ISSA Proceedings 2014 – Should We Teach Epideictic?

Abstract: In this paper, I consider the possibility of recreating a rhetorical teaching of epideictic inspired by the ancient practice. First, I remind of the usefulness of epideictic. Then, I try to reconstruct the technical knowledge that an ancient student acquired through epideictic training. Finally, I make some suggestions based on the ancient pedagogical material about the way we could teach epideictic to contemporary audiences.

Keywords: ancient rhetoric, blame, epideictic, praise, exercises, teaching, speech genres, technique

1. *Introduction: teaching ancient rhetoric today*

It is well known that since the beginning of its history, rhetoric has been taught. This teaching, as our sources still allow us to know it, seemed to closely associate theory and practice through rhetorical exercises. After the first sophists and their *dissoi logoi* (Danblon, 2013, pp. 127-148; Ferry, 2013; Pearce, 1994) rhetoric teaching evolved progressively and new kinds of exercises appeared. Around the beginning of the Roman Empire, there was a relatively homogeneous set of exercises called *progymnasmata*, which were organized in a progression from basic writing exercises to complete speeches and argumentations (Cribiore, 2001; Pernot, 2000, pp. 194-200; Webb, 2001). These exercises were supposed to prepare the students for full speeches and declamations (Patillon, 2002, p. xviii), considered as the closest to reality, and beyond them, for every circumstance or field of their future public life (local politics, advocacy, imperial service, literary contests, teaching; see Heath, 2004, pp. 276-331). In addition to the famous treatises of Aristotle, Cicero or Quintilian, we still have a lot of works whose practical dimension is more marked, like manuals of exercises and declamation collections, which inspired teachers of rhetoric for centuries. We also have some papyrological evidence, which show us the every day practice in rhetorical schools. But when rhetoric was excluded from teaching and schools' programs, all these pedagogical tools were almost forgotten. My research team and I have recently started a research project that aims to reintroduce some rhetorical training at Brussels' University but also in high schools, by reconnecting the ancient exercises with actual practice. In doing so, we undertake a kind of

experimental archaeology. We test the ancient teaching techniques and exercises in classrooms to observe the effects they produce on contemporary audiences, to see whether they still meet the objectives they were supposed to and whether we can create other exercises that could help to stimulate and to train useful capacities and technical skills. In conducting these exercises, the usefulness and the goal of each of them became clearer: the *ekphrasis* consisted in making a vivid depiction of an object or a scene, the *ethopoiia* in imitating the *ethos* and the *pathos* of a person or character in a given context; the declamation called *suasoria* imitated the deliberative genre and the *controversia* imitated the forensic genre; both of them corresponded to actual institutions that, *mutatis mutandis*, we still have today. But the ancient students were also trained in a third genre, according to Aristotle's theory: the epideictic, i.e. speeches of praise or blame (Pernot, 1993, pp. 25-42; 117-127; Pratt, 2012). In this lecture, preparing our future work with our pupils and students, I would like to propose a preliminary inquiry, through ancient pedagogical material and modern works, about what we can hope to achieve if we practice the epideictic genre and how we could do it.

2. *The function of epideictic*

To begin, we should ask ourselves what the epideictic speeches are good for and why the Ancients used them. The epideictic genre has often been understood as a ceremonial kind of speech, a pleasant and aesthetic spectacle without a link with persuasion, where the audience admires the orator's technique and talent. As the word *epideixis* (demonstration) shows, this technical aspect has always been present in the epideictic genre. But, as Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca (1950; 1958 [2008], pp. 62-68) pointed out, it would be a mistake to reduce the genre to this only function, forgetting the deep, social, rhetorical and political role it could play. Unlike the forensic and deliberative speeches, where adversaries are struggling over disputed facts, the epideictic speech tries to gather the community around undisputed views. The epideictic orator is the spokesman of the community: he invokes ancestors and gods, quotes poets and leaders, rediscovers the past to remind the audience of the ideas they chose to believe in, and why, to form a community in the present and to counter future objections. The very function of the epideictic is then to reinforce the support to the values that ground the community and its decisions. The speech meets this effect by temporarily suspending criticism, but it only makes sense if criticism is allowed on other occasions. If the end is already known, the attention is drawn to

