινοῦ, καὶ παρατρέχουσα διὰ τῆς ἀγορᾶς οὕτως εἰς τὸ δικαστήριον συνεισῆλθε. Lib.: γυμνώσασα μὲν

In this sense, Chrysostom and Libanius seem to follow Aristotle's prescripts on how to arouse an audience's sympathy by presenting a pitiable mother who was helped in a time of desperate need.[19] After this, the priest and the sophist end their accounts by remarking upon the monks' and Ellebichus' sympathy, respectively. The striking resemblance of these two passages has not passed unnoticed by scholars and has provoked different opinions. Whilst Goebel accused Libanius of plagiarism due to a desire for public recognition ("ut laudis erat cupidissimus"), Norman excused the sophist, arguing that the common subject-matter should explain the thematic and verbal similarities.[20] Petit and Leppin hold that each text was composed with different purposes in mind: Chrysostom would aim to emphasize the philanthropic character of the monks, and Libanius would underscore the civic and political import of the episode.[21]

Clearly, the religious and political dimension of the riot has been the predominant criterion when examining the uprising and, consequently, has caused scholars to overlook the literary references in Libanius' version. Obviously, Libanius wanted to counter the role of the monks in Chrysostom's homily by underlining Ellebichus' humane nature as the decisive factor in

τὴν κεφαλήν, λύσασα δὲ τὴν γεγηρακυῖαν τρίχα, προσδραμοῦσα τῷ στήθει καὶ περιθεῖσα τούτῳ μετὰ τῶν χειρῶν τοὺς τοιούτους πλοκάμους ᾔτει μὲν τὸν υἱὸν ἐλεεινὸν βοῶσα.

[19] Both authors follow Arist. *Rh.* 1356a14–19, 1385b11–1386a4. For Chrysostom evoking pity see S. Sitzler, "Identity: the Indigent and the Wealthy in the Homilies of John Chrysostom," *VigChr* 63 (2009) 470–472. Although mainly focused on Latin literature, see A. Corbeill, *Nature Embodied: Gesture in Ancient Rome* (Princeton 2004) 65–106, for gestures in laments and mourning.

[20] R. Goebel, *De Ioannis Chrysostomi et Libanii orationibus quae sunt de seditione Antiochensium* (Göttingen 1910) 49; Norman, *Libanius* 239.

[21] Leppin, in *Gedeutete Realität* 118; Petit, *Libanius* 243–244. For further implications of these accounts (especially Chrysostom's) see van der Paverd, *St. John Chrysostom* 70–71.

obtaining Theodosius' forgiveness.[22] *Or.* 22 is part encomium, therefore panegyrical words were expected.[23] In my opinion, the religious and political issues underlying Libanius' work should be supplemented by a closer reading of the literary models on which he relied.

A suppliant mother such as that described by Chrysostom and Libanius was easily likened to the kind of "stylisation of passion"[24] presented by the Euripidean *Hecuba*:[25] in the aftermath of conflict (Trojan War/Riot of the Statues),[26] an aged mother pleads for the life of her offspring (Polyxena/the young man arrested) to an authority figure (Odysseus/Ellebichus). The assimilation between the two mothers was easy enough to make, especially for Libanius, a sophist whose mastery of classical texts was supplemented by his ability to find the appropriate *kairos* to deploy them. A confessed admirer of Euripides, he cited *Hecuba* in several contexts: in *Or.* 2.49 the tragedy appears in a list of classical plays (*Oedipus, Hippolytus, Bacchae, Medea*), which reveals the prestige of *Hecuba* in the late antique theatre —in fact, lines 596–597 are quoted in his *Defense of the Pantomime* (64.47). It is also important to note that he used 864–867 in the proemium of *Or.* 25.3,[27] a very fitting quotation for an oration

[22] His more complete attack on monasticism is his *Pro templis* (*Or.* 30).

[23] As to the literary genre of *Or.* 22, A. Cameron and J. Long, *Barbarians and Politics at the Court of Arcadius* (Berkeley 1993) 179, do not consider it a panegyric, but Norman, *Libanius* 240, and J. Ernesti, *Princeps Christianus und Kaiser aller Römer. Theodosius der Große im Lichte zeitgenössischer Quellen* (Paderborn 1998) 437, think otherwise.

