

A close-up photograph of a marble bust of a man's head and shoulders. The man has thick, curly hair and a serious expression. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the marble and the contours of his face. The background is a solid, dark brown color.

ABUSIVE MOUTHS  
in Classical Athens

NANCY WORMAN

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## ABUSIVE MOUTHS IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

This study of the language of insult charts abuse in classical Athenian literature that centers on the mouth and its appetites, especially talking, eating, drinking, and sexual activities. Attic comedy, Platonic dialogue, and fourth-century oratory often deploy insulting depictions of the mouth and its excesses in order to deride professional speakers as sophists, demagogues, and women. Although the patterns of imagery explored are very prominent in ancient invective and later western literary traditions, this is the first book to discuss this phenomenon in classical literature. It responds to a growing interest in both abusive speech genres and the representation of the body, illuminating an iambic discourse that isolates the intemperate mouth as a visible emblem of behaviors ridiculed in the democratic arenas of classical Athens.

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*For Iakovos*





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All translations in the book are my own.

## Abbreviations

- A C. Austin, ed. *Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Berlin, 1973)  
AA *Archäologischer Anzeiger*  
AJP *American Journal of Philology*  
C F. D. Caizzi, ed. *Antisthenis Fragmenta* (Milan, 1966)  
CA *Classical Antiquity*  
CJ *Classical Journal*  
CP *Classical Philology*  
CQ *Classical Quarterly*  
CW *Classical World*  
D H. Diehl, ed. *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca* (Leipzig, 1949–)  
DK H. Diels and W. Kranz, eds. *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 12th ed. (Berlin, 1966–67)  
FGH F. Jacoby, ed. *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin/Leiden, 1923–58)  
G&R *Greece and Rome*  
GRBS *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*  
HSCP *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*  
IG *Inscriptiones Graeci* (Berlin, 1873–)  
JHS *Journal of Hellenic Studies*  
K T. Kock, ed. *Comicorum Atticorum Fragmenta* (Leipzig, 1880)  
K-A R. Kassel and C. Austin, eds. *Poetae Comici Graeci*, vols. i–ix, (Berlin, 1983–)  
Kannicht R. K. Kannicht, ed. *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, vol. 5.1–2 (Göttingen, 2004)  
L-P E. Lobel and D. L. Page, eds. *Poetarum Lesbiorum Fragmenta* (Oxford, 1955)  
M A. Meineke, ed. *Poetarum Comicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Hildesheim, 1989)  
N A. Nauck, ed. *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, 2nd ed. (Heidelsheim, 1964)

<i>NJb</i>	<i>Neue Jahrbucher für klassische Altertum</i>
<i>P</i>	D. L. Page, ed. <i>Poetae Melici Graeci</i> (Oxford, 1962)
<i>PCPS</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society</i>
<i>PMG</i>	<i>Poetae Melici Graeci</i> , ed. D. L. Page (Oxford, 1962)
<i>R</i>	S. Radt, ed. <i>Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> , vol. 4 (Göttingen, 1977)
<i>REA</i>	<i>Revue des études anciennes</i>
<i>REG</i>	<i>Revue des études Grecques</i>
<i>RhM</i>	<i>Rheinisches Museum für Philologie</i>
<i>Rose</i>	V. Rose, ed. <i>Aristoteles Fragmenta</i> (Leipzig, 1886)
<i>SEG</i>	J. J. E. Hondius, ed. <i>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</i> (Leiden, 1923–)
<i>SO</i>	<i>Symbolae Osloenses</i>
<i>Stu. Urb</i>	<i>Studi Urbinati</i>
<i>TAPA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>Valk</i>	M. van der Valk, ed. <i>Eustathii Commentarii ad Homeri Iliaden Pertinentes</i> (Leiden, 1971–87)
<i>W</i>	M. L. West, ed. <i>Iambi et Elegi Graeci</i> , 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1989–92)
<i>YCS</i>	<i>Yale Classical Studies</i>



## Introduction

πόλιν οὐ τὴν ἐπὶ προγόνων τὴν ναυμάχον,  
ἀλλὰ γραῦν σανδάλια ὑποδεδεμένην  
καὶ πτισάνην ῥοφῶσαν.  
[Athens], no longer the city of our ancestors,  
ready for sea-battles, but an old hag, wearing slippers  
and gulping her broth.

Demades, fr. 18<sup>1</sup>

The language of insult has a long and far-flung history of lampooning the oral behaviors that polite society carefully regulates, especially as the main fare of comic invective. Scornful analogies with low-status demeanors may serve to denigrate entire cities, as in the quotation above, or particular players on the public stage. This study charts abuse in classical Athenian literature that centers on the mouth and its activities: especially talking, eating, drinking, and sexual practices. The patterns of imagery that it illuminates dominate ancient invective and pervade insulting talk in western cultures. Students of Roman satire will find this use of the ignoble body familiar, as will readers of Rabelais and modern picaresque novels.<sup>2</sup> I aim to supplement the burgeoning interest in both abusive speech genres and the representation of the body, by demonstrating that in the classical period public mockery of professional speakers forges an iambic discourse that isolates the intemperate mouth as a visible emblem of behaviors pilloried in the democratic arena.

<sup>1</sup> The fragments of the fourth-century orator Demades are collected in de Falco 1954. This one is quoted by Demetrius and attributed to Demades, as an example of “vibrancy” (*deimotēs*) in style (*de Eloc.* 282, 285).

<sup>2</sup> On comic imagery and the grotesque, see Edwards 1993 and Platter 1993; on Roman satire, see Henderson 1999, as well as the special edition of *Arethusa* entitled *Vile Bodies* (1998). Most of these articles respond in one way or another to Bakhtin’s famous monograph on Rabelais (1984). On the mouth as a site of impurity in Roman literature more generally, see Richlin 1983 [1992]: 99; Corbeil 1996: 101–24, and further below.

While in recent years scholars have increasingly paid attention to how Athenian drama and oratory respond to each other, they have not noticed the consistent patterns that shape defamation in these genres.<sup>3</sup> Dramatic and rhetorical works from the classical period that depict popular orators and teachers often focus on oral behaviors, revealing how the feminized or vulgar appetites of these figures match their speaking styles and render them worthy of abuse. Old comedy, the satyr play, Platonic dialogue, and oratorical invective portray figures such as the sophists, Socrates, Cleon, and Alcibiades as ranging from loud-mouthed, crude, and rapacious to chattering, effeminate, and fastidious, as do the barbed exchanges of Aeschines and Demosthenes. This scheme plays upon Athenian attitudes toward the appetites and in turn influences them, in some instances even affecting public policy by means of open ridicule.