the way the orator reaches it, on his art of creating a communion of thought *(homonoia*) and of arousing emotions. But it is a consequence and not a goal. Such kind of rhetoric, focusing on gathering rather than dividing, could still be useful in our modern multicultural societies, where we still have occasions to express it. In addition to its function, epideictic speeches required specific techniques that may contribute to the intellectual development of the learners and could be used as rhetorical devices in many circumstances.

3. *Epideictic in the basic rhetorical training*

The next question is to know what kind of techniques the ancient students did learn through epideictic and how. For this, we need to reconsider the epideictic training. The starting point will be the papyrus Mil. Vogl. III 123 (Pack2 2525; LDAB 7011). This papyrus, dated from the IIIth century B. C. by the editor Cazzaniga (1957; 1965), is one of the few documents that we still have for the Hellenistic period. It presents some *encomia* or *epanoi* of heroes, among which we can recognize Minos, Rhadamanthus and Tydaeus. In the treatment of each subject, we can also recognize some typical epideictic topoi (*eugeneia, paideia*), defined by Aristotle and in the rhetorical manuals of the first centuries A.D. The editor considers that this is a collection of *encomia* of an earlier period, but Pernot (1993, pp. 43-44) and, more recently, Delgado (2012), convincingly argued that it is rather the teaching notes of a rhetor. This would be a unique piece that could help us to make a link between the early developments of rhetorical teaching in the Classical Period and the many sources of the Second Sophistic in the first years of the Roman Empire. But it is also worth stressing the technical aspects of this document that, I think, point to later evolutions of the genre. First, there is something strange about those three names: Minos and Rhadamanthus are often quoted with a third hero, Aeacus (Men. Rhet. II, 379, 13-18; 380, 21-22). Those three have a perfect *heroic resume* and after their life on earth became the judges of the Greek underworld; they are *endoxoi*, famous and positive subjects to start rhetorical training and good comparative examples in actual speeches. So we may suppose that the rhetor broke the trilogy to surprise his students and increase the difficulty of the exercise. Tydaeus has some embarrassing holes or misbehaviours in his *resume* (Grimal, 1951[2007], p. 465): he was the son a second relationship (maybe out of a wedlock or incestuous), he was raised by pig keepers, he had to leave his homeland because he committed murder and then became a hero in the war of the Seven against Thebes; but at the end of it, when he was about to die, he lost the support of the goddess Athena, and immortality,

because he ate his enemy's brain out of his skull. This subject, combining positive and negative aspects, would be called *amphidoxon* in the later treatises. Another interesting detail is the way the teacher tackled the lack of a good education. Even if the document is very damaged, the editor proposes to read two times "*ou pepaideumenos*" which means "even if he has not received a (good) education"; we may suppose that the following lines would have been something like "he became a hero" or "he built up his own glory thanks to his natural qualities". From a technical point of view, it means that instead of avoiding the difficulty, the teacher thought it would be a better choice to confront the problem and to turn it into a source of praise; and that he wanted to train his students to this particular possibility.