[24] J. Mossman, *Wild Justice: A Study of Euripides' Hecuba* (Bristol 1999) 100.

[25] On the myth and plot of the Euripidean drama see Mossman, *Wild Justice* 254–263; cf. Hom. *Il.* 22.25–89, 405–407, 430–436.

[26] On the symbolism of the setting where the tragedy takes place see F. I. Zeitlin, *Playing the Other. Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature* (Chicago 1996) 173–176.

[27] *Hec.* 864–867: οὐκ ἔστι θνητῶν ὅστις ἔστ' ἐλεύθερος· ἢ χρημάτων γὰρ δοῦλός ἐστιν ἢ τύχης/ἢ πλῆθος αὐτὸν πόλεος ἢ νόμων γραφαὶ εἴργουσι χρῆσθαι μὴ κατὰ γνώμην τρόποις. Cf. B. Schouler, *Libanios. Discours moraux* (Paris 1973) 58–59.

that deals with slavery and that capitalizes on these lines of Euripides, alluding to individual freedom, private constraint, or civic norms.[28] The lyric tone of Libanius' *Ep.* 1424.2, in which he laments the death of the emperor Julian, is indebted to his use of line 285 (τὸν πάντα δ' ὄλβον ἦμαρ ἕν μ' ἀφείλετο), which had become a tragic axiom used in elegiac contexts.[29] Hecuba also appears in his progymnasmata as a motherly and pitiable figure in the invective against Hector (*Prog.* 9.2.12) and in a speech in the character of Hector's wife (11.2.2).[30] Libanius, therefore, resorted to Hecuba (both the character and the homonymous tragedy) in two main contexts: the situation of the defeated after a conflict, and motherly lamentation,[31] precisely the two main themes of *Or.* 22.22.[32]

In this passage, the strong symbolism of the unnamed mother who suffers for her son's imprisonment[33] is strengthened by Libanius' emulation of Euripides' physical portrait of Hecuba

[28] J. Gregory, *Euripides: Hecuba* (Atlanta 1999) 148. Euripides will insist on these themes at 800–805, 1240–1251. Cf. S. G. Daitz, "Concepts of Freedom and Slavery in Euripides' Hecuba," *Hermes* 99 (1971) 217–226, esp. 222–223; R. B. Rutherford, *Greek Tragic Style: Form, Language and Interpretation* (Cambridge 2012) 157–159.

[29] Men. Rh. 434.12 mentions Hecuba in his theorization of monodies.

[30] For Hecuba as a pitiable figure see C. Segal, *Euripides and the Poetics of Sorrow* (Durham 1993) 166–167.

[31] A comprehensive and thorough study of laments and supplications can be found in F. S. Naiden, *Ancient Supplication* (New York 2006), who furnishes a plethora of examples from Greece, Rome, and the Near East catalogued according to different criteria (163–169 and 301–338 for examples from Greek literature). See also L. Miguélez Cavero, "Gesture and Gestuality in the *Dionysiaca* of Nonnus," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 2 (2009) 253–260; L. Neville, "Lamentation, History, and Female Authorship in Anna Komnene's *Alexiad*," *GRBS* 53 (2013) 199–209.

[32] For the rhetorical usages of Euripides' *Hecuba* see Mossman, *Wild Justice* 94–141.

[33] On the worsening prison conditions in Late Antiquity see S. Torallas Tovar, "Violence in the Process of Arrest and Imprisonment in Late Antique Egypt," in H. A. Drake (ed.), *Violence in Late Antiquity. Perceptions and Practices* (Aldershot 2006) 107–109.

and by lexical similarities. The tragedian is consistent in making the *dramatis personae* and Hecuba herself stress that she is an old woman (59, 156, 170, 203, 389, 495, 621, 810), with aged hands (64, 143, 876–877) and white hair (500).[34] In Libanius, the mother unveils her head and her white hair reveals her as aged (γυμνώσασα μὲν τὴν κεφαλήν, λύσασα δὲ τὴν γεγηρακυῖαν τρίχα). In the tragedy, Polyxena inquires why Hecuba is crying out (177),[35] unaware that she will be told that she is going to be sacrificed; in the sophist's passage, the mother also cries out for her son's sake (ᾔτει μὲν τὸν υἱὸν ἐλεεινὸν βοῶσα).[36] Both women could not refrain from shedding tears (*Hec.* 230, οὐδὲ δακρύων κενός; *Or.* 22.22, δάκρυα δὲ τὰ μὲν ἐκείνης) and from supplicating (*Hec.* 97, 145; *Or.* 22.22, τῷ μήκει τῆς ἱκετείας) to save the lives of their children (*Hec.* 74, 79; *Or.* 22.22, πανταχόθεν εὐχαὶ σώζεσθαί).[37]