My discussion thus charts a crucial conjunction between the body as a social entity and ancient political discourse. Athenian writers contrast speaking in the courts and assembly with other traditional spaces for exercising oral activities, most notably the symposium and the agora. In these arenas insulting depictions highlight the speaker's style in a broad sense (including vocal tone, dress, and deportment), focusing in on the concrete visibility of the talking citizen in a public setting and often connecting other physical attributes to oral techniques.<sup>4</sup> The critique of professional speakers is a whole-body affair, with the mouth serving as a central indicator of various types of behavioral excess. This abuse of the speaker in action emerges from types of pointedly offensive speech performance in archaic society, namely heroic invective and the insult poetry (iambos) of the aristocratic symposium.<sup>5</sup> When defamation spawned in elite settings infiltrates the arenas for public speaking that are central to the administration of the democratic city, the mouth emerges as a dominant metonymy for behaviors and attitudes that menace the well-being of Athens.

<sup>3</sup> Regarding the intersection of drama and oratory, see, e.g., Ober and Strauss 1990; Worthington (ed.) 1994; Hall 1995; Goldhill and Osborne (eds.) 1999. Both Ussher 1960 (on Theophrastus) and Rowe 1966 (on Demosthenes) point to Aristophanic influence, but they do not make any claims about the larger discursive development.

<sup>4</sup> See Worman 2002a on ancient ideas about style and oral performance; also Gleason 1995 on professional speakers' visible character traits.

<sup>5</sup> By heroic invective I mean the exchange of insults that typically precedes hand-to-hand combat between prominent warriors in Homer. Cf. Martin 1989: 67–75. What is known about iambic poetry indicates that it was often agonistic and insulting, whether this functioned as an apotropaic device in fertility rituals or bawdy entertainment at symposia. See West 1974: 22–39; Nagy 1979: 222–52; Bowie 1986; Gentili 1988: 107–14; Bartol 1993: 61–74; Stehle 1997: 213–27; Ford 2002: 25–45, and further below.



## A MAN'S, MAN'S WORLD

Given the likelihood that iambos originated in the agonistic, manly, and drunken setting of the archaic symposium, it should come as little surprise that the formalities that govern ritualized insult tend to foster a rude, masculine verbal style that lampoons weak and feminizing habits.<sup>6</sup> In social spaces devoted to talking and eating, the voice of invective may be concertededly crude and reviled as much as it reviles, but it is almost never unmanly. Speakers sometimes ventriloquize women, as they do other low-status types, but this imposture merely isolates certain figures as targets for abuse. Indeed, women, with their vulnerable, soft bodies, serve in abusive talk as the predominant negative measure in the regulation of male behaviors, especially those involving the appetites. Demetrius, for example, explains that Demades' image of Athens as a "hag" (γρᾶν) indicates that it is "weak and already fading" (ἀσθενῆ καὶ ἐξίτηλον ἤδη), while the details of her dress and table manners point to a city "amused by feasts and banquets" (ἐν κρεανομίαις τότε καὶ πανδαισίαις διάγουσαν) (*de Eloc.* 286).<sup>7</sup>

As such metaphors indicate, in abusive public speech the female body may represent figuratively the weakness and indulgence that mark male social practices (e.g., the feasts and banquets). A number of scholars have noticed that female characters play a facilitating or mediating role in Greek literature,<sup>8</sup> and the material explored in this study often reveals an anxious calibration of "female" appetites. While it consists largely of instances in which male speakers direct abuse at male targets, its imagery is underpinned by fundamental social tensions – those structured by class and perhaps most importantly by gender. In fact, the contrasts that organize the oral images discussed here arise from perceived distinctions between male and female behaviors, while aspects of class reinforce these basic differences. Thus Aristophanes depicts the sophist as a louche, effeminate chatterer, while the demagogue is a tough guy with a big mouth. Classicists have largely overlooked the centrality of this opposition to both ancient democratic thought and the larger literary tradition, but it constitutes a persistent scheme in western expression. Indeed, the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu points out that in popular French usage the gaping maw (*la gueule*) of the loud-mouthed,

<sup>6</sup> Cf. further discussion in ch. 1. See Bowie 1986; Schmitt-Pantel 1992: 32–38; Bartol 1993: 51–74; also Ford 2002: 25–39.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Pl. *Rep.* 9: βροσκημάτων δίκην κάτω αἰεὶ βλέποντες καὶ κεκυφότες εἰς γῆν καὶ εἰς τραπέζας βόσκονται χορταζόμενοι καὶ ὀχεύοντες (586a7–8).

<sup>8</sup> See especially Zeitlin 1990; also Loraux 1995; Wohl 1998; Foley 2001.

greedy, manly speaker operates in the realm of lowbrow insults and physical violence. The prim, feminized *bouche*, on the other hand, is allied with polite bourgeois utterance.<sup>9</sup>

Elite genres, then, traditionally figure the language of insult as male and lower-class, so that those who insult usually engage in a form of imposture, being themselves elite male participants in symposia and festivals.<sup>10</sup> This abuse also focuses on the body and its parts, forging a rude, voracious discourse. Mikhail Bakhtin has famously emphasized that popular, abusive language effectively cannibalizes the body and reveals a particularly crude palate; such speech “is flooded with genitals, bellies, defecations, urine, disease, noses, mouths, and dismembered parts.”<sup>11</sup> Insulting talk centers on the open mouth, which like the Gorgon’s maw in ancient depiction elicits both fascination and revulsion.<sup>12</sup> This oral fixation also has a sustained presence in western literature, most notably in ancient satire and the genre that it helped to spawn: the modern novel. Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel* manifests a gleeful absorption in the workings of the mouth and other bodily apertures, and its proto-novelistic form allows for the confrontation of competing attitudes toward the appetites.