This technical reflection brings us to the later period of the Second Sophistic, where rhetorical teaching was widely spread in the Roman Empire, where the sources are many and we can hope to learn more about the way technique was taught. The *encomium or epainos* (Pernot, 1993, pp. 117-127) had been integrated as an exercise in the *progymnasmata* program as we can see in the manuals of Aelius Theon, Pseudo-Hermogenes, Aphthonius and Nicolaus (Patillon, 2002; 2008; Kennedy, 2003; Pernot, 1993, pp. 56-60). During this part of their training, the students learned a method that combined *inventio* and *dispositio*. To praise a person, after a brief introduction, you had first to find his origins and to praise his family, city and nation; then, you might speak about the childhood, the education, activities and early career; you might also add the external goods and gifts of nature (wealth, beauty, physical strength, talent); the main part of the speech was devoted to the presentation of the virtues, illustrated by some famous deeds or reciprocally. If there was something remarkable or glorious about it, you might also tell the audience about the death. The speech ended with a comparison (always in favour of the one you were praising) and a brief conclusion. The orator could freely fill the different parts of the speech, but the global frame was very strict. Another exercise, called the "common-place" (*koinos topos*), was supposed to train amplification from determined kinds of facts or persons, like the murderer or the seducer; such rhetorical developments could easily be inserted in forensic or deliberative speeches. It reminds us that praise itself could be used as a rhetorical strategy in other kinds of speeches (*Rhet. Her*. III, 15; Quint. III, 7, 1-3; 28; Pernot, 1993, pp. 25-26). The students also practised blame, but the manuals do not tell a lot about it: the blame was confined to school and could not be expressed in public life, but as a part of other speeches (Pernot, 1993, pp.

481-490). Inspired by the first sophists, the Second Sophistic loved the paradox and we may also suppose that the paradoxical *encomium* (Pernot, 1993, pp. 532-543; Dandrey, 1997, pp. 9-35) was practised as well, but it was not a part of the basic training: such as Gorgias commented his *encomium* of Helen, it was a pleasant game (*paignion*), an exercise of virtuosity for high level rhetors who wanted to show their talent and be admired thanks to an impressive demonstration (*epideixis*) of the rhetorical technique and its power. But many technical skills were already required for standard epideictic speeches (Pernot, 1993, pp. 129-178; 254-265; 674-710). To achieve a proper encomium, a student had to learn and master specific techniques of amplification and argumentation: he had to show why the person could be praised, why his deeds illustrated some virtues; sometimes, when the subject was not fully *endoxon*, he had to defend the reputation of the one he praised. To find arguments, the students used rhetorical topoi and their cultural background. They had to know the world they lived in, what could be a reason for praise or blame in their society, what the audience, or even, everyone, could praise or admire. So, the students progressively built up a rich and flexible amount of values, sometimes contradictory (see for instance: *Arist., Rhet.* I, 9 = 1367b 12-20), to face every situation or case. The *encomia* had of course to be written and delivered with an appropriate style (Pernot, 1993, pp. 333-421). Through the Hellenistic and Roman period, we observe an evolution of the subjects: they praised heroes, past leaders and writers, gods, animals, objects or abstract notions, but also contemporary and actual subjects like family members, friends, cities, officials and emperors (Pernot, 1993, pp. 178-249).

4. *Advanced training: speech genres and detour strategy*

After the basic courses, some students received an advanced or extensional training in the epideictic genre (Heath, 2004, pp. 218-254; Pernot, 1993, pp. 60-66) for the many speech contests organized in the Empire next to other competitions, but also for the many circumstances of the private and public life where an epideictic speech could take place. Some ancient treatises were only devoted to the epideictic genre, like the two treatises attributed to Menander Rhetor and the one of Pseudo-Dionysius, dating from the IIIth century A.D (Russell & Wilson, 1981 [2004]). The first treatise of Menander is organized following the subjects of encomium; the second one and the treatise of Pseudo-Dionysius are organized following the different types of epideictic speeches according to specific circumstances: the *gamêlios logos* is the wedding speech, the *klêtikos* is the speech of invitation, the *epibatêrios* is the speech of arrival, the

syntaktikos is the leavetaking speech (Pernot, 1993, pp. 67-111). Every coming and going, every private or public event (birthday, funeral, crowning, opening) was an occasion for speech: this was a way to draw attention and get renown, to begin a public career and get closer to those who had power. In a world where the most important political and forensic issues were controlled by the emperor or those who represented him, some of the rhetorical and political activity moved to the epideictic genre through a "detour" strategy of advice and encouragement (Pernot, 1993, pp. 710-723; Danblon, 1999; 2001). For instance, the speech of an embassy of a city which suffered a disaster and asked for the help of the emperor, started by an encomium of the emperor and his past generosity, followed by a lamentation about the city and its past splendour: the emperor could feel forced to be generous again for a city that deserved his help. The welcoming address to a new governor praised him and the city he was coming to: the governor learned what the city was famous for, what the citizens cared about and implicitly, what a good governor should do to be appreciated.