Thus, Libanius' treatment of the suppliant mother as Hecuba was rendered deliberately unoriginal in order to make the assimilation between the two characters more easily recognisable.[38] But what makes the account singularly dynamic is

[34] Cf. the sarcastic allusion to Hecuba's age in an epigram about a woman making up to look younger, *Anth.Gr.* 2.408: οὔποτε φῦκος καὶ ψίμυθος τεύξει τὴν Ἑκάβην Ἑλένην.

[35] In *Prog.* 12.18 Libanius describes a statue of the sacrifice of Polyxena.

[36] On the semiotic implications of Hecuba's βοά see J. Campos Daroca, "Las voces de la violencia: lectura de Hécuba," in F. de Martino and C. Morenilla (eds.), *Legitimización e institucionalización política de la violencia* (Bari 2009) 95–96.

[37] This scene resembles that of women mourning in Homer, see K. Derderian, *Leaving Words to Remember. Greek Mourning and the Advent of Literacy* (Leiden 2001) 52–53. See also S. Lawrence, *Moral Awareness in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford 2013) 214–215, and 218–224 for a *status quaestionis* on how Hecuba's character has been reappraised.

[38] Hecuba played a secondary role in classical art and in most classical literature, see Mossman, *Wild Justice* 254–263, and 211: "late writers often blur the distinction between the Hecuba of Homer and those of the two Euripides plays"; 219: "by the end of antiquity, a conglomerate figure made up of the Hecubas of Homer and Euripides was a universally recognizable

that the sophist did not bow to the tragedian's authority but revised the characteristic features of Odysseus, Hecuba's antagonist in Euripides' play, in order to present Ellebichus as a morally improved and more compassionate version of the hero. The enabling of praise of Ellebichus' attitude was achieved by subverting the features of the manipulative Odysseus,[39] whose renowned capacity for disguise and deceitfulness gives way to the irreproachable ethics of the *magister militum* who empathized with a suffering mother in a moment of extreme uncertainty. Unlike the Euripidean Odysseus, Libanius made Ellebichus occupy the moral high ground of the episode.

Ellebichus resembled Odysseus in that both held positions of command and shared a strong concern with the interests of the state,[40] but the *magister militum* differs from the hero in that Ellebichus found a way to combine his personal sympathy towards an individual with decisions that affected the entire community. Libanius illustrated such empathy by paying particular attention to the physical contact between a pitiable and an authoritative figure, with the goal of intensifying the contrast between Odysseus and Ellebichus. In *Hecuba*, embracing —physical contact among the characters—is revealing of how their relations are conducted: Odysseus warns Hecuba to

type of suffering." A.-F. Laurens, *LIMC* IV.1 473–481, esp. 480: "en général, elle souligne, simplement par sa nature de femme, ou par son statut d'épouse ou de mère…" See also A. Esteban Santos, "Mujeres dolientes épicas y trágicas: literatura e iconografía (heroínas de la mitología griega IV)," *CFC(G)* 18 (2008) 17–19; Romero Mariscal, in *En Grecia* 489–491.

[39] For Odysseus as deceitful and a liar in fifth-century tragedy see R. G. A. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge 1982) 174–181; Mossman, *Wild Justice* 103–118; N. Worman, "Odysseus *Panourgos*: the Liar's Style in Tragedy and Oratory," *Helios* 26 (1999) 35–68, esp. 43–44, and *Abusive Mouths in Classical Athens* (Cambridge 2008) 52–55. Cf. W. B. Standford, *The Ulysses Theme: A Study of the Adaptability of a Traditional Hero* (Oxford 1954). For the purpose of this study, Lib. *Decl*. 4 is especially revealing of Odysseus' character; see Schouler, *La tradition hellénique* 205–208.