Indeed, one could trace an arc of aggressively masculine lampoon centered on these appetites that runs effectively from Aristophanic comedy, the poetry of Catullus and Martial, Roman satire, and the “novel” of Petronius on one end, to the satirical verses of Ben Jonson, John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, Robert Herrick, and John Donne, or contemporary American writers such as Kurt Vonnegut, Philip Roth, and Charles Bukowski, on the other. While these clearly constitute only a few of many such arcs, my point is that this imagery has very broad significance. It forges a dominant strain in western literature that situates the body in ignoble and sometimes obscene postures and often highlights the mouth as a metonymy for excess.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Bourdieu 1991: 86–87.

<sup>10</sup> Although there are abusive female characters in iambic poetry and Attic comedy, these ventriloquisms are largely employed, as far as I can determine, as reference points for shaping male insult, a strategy that also marks iambic discourse in later prose. To say this is to make no claims about forms of abuse that may have been originally female (e.g. *gephurismos*, the “bridge insult” of Eleusinian ritual; cf. *Ar. Ran.* 391ff., *Plut.* 1014; and see O’Higgins 2003: 20, 57). See further in ch. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Bakhtin 1984: 319.

<sup>12</sup> On the Gorgon as an apotropaic device that exorcizes internal demons, see Frontisi-Ducroux 1984: 152–55. Frontisi-Ducroux argues more generally that the frontal gaze in Greek art confronts the viewer with his own mortality; as such the Gorgon’s open-mouthed grin serves as a fundamental metonymy for the human condition. Cf. also Vernant 1991: 111–25.

<sup>13</sup> As ch. 5 explores, this scheme extends not only to comic or satirical texts but also to oratorical invective. Demosthenes’ mocking of his opponents’ appetites has its most grotesque extension in Cicero’s *Second Philippic* (esp. 62–75), which depicts his opponent Antony as all mouth – a bawling, drunken, blood-sucking Charybdis. Although Corbeil (1996: 104–24) does not address sufficiently Cicero’s depiction of Antony, he does emphasize the importance of mouth imagery in Cicero’s

Catullus, for instance, employs an infamously crude means of silencing his critics in *carmen* 16, which begins *pedicabo ego vos et irrumabo* (“I’ll bugger you and shove it in your mouths”) – a wielding of the authorial phallus unparalleled in ancient literature. This gesture aims at chastening those who read him (i.e., “Catullus”) as “bad at being a man” (*male me marem*, 16.13) for writing “softie” little verses (cf. the diminutives *versiculi* and *molliculi*, 16.3–4). This and other poems chart the bodily schemes by which Catullus mocks the weaknesses of his fellow elite Romans, as well as those of his poetic *ego*. The body emerges as a site of degradation in which appetitive vulnerabilities run from mouth to anus (e.g., 15, 21) and the narrator sometimes himself submits to the aggressions of others (e.g., 11, 28).<sup>14</sup>

Horace’s *Epodes* make a similar use of the ignoble body, situating the collection of poems as a vitriolic confrontation between the poet and his alter ego, the bitter witch Canidia, who – like women more generally – threatens to sap the phallic energies of the poet and thereby elicits abuse in defense of both his poetry and his manhood.<sup>15</sup> The *Satires* also depose the male body in comically weak and challenged postures. When, for instance, Horace depicts the journey to an important diplomatic meeting as his body’s debasement through dyspepsia and masturbation (*Serm.* 1.5), his discomfort, fastidiousness, and disappointment effectively upstage the momentous political event. The scene of Trimalchio’s dinner in Petronius’ *Satyricon*, during which the host stuffs his mouth with food and verbiage and fondles boys at table, emerges as a gross extension of the satirist’s wry warnings about the body’s weaknesses. The dinner is a seemingly endless round of oral excesses, with the host’s lowbrow crudity resulting in a profligate jumble of outré delicacies, boastful misquotations, and purging from both ends.<sup>16</sup>

This ancient relationship between satire and the picaresque, in which the latter paints in florid detail what the former bitingly denigrates, has

invective. Focusing on Cicero’s attacks on Verres (e.g., *Verr.* 2.3.5, 2.3.23) and Clodius (e.g., *Dom.* 25, 47, 104), Corbeill directs attention especially to the implications of sexual “degradation” (e.g., cunnilingus) as well as drunkenness. Following Richlin 1983 [1992]: 99, he argues that the “impure mouth” (*os impurum*) has class implications. See further in the epilogue.

<sup>14</sup> Fitzgerald (1995: 72) recognizes that in Roman culture the mouth “was the most important site of purity and contamination”; cf. Richlin 1983 [1992]: 99; Henderson 1999: 69–72; also Corbeill 1996: 104–05. Although Adams 1982 does not have an entry for *os*, this may suggest the paucity of its metaphorical uses in Latin (versus the “tainting” of the orifice itself by association, juxtaposition, innuendo, etc.).

<sup>15</sup> Old women serve as dominant targets in the *Epodes* (e.g., 3, 5, 8, 12, 17), with Canidia as their most prominent member. They are a doggish, disgusting group (Oliensis 1991; also Henderson 1999: 93–113 on *Ep.* 8). Cf. the seventeenth-century poet Robert Herrick’s offering: “The staffe is now greas’d,/ And very well pleas’d,/ She cokes out her Arse at the parting,/ To an old Ram Goat,/ That rattles i’t’h’throat,/ Halfe choakt at the stink of her farting” (“The Hagg,” 1648 [1963]: 441).

<sup>16</sup> On the “palate” of Roman satire (including Petronius), see Gowers 1993.

an enduring afterlife. Witness, for instance, Ben Johnson's 118th epigram, "On Gut":

GUT eats all day and lechers all the night,  
 So all his meat he tasteth over twice;  
 And striving so to double his delight,  
 He makes himself a thorough-fare of vice.  
 Thus, in his belly, can he change a sin,  
 Lust it comes out, that gluttony went in.<sup>17</sup>

The English satirist charts a confluence of appetites in which modern avatars of the picaresque gleefully wallow. Think of Alexander Portnoy, the roguish self-abusing hero of Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, who inhabits precisely this confluence in his relationship with a piece of liver: "My first piece I had in the privacy of my own home, rolled round my cock at three-thirty – and then again on the end of my fork, at five-thirty, along with the other members of that poor innocent family of mine." Since the novel is staged as one long riotous therapy session, Portnoy also offers his "analyst" the obscene conclusion to this transgression: "So. Now you know the worst thing I have ever done. I fucked my own family's dinner."<sup>18</sup>