These circumstantial speeches are particularly interesting because they had to deal with the past, present and future reality. Several problems and tensions arose from this (Pernot, 1993, pp. 254-265). First, the orator had to find information and interesting arguments to fill the different parts of speech; secondly, he has to be specific and not only general: he had to explain what makes the praised person or object different and better than the others; thirdly, he could not say all the good things he found but had to make a selection of the most appropriate arguments. But the main problem was that reality rarely corresponded to the model. It is then not surprising that Menander Rhetor (I, 346, 9-19; 353, 25-26) proposed another classification of the epideictic subjects, maybe more realistic and probably inspired by the forensic genre: next to the endoxon and the paradoxon, he speaks about the amphidoxon and the adoxon: this later word, which already appeared earlier, referred to something that was obviously negative or, more interestingly, something that simply didn't fit with the standard endoxon scheme but on a lesser degree than the paradoxon: something "obscure" or "of no reputation", "insignificant" (Pearce, 1926; Pernot, 1993, pp. 536-539). Sometimes or maybe more often, the new governor you had to welcome with an appropriate speech, had no famous family, was born in an obscure town or had not made brilliant military campaigns; sometimes, you also barely knew him. But still, you had to say something. With a kind of jurisprudential thought and clearly pedagogical intention, Menander, and other rhetors, tried to consider every

possible situation and to find practical solutions, and I will now detail some of them.

(1)
First, you could avoid the problem by simply skipping the embarrassing part of the speech (Pernot, 1993, pp. 522-523). But as everyone knew the *topoi* and the organization of the speech, it created expectations that you had to satisfy; the treatises generally recommended to hide the fault by some technique and to draw attention on better elements: for instance (Men. Rhet., II, 370, 15-20; 21-28), you could speak only about the famous ancestors or say that the one you were praising gained enough glory by himself. In a wedding speech, if you had nothing interesting to say about the bride and the groom's family, you could say a few words about their moderation and honesty, and quickly move to the praise of the bride and the groom (II, 403, 21-25).

(2)
Secondly, when the problem was too obvious and couldn't be simply eluded, you could try to turn it into a source of praise (Pernot, 1993, pp. 523-524), like we saw in the case of Tydaeus. Menander (I, 347, 23-30) writes that if a city has no grounds of *encomium* from the point of view of its position, if it is situated in very cold region or surrounded by a desert, you could say that it makes the inhabitants more philosophical and enduring. The treatises are based on the principle that every element could be source of praise and offered a double treatment for each *topos* (Pernot, 1993, p. 520); the students were trained to look for any source of praise in their collection of topoi and values. Here are a few more examples:

"*If he [a young man] is of illustrious descent, he has been their peer or their or superior; if of humble descent, he has his support, not in the virtues of his ancestors, but in his own*" (Rhet. Ad Her., III, 13 ; transl. H. Caplan, LCL, 1954)

"*Surely growing things (can be praised) in a similar way. (…). If they should need much care, you will marvel at that; if little at that too.*" (Ps-Hermog., Prog., 18, 1-4; transl. G. Kennedy, 2003)

"*If the god is adored by the Greeks, and not by the Barbarians, you could say that the god avoided this (…); if the is also found by the barbarians, you could say that even the Barbarians didn't ignore him.*" (Alex. Noum. 338, 19-26; Spengel III, p. 5)

"*We usually take praise from the neighbouring cities as well: if our city is more powerful, because we protect the others; if we are less powerful, because their brilliance shines upon us*." (Excerpta rhetorica, Halm, p. 587, 28-30)

(3)
A step further was blaming the predecessors or speaking about the hopes for the future (Pernot, 1993, pp. 715-716), about the positive things that the one you praised maybe did not have yet but would certainly get, and about the mistakes he certainly wouldn't do. For instance, according to Menander (II, 379, 13-18; 380, 21-22), concerning justice, you could say to the new governor that "he will rival Minos, imitate Rhadamanthus, compete with Aeacus"; or more generally: "For if a man understands everything that is right, and examines everything with care, how can he not be seen and confessed by all men to be one who will rule for the benefit of those under him" (Men. Rhet. II 380, 3-6).