[40] D. Corey and C. Eubanks, "Private and Public Virtue in Euripides' *Hecuba*," *Interpretation* 30 (2003) 225–228; Lawrence, *Moral Awareness* 215.

surrender and not to compell him to separate Polyxena from her by force (225–226), and the suppliant Hecuba must swallow her pride and grasp Odysseus to beg him not to tear her daughter from her (275–278).[41] Odysseus remains adamantly insensitive to Hecuba's pleas despite the fact that she reminds him of when he came to spy on Troy and, after being recognized, touched Hecuba's knees in supplication for his life (239–250).[42] Ellebichus, by contrast, showed a compassionate disposition and allowed physical contact with the anonymous mother to the point that his tears flowed onto her head, completely the opposite of Odysseus who turns his head away so he would not be touched by Polyxena (342–344).[43] By adding this humane gesture to his portrait of Ellebichus, Libanius makes the mother's antagonist a sympathetic administrator of the moral justice denied to Hecuba in the Euripidean play.[44] Likewise, in another reworking of the play, Libanius portrays Ellebichus' physical contact with the mother as a sign of reciprocation and awareness of others' suffering, a gesture "beyond human nature" (κρείττων εἶναι φύσεως ἀνθρωπείας), whilst in *Hecuba* the chorus of Trojan Women underestimates Odysseus' imperviousness to the tears of a suppliant mother as they confess that not crying in such situation would defy "human nature" (296–298, οὐκ ἔστιν οὕτω στερρὸς ἀνθρώπου φύσις ἥτις γόων σῶν καὶ μακρῶν ὀδυρμάτων κλύουσα θρήνους οὐκ ἂν ἐκβάλοι δάκρυ), a state achieved by Odysseus, as he did not pity Hecuba nor cry.

[41] For the importance of physical contact in this passage see C. E. Mercier, "Hekabe's Extended Supplication," *TAPA* 123 (1993) 154–156.

[42] On these controversial lines see A. W. H. Adkins, "Basic Greek Values in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Hercules Furens*," *CQ* 16 (1966) 196–200.

[43] C. Collard, *Hecuba. Euripides* (Warminster 1991) 148: "Od. moves to avoid the physical contact by a suppliant which obliges response and curtails independence."

[44] Romero Mariscal, in *En Grecia* 489–490.

The purposes of reenactment

Beyond the lexical and thematic resonances, Libanius' *Or.* 22.22 captured the oxymoronic hints of Euripides' play (a barbarian woman lecturing Greeks on Greek virtues; a slave who is spiritually free enough to put into practice her own decisions; a powerful figure like Odysseus constrained by circumstances)[45] and applied them to a similar setting (a moment of uncertainty after a convulsive event), yet with his own agenda. Libanius portrayed as Hecuba the mother of the young man, who displayed great courage when she approached Ellebichus, but the panegyrical nature of *Or.* 22 called for a twist in the story: unlike the ruthless Odysseus, the *magister militum* was shown making a public demonstration of sympathy for those in need.

But why did Libanius assimilate the incident of the young man's mother to Euripides' *Hecuba*? What did the sophist want to achieve? In my opinion, opting for this literary approach enabled him to strike three different targets in a single and well-crafted blow.

First, from a religious viewpoint *Or.* 22.22 is paradigmatic of the rhetorical strategy adopted by the sophist in the corpus of orations on the Riot of the Statues, in that its main goal was to neutralize the influence of John Chrysostom's preaching on the Antiochenes.[46] The priest advocated a religious and cultural programme that condemned pagan practices and the attending of events based on pagan culture. Such caveats, summed up in his *Contra ludos et theatra*, are scattered throughout his work and are particularly incisive in censuring theatrical representations.[47] Unlike Chrysostom, Libanius wanted his audience to

[45] Zeitlin, *Playing the Other* 208–211.

[46] On Chrysostom's success in converting people see L. Brottier, "Jean Chrysostome. Un pasteur face à des demi-chrétiens," *Topoi* Suppl. 5 (2004) 439–457.