*Portnoy's Complaint* focuses its bawdy abjection on the hero's controlling mother, whose looming presence impinges on his teenage fantasies and adult relationships alike. Although Roth's novel, like so much of Bukowski's writing, careens from one appetite to another, sexual desire serves as the anxious strain that runs through its outrageous rants. Consider in this light Bukowski's poem "the sniveler," in which a female interlocutor says over the phone to the narrator (who is pining for another woman), "oh my god, you're impossible, you big soft/ baby's ass!" He responds, "suck me off and maybe I can forget, help me/ forget." They hang up and the narrator considers his options:

I thought, well, I can masturbate, I can look at television,  
 and then there's suicide.  
 having already masturbated twice that day  
 I had two choices left and  
 being a big soft baby's ass I  
 switched on the tv.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Johnson 1616 [1947]: 76. Cf. also John Donne, who in one of his satirical poems envisions the rival writer as a plagiarizing "glutton": "But hee is worst,/ Who beggarly doth chaw/ Others wits fruits, and in his ravenous maw/ Rankly digested dost those things out-spue,/ As his owne things; and they are his owne, 'tis true,/ For if one eate my meat, though it be knowne,/ The meat was mine, th' excrement is his owne" (1601 [1952]: 94).

<sup>18</sup> Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* 1967 [1994]: 134. <sup>19</sup> Bukowski 1981: 192–93.

Sex, for these aggressively male, heterosexual writers, means women, and with women come anxieties about the very maleness they so rudely and self-mockingly celebrate. Much of ancient abuse exhibits a similar unease, which also fosters male posturing and obsession with the phallus.

Something rather different happens when the protagonist is a woman, a difference revealing for the equations drawn among talk, food, and the female body familiar (in more obscene forms) from ancient comedies that feature “women on top.”<sup>20</sup> In Margaret Atwood’s novel *The Edible Woman*, the increasingly fastidious Marian observes her fellow workers at a Christmas party: “She looked around the room at all the women there, at the mouths opening and shutting, to talk or to eat.”<sup>21</sup> Her fear of food, which grows apace with her discomfort with her conventional life, generates an internal commentary bearing many features of ancient abuse. Hers is a rebellious idiom; and although it remains carefully cordoned off from the polite talk of social interaction, much like Attic old comedy and the satyr play it relentlessly dismantles the “natural” coherences of social life into its detritus, focusing on the debased body and especially on the organ most difficult to control: the open mouth. Thus Marian sits silently in the middle of the party and says to herself, “What peculiar creatures they were; and the continual flux between the outside and the inside, taking things in, giving them out, chewing, words, potato-chips, burps, grease, hair, babies, milk, excrement, cookies, vomit, coffee, tomato juice, blood, tea, sweat, liquor, tears, and garbage.”<sup>22</sup>

Women at a tea party: to Marian this appears as one of life’s greatest grotesqueries, the very propriety of the sweet food and trivial talk catalyzing her bitterly hilarious response. In this pivotal scene Atwood appropriates for her biting protagonist the familiar elements of abusive speech – the focus on the permeable female body, the insulting outsider’s voice with its omnivorous palate, and the social setting that both generates the derisive talk and serves as its target. That the speaker is a woman and the invective internalized ironically signals the protagonist’s alienation from her own body, as opposed to the gleeful indulgence that often characterizes male discourses. Both factors also throw into especially sharp relief the overt, masculine antagonism of ancient invective, which parades conflicts in public spaces that tend in modern bourgeois idioms to be confined to internalized rants in domestic settings. Greek comedy, for instance, may isolate its mockery as ritual abuse in a formal arena, but it nevertheless frequently constitutes

<sup>20</sup> See further in ch. 2. <sup>21</sup> Atwood 1969 [1998]: 180.

<sup>22</sup> Atwood 1969 [1998]: 181. Cf. Bukowski’s depiction of his father: “pork chops, said my father, I love/ porkchops!/ and I watched him slide the grease into his mouth” (“retired,” 1986: 17).

a direct attack on public figures before a mass audience, much like the slandering of opponents in oratory.

Ancient insult does, however, confirm a tension between polite ritual and rude critique comparable to that of Roth's dinner-table travesty or Atwood's monstrous tea party. Further, ancient poets and prose writers similarly appropriate abusive talk as a means of passing judgment on their own kind. Although classical invective probably originated in the elite setting of the aristocratic symposium, the setting itself subsequently emerges either as a potentially enervating sphere in contrast to the vulgar but vigorous marketplace (i.e., the Athenian agora) or, conversely, as a forum for fostering the proper educational training of the elite citizen.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps because of the tensions that developed around class status in the democratic city-state, the iambic speaker may occupy a complex position in relation to his audience and his own usage. The patent imposture of low-status figures isolates crude talk as derisive quotation, but at the same time it signals to elite listeners the wit and wisdom of the (male) ventriloquist. This imposture thus implicitly promotes aristocratic sentiments by means of lowbrow critique, as is the case with archaic iambos. Think of the commonplace chat of Socrates, whose arguments foster antidemocratic ideas; or Demosthenes' arch and colorful invective, which often denigrates opponents as low-class habitués of the agora.

#### IAMBOS AND IAMBIC DISCOURSE

A consideration of the archaic background of iambic poetry (*iambos*), which I take up at greater length in chapter 1, reveals the adumbrated origins of abusive themes and vocabulary. The texts focused on here span the comedies of Aristophanes in the 420s to the sketches of Theophrastus in the 320s, but the iambic tradition that fosters this phenomenon extends back to Homer. In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* it surfaces intermittently as the insulting talk of "low-status" figures (i.e., characters assigned non-heroic status, whether actual or assumed) who embody a threat to epic discourse and its heroes.<sup>24</sup> The blaming function of iambos in this "high" or praise genre suggests that it was first formulated as invective (*psogos*), typically with high-status figures as its targets. As a genre, however, iambos is oddly elusive: it is not metrically

<sup>23</sup> Bowie (1997:3) argues that actual symposiasts were probably exclusively upper-class; Schmitt-Pantel 1992: 222–31 and Fisher 2000 have contested this. *Wasps* indicates that the symposium might involve playful imitation of upper-class habits and conceits. See also Wycherly 1956, Wilkins 2000a on the character of the agora.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Nagy 1979. I consider this aspect of iambos in ch. 1.

uniform; nor does it necessarily involve blaming speech.<sup>25</sup> The two most famous proponents of this mode, Archilochus and Hipponax, wrote in a number of meters (e.g., trimeters, tetrameters, epodes) and about topics that range from desire and erotic contest to soldiering and the brevity of life. We might note that these are subjects typical of the symposium, and the fragments that remain share features that reflect this drunken setting: a focus on the concrete needs of the body; an irreverent, deprecating tone; and a concertedly crude sensibility.