(4)
Finally, you could simply invent qualities and facts (Pernot, 1993, pp. 524-525). In Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, (Rhet. I, 9, 1367a 32- b 7; transl. J. H. Freese, LCL, 1926) we already read that "we must also assume, for the purpose of praise or blame, that qualities which closely resemble the real qualities are identical with them"; and in the *Rhetoric to Alexander* (III, 1 =1425b 36-38; transl. D. C. Mirhady, LCL, 2011): "In short, the species of praise is an amplification of reputable choices, acts, and words, and an appropriation of those that are not present". The epideictic genre is not about historical factuality but about moral and social values, about seeing and making reality better than it really is, and for good reasons. Again, it is not a problem if criticism can be expressed elsewhere. Besides, rhetorical treatises have to examine every possible mean: their topic is the technique and not the ethics, but that doesn't mean that they do not care about ethics. Some of them suggested inventing things (Ps-Dionysius, 273, 18-22; 274, 10-11; Men. Rhet. II, 371, 11-14; 378, 12-14 (28); 390, 5.10-13), but according to likelihood and mostly when there were no consequences to fear. This solution was the last resort and the other techniques helped to avoid it. When it comes to actual speeches, rhetors hesitated to recommend complete lie for philosophical or ethical reasons, but also for practical ones. In front of the one you were praising and of an audience that already knew him, lying could make the speech unconvincing or awkward and could draw suspicion on your talent and morality (Men. Rhet. II, 397, 30-398, 5). The actual encomium was always flattering, but had to be close to the original,

plausible and relevant, and that's what made it challenging.

5. *Conclusion: teaching epideictic*

These techniques are to be added to the preceding ones. To resume, besides its own function, practicing the epideictic speeches trains specific argumentation techniques and useful skills, like amplification, indirect praise, detour strategy, flexibility and creativity. But the ancient treatises also give us some clues about the way we could learn or teach epideictic. The main principle of this progressive teaching is quite simple, but probably efficient: first, the students learned and imitated a specific pattern and were then confronted to other subjects and problematic cases in the eyes of the pattern itself and the rule of saying something good; facing these difficulties, they had to adapt the model, to find creative solutions and exercise their sense of judgement by choosing the right technique. Furthermore, this learning was probably a relevant and consistent way to prepare them for actual speeches. Contrary to the understanding of the epideictic as an entertaining spectacle, the ancient sources suggest us that we can increase difficulty and learn technique through actual practice of exercises and real issues. We should not forget that in Antiquity, gods, heroes, poets or leaders, were a part of a living culture and of the contemporary reality. A modern and experimental teaching of encomium could start with some familiar endoxa (like praising your favourite character, your own city) and next move to adoxa (praising a common thing) or amphidoxa (praising a controversial celebrity), rather than paradoxa. Blaming the same objects could be used as a way to practice mental flexibility and to feel the advantages, as well as the limits, of this strategy (Dominicy, 2001, pp. 49-50; Ferry, 2014). We could also place the learners in plausible situations where an epideictic speech could still take place, on the model of the ethopoiia, like someone who has to make a speech for a commemoration, an anniversary or the opening of an exhibition. We could make it more challenging by adding potentially problematic circumstances, like making a speech for the Nobel Peace Prize when your country is still engaged in military conflicts. This way, students would feel the difficulty of creating homonoia around shared values and the tensions between good ideas and reality; it could be a practical initiation to ethics. This way, the learners would also feel that such a speech requires specific techniques. Then, when they become more conscious of the technique and manage to master it, we could go further with something more fanciful or paradoxical, for the challenge, for the performance and the pleasure of technique itself.

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