[47] S.-P. Bergjan, " 'Das hier ist kein Theater, und ihr sitzt nicht da, um Schauspieler zu betrachten und zu klatschen' – Theaterpolemik und Theatermetaphern bei Johannes Chrysostomos," *ZAC* 8 (2005) 567–592;

enter and reenact the world of theatre, for in doing so the cultural and moral values transmitted by the classical theatre would come to life again. His choice to reenact a theatrical scene instead of developing a rhetorical counter-argument should not be seen as a pointless literary construction. As Isabella Sandwell has rightly pointed out, Libanius' orations on the Riot of the Statues are subtle works in which he confronted the weakening position of pagan culture at the end of the fourth century.[48] In this context, responding to Chrysostom's praise of the monks with a theatricalized version of the same incident fit the sophist's political and religious agenda.[49]

Second, choosing to allude to a theatrical text as the means of expressing civic concerns should not surprise us, since Greek tragedy and a city's political life had always been linked. In this connection, it is not unexpected that Libanius expressed his concern for Antioch's safety after the uprising through recourse to a well-known scene in Euripides.[50] Thus, if in the play Polyxena symbolizes Hecuba's πόλις (160, 281, 494, 669, 811), in *Or.* 22.22 Libanius emphasizes the young man's achieve-

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Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows* 2001) 42–74, 143–166; L. Lugaresi, *Il teatro di Dio: il problema degli spettacoli nel cristianesimo antico* (Brescia 2008) 695–798.

[48] I. Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge 2007) 173–176; cf. U. Criscuolo, "Aspetti della resistenza ellenica dell'ultimo Libanio," in F. Ela Consolino (ed.), *Pagani e cristiani da Giuliano l'Apostata al sacco di Roma* (Soveria Manelli 1995) 90–99; P. Easterling and R. Miles, "Dramatic Identities: Tragedy in Late Antiquity," in R. Miles (ed.), *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity* (London 1999) 100–107.

[49] Cf. D. G. Hunter, "Preaching and Propaganda in Fourth Century Antioch: John Chrysostom's *Homilies on the Statues*," in D. G. Hunter (ed.), *Preaching in the Patristic Age. Studies in Honor of Walter J. Burghardt* (New York 1989) 120: "Chrysostom's Homilies on the Statues continue a long-standing debate with his former teacher … Chrysostom uses the crisis to argue that Christianity, and not pagan culture, forms people in the virtues most necessary for public life."

[50] For *Hecuba* in late antique literature see Mossman, *Wild Justice* 210–219; T. Pollard, "What's Hecuba to Shakespeare?" *Renaissance Quarterly* 65 (2012) 1063–1065.

ments in public service and liturgies in Antioch.[51] Hecuba's lament for being ἄπολις (669) after the death of Polyxena[52] was a fear that Libanius to some extent shared. Denunciation of the ruinous burden of liturgies and the exhausted resources of the *curiales* became a theme of his work,[53] so the reference to the detention of a young man who was fulfilling civic duties should be understood as a rhetorical strategy to symbolize the vital importance of the *curiales* to the wellbeing of Antioch.[54] Unlike Odysseus' decision which made Hecuba ἄπολις, Ellebichus' thoughtfulness towards those on whom Fortune had turned her back (πρὸς ἀτυχοῦντας)[55] caused him (and the other emissary

[51] Note the rhetorical disposition of his renowned deeds, placed between μήτηρ and the participles modifying her: μήτηρ γὰρ δὴ τῶν ἐν τοῖς κρινομένοις ἑνὸς νέου τε καὶ καλοῦ καὶ πολλαῖς μὲν πρεσβείαις, ἁπάσαις δὲ λαμπρυνομένου λειτουργίαις, τοῖς πράγμασι δὲ ἀντὶ τοῦ πατρὸς ἀρκέσαντος γυμνώσασα κτλ. (n.18).

[52] The alliterative sequence ἄπαις ἄνανδρος ἄπολις reflects one of the aspects of motherhood that N. Loraux, *Mothers in Mourning* (New York 1998) 12, highlighted: "motherhood nonetheless counts as a civic activity." See also A. Fishman, "*Thrênoi* to *Moirológia*: Female Voices of Solitude, Resistance, and Solidarity," *Oral Tradition* 23 (2008) 267–268, 274–280; Mossman, *Wild Justice* 109–110, 274–279; E. Visvardi, "Pity and Panhellenic Politics. Choral Emotion in Euripides' *Hecuba* and *Trojan Women,*" in D. M. Carter (ed.), *Why Athens? A Reapraissal of Tragic Politics* (Oxford 2011) 269–289.