In fact, it is significant for this discussion that the origins and generic boundaries of iambs are rather obscure. While Ewen Bowie and others are concerned with determining the parameters of this “network of poetic types,”<sup>26</sup> I would call attention instead to the discursive nature of abusive speech. Many broad features of abuse traverse generic boundaries, while showing a remarkable consistency of tone (irreverent), subject matter (commonplace), and speaker’s fictive status (usually low). In addition, like iambs, the discourse that develops in the fifth century around professional speakers often focuses on “vulgar” activities, especially eating and sex.<sup>27</sup> Like iambs, it sometimes includes elements of animal fables (*ainoi*) as well as the communal street revels (*kōmoi*) from which Attic comedy is thought to have developed.<sup>28</sup> Further, this discourse often seems aimed, like the *ainos*, at education of the young: witness the ephebic satyr chorus, the plot of Aristophanes’ *Clouds*, and Socrates’ youthful audiences in Plato.<sup>29</sup> It also sustains across genres more precise elements such as vocabulary and imagery, so that a reprehensible figure like the sophistic butcher (*mageiros*)

<sup>25</sup> Cf. West 1974; Rosen 1988a: 12–14; Bowie 2001.

<sup>26</sup> This is Bowie’s phrase (2001: 6). Cf. Bartol 1993: 30–41.

<sup>27</sup> I should note that the word “discourse” is particularly useful here, since it designates a linguistic arena with shared conventions and vocabulary that does not conform to any one genre, although it is usually fostered in a particular social context (cf. Foucault 1977). In this case the discourse develops in a number of formal literary settings that share a performative element (delivery before an audience), a general speech type (abusive), and a particular target (professional speakers).

<sup>28</sup> Aristotle, *Po.* 1448a35–36; see Rosen 1988a; Zanetto 2001. Aristotle also represents iambs as spawning comedy and treats both with some disdain, assigning these “low” genres to poets with base personalities (*Po.* 1448b24–1449a5). For the connection to *ainoi*, see Semonides 7 W and Archilochus frs. 182–87 W; cf. Nagy 1979: 222–41; Cole 1991: 48–49; Zanetto 2001; Ford 2002: 74–80. West (1974: 23–25) hypothesized that iambs developed in the context of the worship of Dionysus, whose cultic titles and modes (*dithyrambos*, *thriambos*, and *ithumbos*) suggest links with iambs, and also of Demeter, who was cheered by the “indecent” jokes of Iambe in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (cf. O’Higgins 2003 and further in chs. 1 and 2). Both ties would help to explain the transformation of iambs into comic performance, as well as its pervasive emphasis on the physical world and bodily need. Rosen (1988a: 15–16) has pointed to the association of iambs with physical pain, the verbal equivalent of a blow.

<sup>29</sup> See Degani 1984; Bartol 1993: 73–74; Steinrück 2000: 1–4, 82–86; Griffith 2002.

turns up in comedy, the satyr play, Platonic dialogue, and the sketches of Theophrastus.<sup>30</sup>

I thus do not employ the term “iambic” merely for purposes of economy, but because fifth- and fourth-century invective and its objects show clear ties to the poetry more strictly designated as iambos. While scholars have argued for the influences of iambic poetry on comic drama, I demonstrate that through the essential vehicle of comedy, iambic modes share features with the satyr play, shape oratorical defamation of character, and contribute to the Platonic depiction of Socrates. Indeed, I contend that over a century in which the public critique of professional speakers moved from the dramatic to the oratorical arena, these genres perpetuated iambic connections among abusive language, those who use it, and its targets. As comedy began to move away from the (frequently obscene) lampooning of public figures, orators appropriated abusive vocabulary from that genre, although in this politer context obscene characterizations were merely suggested rather than explicit.<sup>31</sup> This points additionally to the transformation during this period of public forums for social dialogue and critique, since the move of invective from the comic stage to the oratorical platform parallels the waning of the former and the burgeoning of the latter as a setting for civic self-articulation and analysis. My discussion thus innovates most importantly by tracing the trajectory of iambic language in conjunction with the development of oratory and Platonic dialogue out of dramatic forms, as well as the ways in which the shift in public arenas alters the effects of this language.

This transformation is evident in later rhetorical theory as well, which indicates the ongoing awareness of oratory’s debt to comic language and its appropriation of the fiction of the low-status iambic speaker. Note, for example, that Demetrius cautions his reader against the rough style of Demades, who was famous in antiquity for his claim to be self-taught.<sup>32</sup> Demetrius regards Demades’ language as “peculiar and eccentric” (ἴδιον καὶ ἄτοπον, 282), which is how Socrates’ interlocutors often characterize his speech techniques.<sup>33</sup> Demetrius also warns that Demades’ style is not without its danger (τι ἐπισφαλές) and is mixed with comedy (μικτὸν κωμωδίας) (286). The crude orator, much like the mocking philosopher

<sup>30</sup> See further discussion below and in chs. 2, 3, and 6.

<sup>31</sup> This is not to make any claims about fourth-century audiences’ actual exposure to comic insults and obscenities in particular plays, especially since the shift toward more restrained comic representation could indicate that the abusive and often obscene political plays may not have continued to be performed. Rather, I would argue that the comic vocabulary and characterizations that turn up later in oratory and rhetorical theory had become part of the common idiom, as is the nature of discursive language.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. de Falco 1954: 12–13 and further in ch. 5.      <sup>33</sup> See ch. 4.



and the comic abuser,<sup>34</sup> thus engages a potentially hazardous combination of techniques that are nonetheless piquant and effective in argument.

In both the fifth and fourth centuries iambic talk becomes especially prominent as a witty, irreverent tactic with a serious purpose: determining which types ought to be trusted with the well-being of the democratic city. The fact that the abusive language employed by writers in this period shows a remarkable degree of consistency suggests that during the century in which Athens lost its empire an abusive discourse developed around public speaking and forged a cohesive critique of the verbal excesses perceived to threaten the democratic polis. This is thus a specifically Athenian medium, focused on issues of particular importance to a city-state that many regarded as uniquely vulnerable to persuasive speech. Like archaic iambos, this elite discourse appropriates various “low” perspectives as a means of reinforcing distinctions between friends and enemies, insiders and outsiders. Old comedy, for example, reconceives symposiastic invective, usually in the service of promoting aristocratic (or at least culturally conservative) values to a mass audience. Compare again Platonic dialogue, which uses an iambic stance to identify radical democracy as the true enemy of Athens.

For all that such elements point to innovations on the archaic genre, one feature of iambic talk in the classical period distinguishes it importantly from earlier iambos. Archaic poetry often indicates the appetitive behaviors of certain characters (e.g., the hungry outsider in Hipponax). In some contrast, a central distinction organizes the classical imagery and vocabulary along a continuum that effectively extends from “weak” to “strong” types, assigning certain behaviors and attitudes to one end of this spectrum or the other. Writers tend to portray professional speakers as ranging from the overly polished, hair-splitting chatterbox at one end, to the voluble, booming haranguer at the other. Both types show an overuse or misuse of the mouth and its vocal organs. But while the chatterer may be associated with effeminacy and what came to be called the “fine style” (*ischmos charaktēr*), the voluble speaker is more often portrayed as a greedy gobbler of words who indulges his ability to perform in the “grand style” (later termed the *megaloprepēs charaktēr*).<sup>35</sup> Not surprisingly, the chatterer is more often the target of abuse, while the haranguer doles out as much slander as he takes. These categories are not, of course, always consistently drawn in Athenian literature of the classical period. The style of the brash Thrasymachus, for

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Ach. Tat. 8.9.1–5 and the discussion in the epilogue.

<sup>35</sup> See O’Sullivan 1992 on this distinction.

example, was said to be both overly polished and grandly emotional, a combination of effects that Demosthenes also often employs.<sup>36</sup>

Insulting labels, defaming character associations, and violent invective together forge a strain of negative responses to the verbal performances of orators and teachers. The use of “sophist” and “demagogue” as denigrating labels turns up repeatedly in these depictions, which indicates the extent to which certain kinds of intellectual and political engagement were regarded by many elites as excessive in one way or another. As scholars have noted, during the fifth and fourth centuries the sophist became a general figure of abuse, maligned as much for the bold rhetorical tricks that he reputedly taught young elites as for the decadent morals he was said to promote.<sup>37</sup> In depictions of the period, the demagogue usually emerges as a crude marketplace wrangler with an overly agile tongue, while the sophist is often an effete symposiast with a taste for ornate locutions. And what was more disturbing, the sophist might train others to become like him. He sometimes even shares features with demagogues, who may be his students; these run the gamut from the crude, loud-mouthed Cleon of Aristophanic depiction to the subtle, versatile Alcibiades who seduces his audiences in Thucydides and Plato.<sup>38</sup>

Add to this scorning of the sophist that of the woman – or more precisely, the female body, as highlighted above. Male thinking about appetite and its regulation also inevitably involves thinking about the form most commonly suppressed in Athenian public speech.<sup>39</sup> In the classical period this specter and its notorious weaknesses became the focus of anxieties about how to maintain the power and integrity of the citizen body, both the body of the male citizen and the citizens as a political body. The complexity of this discursive thread, which ties together not only various behavioral excesses but also certain key body parts, is redoubled by a constant (if often oblique) referencing of “feminine” behaviors and female physical characteristics. A penchant for soft clothes and idle chatter, for instance, signals attitudes and proclivities unsuitable in public leaders. And while the scrupulous rejection of these tastes manifestly celebrates the male body, it is only by indexing female bodies and behaviors that such distinctions can be formulated. Moreover, the literary genre establishes its own parameters, its laudatory

<sup>36</sup> This is what Theophrastus apparently termed the “mixed” style; cf. DH *Dem.* 3; Theophr. fr. B 6 D-K; Pl. *Phdr.* 266e4–5, 267c9–d1; Cic. *Orat.* 39; Plut. *Dem.* 8–9.

<sup>37</sup> See Guthrie 1971: 27–34; Kerferd 1981: ch. 2; Ford 1993; Worman 2002a: 151–54. Cf. also Carey 2000: 425, who notes that the sophist is “assimilated to a type rather than isolated and presented as a distinctive phenomenon.”

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Ar. *Eq.*, *Vesp.*; Thuc. 6.15–19; Pl. *Symp.* 212–22 and further discussions in chs. 2 and 4.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Foucault 1985; Dover 1978; Winkler 1990; Zeitlin 1990; Cohen 1992; Wohl 2002.

and denigrated attributes, by means of this suppressed form. In Attic comedy, for instance, feminine “chatter” (*lalia*) signals the kind of language that the comic idiom and its “heroes” (both male and female) associate with weakness and effeminacy.<sup>40</sup> Theophrastus indicates his understanding of the underlying implications of this denigrated style when he portrays the babbler (*lalos*) as a twittering fool who keeps others from more manly pursuits in the schools and wrestling rings.<sup>41</sup> Thus the demagogue, the sophist, and the female serve as negative reference points for constituting praiseworthy male behaviors and their attendant discourses.

The predominantly male social settings that frame this iambic talk and help to shape its parameters – the courts and assembly, the agora, the public dining hall (Prytaneium) or sympotic salon – further indicate the conceptual intersections among oral activities. Each setting condones certain oral behaviors and proscribes others, the implicit coercion of which suggests that regulating the mouth’s activities constituted a central form of social control in democratic Athens. Again, poets and prose writers frequently introduce these settings as a face-off between the private, elite symposium and the public, vulgar agora, both of which shape this discourse and provide contexts for its expression. Writers may assess the courts, the assembly, and the speakers who perform there in terms of this contrast and introduce other dining rituals that color this opposition, most notably various formal types of festive eating and revelry. Moreover, the agora, as a multi-functional social space, embraces many differently coded activities, including not only commercial activities but also public feasts and sacrifices. Both dramatic and oratorical depictions show a tendency to associate loud-mouthed demagogues and other crude talkers with the agora, and chattering, effete sophists with the symposium. In these abusive portraits of public speakers, neither setting enhances their personas, since each can be seen to have its negative side. If, for instance, the symposium indulges decadent tastes and thereby enervates its participants, the agora fosters lowbrow and brutal behaviors. These concrete social contexts also map important political conflicts, reflecting tensions such as those between the oligarchic tendencies of aristocratic leaders and the mass appeal of radical democrats.