[53] Liebeschuetz, *BZ* 52 (1959) 343–345. The privileged position of this class in Libanius' work has been studied by M. Francesio, *L'idea di città in Libanio* (Stuttgart 2004) 126–132; R. Pack, "Curiales in the Correspondence of Libanius," *TAPA* 82 (1951) 176–192. For the importance of the curiales in a city's economy see R. Delmaire, "Cité et fiscalité au Bas-Empire. A propos du rôle des curiales dans le levée des impôts," in C. Lepelley (ed.), *La fin de la cité antique et le début de la cité médiévale* (Bari 1996) 59–70. See Lib. *Or.* 47–48; R. Pack, *Studies in Libanius and Antiochene Society under Theodosius* (Michigan 1935) 92–96; H. Ziche, "Making Late Roman Taxpayers Pay: Imperial Government Strategies and Practice," in *Violence in Late Antiquity* 132–136.

[54] D. R. French, *Christian Emperors and Pagan Spectacles: The Secularization of the Ludi* (diss. U. California Berkeley 1985) 149.

[55] ἀτύχημα/εὐτύχημα are a recurrent image in the play (282–283, 301,

sent by Theodosius, the *magister officiorum* Caesarius) to issue an exonerating report that prevented further suffering for the mother and benefited the political and financial system of Antioch. Thus Libanius transferred Hecuba's comparison of Polyxena and the πόλις to the civic sphere of late antique Antioch, implying that imprisoning *curiales* like the young man would bring the city to ruin.[56]

Finally, Libanius' literaturization of an historical event and assimilating it to a famous theatrical scene was at the core of his conception of how Greek paideia should be displayed and performed. "Allusion was preferred to precision," Leyerle has pointed out, "Libanius thought obviousness vulgar."[57] The sophist did not consider it necessary to make an explicit introduction to the literary passage he was about to use; instead, he regarded Greek paideia as a palimpsest that could be rewritten according to what the situation demanded. Lieve Van Hoof has argued for considering Greek culture as an active element in the political life of Late Antiquity.[58] In this sense, Libanius' use of Euripides' *Hecuba* to portray a conflict exemplifies what he wanted Greek paideia to become: a flexible and useful language to manipulate and adapt to all circumstances.

Conclusion

The priest's and the sophist's cultural and religious agendas led to two different rhetorical strategies which, eventually, helped Libanius construct his own rewriting of the Euripidean

377, 404, 429, 541, 619, 751, 904, 970, 989, 1228).

[56] For Libanius' concern for prisoners see *Or.* 45 (*De vinctis*); cf. M. Matter, "Libanios et les prisons d'Antioche", in C. Bertrand-Dagenbach et al. (eds.), *Carcer* II *Prison et privation de liberté dans l'empire romain et l'occident médiéval* (Paris 2004) 55–63. For the importance of the concept πόλις in Euripides' *Hecuba* see Campos Daroca, in *Legitimización* 99–100.

[57] Leyerle, *Theatrical Shows* 31 n.92; cf. H. Hunger, "On the Imitation of Antiquity," *DOP* 23–24 (1969–1970) 29.

[58] L. Van Hoof, "Performing *Paideia*: Greek Culture as an Instrument for Social Promotion in the Fourth Century A.D.," *CQ* 63 (2013) 387–406, esp. 387–389, 405–406.

Hecuba. His *Or*. 22.22 represents more than a few lines showing off his knowledge of Euripides and his sense of *kairos*. This passage gives us an example of the vitality of late antique literature, as it proves to what extent the classical legacy became a key player in religious and cultural struggles. The sophist knew how to capitalize on an episode that John Chrysostom had used to exalt the monks. By remolding it and likening it to one of the most iconic moments of Euripides' *Hecuba*, Libanius ensured that his performance of a piece of classical paideia would have an immediate impact. His reenactment of the key leitmotifs of the Euripidean tragedy brought pagan paideia into action as part of a dynamic argument that could be recast into different shapes depending on the situation. Libanius did not simply assimilate the anonymous mother to the well-known character of Hecuba but also played on the male character. The creation of a morally improved version of Odysseus impersonated by Ellebichus shows that classical paideia was a powerful instrument flexible enough to be adapted to new and changing circumstances.[59]

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