The unexpected intermingling or juxtaposition of rituals sometimes complicates this rather crude polarization, however. Writers often conflate or invert, for instance, the ritual mandates of the dinner (*dorpon*, *deipnon*), the public feast (*dais*, *heortē*, *eranos*), and the drinking party (*sumposion*),

<sup>40</sup> For this phenomenon cf. also tragedy and see further in chapter 2.

<sup>41</sup> Thphr. *Char.* 7.4. Women’s talk is frequently analogized to that of birds; see further in chs. 2, 5, and 6.

or the sacrifice (*thusia*) and the revel (*kōmos, thiasos*), usually in order to draw parallels between these activities and the formalities of professional speechmaking.<sup>42</sup> Euripides' *Cyclops*, for example, substitutes the human sacrifice for the dinner party, while his enemy Odysseus convinces him to trade his wine-less *deipnon* for a lonely and disastrous symposium. In Demosthenes' speeches as in Theophrastus, a man may reveal his boorishness as much by shouting in the theater as by dancing the lewd, comic *kordax* when sober. Inversions of the class affiliations indicated above are also common. Aristophanes' crude demagogues stuff their boorish constituents with "tasty" proposals as if they were at some fancy dinner party, while Plato's Socrates sometimes engages his elite interlocutors in a "feast of talk" amid the jostle of the agora.<sup>43</sup> The consistency with which iambic depictions make use of these arenas and their rituals to draw distinctions among types indicates the extent to which abusive talk is both grounded in and challenging of the social formalities that govern eating and drinking as well as speaking.

#### THE APPETITIVE BODY

Bourdieu recognizes the importance of this concrete social frame, since he analyzes language as a social performance and thus emphasizes the ways in which the body figures in linguistic exchanges. As mentioned, the mouth garners particular attention in this discussion, since it is the focal point of the speaking body, as well as a site for the convergence of appetites. The talking mouth is also an eating and drinking mouth (as well as one that spits, chokes, sucks, and so on); these activities motivate its association with a rude, visceral, appetitive discourse.

Bourdieu argues that the mouth focuses many different aspects of what he calls *bodily hexis*, the "life-style made flesh" of deportment, facial expression, tone, and typical linguistic usage.<sup>44</sup> He notes further that even the vocabulary that describes usage disallowed in polite society reflects this

<sup>42</sup> See Murray 1990: 5–6; Schmitt-Pantel 1990: 112; 1992: 209–42; Bowie 1993, 1997 on the categories of feasts in literary depiction. Cf. Ford 2002: 35, who emphasizes that although literary depiction may intermingle social settings, poetic composition has a different character and effect in different contexts. See further in ch. 1.

<sup>43</sup> The agora is more often, however, the site of chance meetings, while full conversations occur in elite settings (e.g., the palaistra, private houses). The agora does *figure* frequently in Platonic dialogues as a place of vulgar, lowbrow activities; and Socrates usually himself introduces marketplace analogies or is associated with these by his more insulting interlocutors. See Nails 1995; and further in ch. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Bourdieu 1991: 86. Cf. Klöckner 2002 for attention to how *habitus* and status are embodied in classical relief.

association of the body with language, and especially with abusive speech: “Domesticated language, censorship made natural, which proscribes ‘gross’ remarks, ‘coarse’ jokes and ‘thick’ accents, goes hand in hand with the domestication of the body which excludes all excessive manifestations of appetites or feelings.”<sup>45</sup> The interaction of the body and language thus pervades the metaphorical register that distinguishes “high” from “low” language, especially aspects of class status and gender identity that serve to elevate or undermine one’s authority. Similarly, in Aristophanes as in Theophrastus, clamorous hucksters in the agora exhibit “coarse” (*miaros*) speaking styles, while effeminate loungers at symposia tend to be glib and “soft” (*malakos*).

Indeed, the teachers and orators who take center stage in the dramas and speeches from the late fifth to the mid fourth century consistently broadcast their types by their oral behaviors: they are voracious consumers or babbling fawners, obnoxiously loud or quibbling; correlatively, they are goods grabbers or ass wagers. The multiple uses to which they put their mouths underscore this organ’s importance to the symbolic scheme. The mouth initiates a cluster of metonymies and metaphors for political activities, the consumption of food, drink, and/or sex forging the common register for articulating differences in social and political styles. From Bourdieu’s perspective such elements serve as tools for the consolidating of social “capital”; in the case of public performance in the classical period as in more modern contexts, this capital manifests itself most frequently as a confluence of linguistic authority and political influence. Appetitive images signify in this powerful manner because they indicate not only class and gender associations – say, simple, tough-man’s foods versus effeminizing delicacies – but also a comprehensive physical scheme (e.g., aggressive consumption versus sexual passivity). While Bourdieu’s sociology of the talking body is not primarily concerned with literary semiosis, his emphasis on how concrete social contexts shape the reception of different discourses clearly offers insights for analyzing the ancient forms of insult that foreground the symposium and the agora.

Bakhtin’s reading of the open, gobbling, abusive mouth in Rabelais’ *Gargantua and Pantagruel* as an emblem of carnivalesque attitudes emanating from the folk also sets oral imagery squarely in the realm of social realities. Bakhtin addresses the literary ramifications of the figurative imagery he invokes in relation to medieval feasting as well as the ancient symposium, identifying this latter setting as “the clearest and most classical form” of

<sup>45</sup> Bourdieu 1991: 87.

the ritually significant connection between eating and speaking.<sup>46</sup> Bakhtin sometimes draws a distinction between the wise talk of the symposium and the jesting of “festive speech,” but he seems in general to conceive of both as formative in the development of abuse genres. On the one hand he acknowledges the prandial, joking elements of symposiastic speech, and on the other he locates both jests and the language of insult within the marketplace. These modes reiterate essential connections to the body’s parts and functions, being effectively rooted in the guts of daily life.<sup>47</sup>

The literary context contributes further nuances to the focus of this imagery. In ancient performance settings the defaming speaker invokes his target’s mouth or related organs less to denigrate his actual physical habits than to suggest moral excesses that should exclude him from public office or aristocratic symposia and relegate him to the agora or (worse) the city gates. These excesses are also programmatic in the sense that they highlight concerns central to abusive genres. In Aristophanes’ depictions, for example, if a given character is reputed to have a rapacious mouth or gaping posterior, he not only reveals himself to be unfit for upper-class pursuits and public duties; he is also a paradigmatic target, the embodiment of all that comedy mocks and rejects.<sup>48</sup> This judgment emerges through a network of imagery that overshadows how he (or his historical counterpart) actually comports himself in respect to his apertures. Further, such references place this character in relation to an iambic literary tradition that organizes characters by their oral activities and suggests crucial parallels between appetites and discourses. These figurative parallels repeatedly articulate one set of activities in terms of another, and usually differentiate speech types most central to the given genre.

Indeed, in Aristophanes as in other quasi-comic settings such as Euripides’ *Cyclops*, the imagery, while clearly inspired by contemporaneous social habits, invokes a metonymic scheme (e.g., implements of cookery) that distinguishes speaking styles in relation to what is actually at stake in the action of the play (e.g., control of the Athenian assembly). This scheme is

<sup>46</sup> Bakhtin 1984: 283.

<sup>47</sup> Bakhtin recognizes, for example, that celebrated heroes such as Odysseus may turn up in debased form on some vase-paintings and in satyr plays (1984: 30–31, 148, cf. also 168–69 on Socrates).

<sup>48</sup> Although the female body would seem to be even more vulnerable to such treatment, comedy does not appear to have emphasized the match between, say, “mouths.” Indeed neither Greek nor Roman usage shows evidence of using “mouth” (G. στόμα / L. *os*) as a metaphor in this way. This does not, of course mean that the vagina was never conceived of as a lower “hole” in conjunction with the mouth (cf., e.g., Hippon. 135b; and Eustath. iv.835.13 Valk, and see discussion in the epilogue below). Rather, the mouth–anus combination prevails, most likely because anxiety about public speaking centers on the male body.

manifestly figurative and programmatic, but it also offers a register of contemporaneous attitudes and appetites, because, being good abusive talk, it is so replete with the rough stuff of daily life. A number of scholars have considered what the sexual or culinary imagery employed in Attic comedy and oratory may tell us about the social settings in which they were performed.<sup>49</sup> I want to extend such discussions by investigating the ways in which the metonymies and metaphors that shape the oral imagery index these social settings, as well as what this suggests about the relationship of such imagery to both generic conventions and the public, ritualized tradition of abusive talk.

Consider, for example, Aristophanes' use of the adjective *euruprōktos* ("wide-holed," or less clinically, "gape-assed"<sup>50</sup>), which has encouraged scholars to discuss homosexual practice in fifth-century Athens. A closer look at the semiotic patterns in the comedies reveals that the adjective is in fact a metonymic attribute that encodes not so much sexual as verbal activity. This does not mean that information about ancient sexuality is not relevant. Rather, since the term *euruprōktos* accretes meaning in Aristophanes' texts by its predication of characters that are first and foremost voluble talkers in settings where this activity predominates (e.g., the courts, the theater), the target behavior is first and foremost verbal rather than sexual. That is, the metonym comes into play through its equation with another bodily orifice: the open mouth. It thereby serves as an index of excessive verbal styles, while its application to public figures itself represents an instance of abusive talk. Moreover, the adjective encodes concerns not only about public speaking but also about comic conventions, querying how these intersect with and comment upon each other. This is especially clear in the *Clouds*, where the Weaker Argument manipulates the Stronger into an admission that most professionals whose medium is language – including politicians, lawyers, and tragic (but not comic) poets – are their audiences (*Nub.* 1085–1100).<sup>51</sup>

The connection established between one organ and another thus suggests parallels between their typical uses, so that, for instance, the prattling mouth of the orator in assembly may imply his effeminate vulnerability in other settings. This is where implications of homosexual activity reenter

<sup>49</sup> E.g., Schmitt-Pantel 1992; Davidson 1997; Fisher 2000, 2001; Wilkins 1997, 2000a. Cf. Wohl 2002 for a discussion more focused on the referencing of these practices as political metaphors.

<sup>50</sup> Since *prōktos* most precisely means "anus," this is a difficult term to translate without sounding either euphemistic or clinical; cf. Henderson 1975 [1991]: 201–02, 209–13.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Dover 1978: 140–138–46; Henderson 1975 [1991]: 75–77, 210; Davidson 1997: 167–82. See further in ch. 2.

the same's path: if being *euruprōktos* means that the mouth is always open, then it also suggests more "shameful" activities than talking. The comic scheme thus maps onto the body a set of correspondences that dismantles its natural coherence and reassembles it in a new and debased form. The result is a metonymic reconfiguration that clearly indexes cultural practices in concrete settings: witness the demagogue in *Knights* who fellates rather than eats in the Prytaneium (*Eq.* 167). But the comic depiction itself forges its own realities, which means that this grotesque body is essentially fabricated by the text's operations and generic mandates.

Roland Barthes famously expressed the irony of how literary representation configures the body in dismantling, misleading ways in his analysis of Balzac's short story "Sarrasine," which embeds a tale about a sculptor who becomes unwittingly enamored of a castrato with the stage name "La Zambinella." Barthes remarks, "The symbolic field is occupied by a single object from which it derives its unity. . . . This object is the human body."<sup>52</sup> Further, when crucial "economies" are not respected in a narrative – when, for instance, conventional gender categories are not maintained – the result is a collapse of the very unifying, organizing function that the body should serve in that narrative. This gives rise to a proliferation of metonymies, in which objects and body parts index character categories or categories mask individuals. The latter creates what Barthes calls "metonymic falsehoods," as when Balzac's figuring of La Zambinella as an "excluded other" (genus) elides the fact that the desired, unattainable "female" (species) is in fact a castrato.<sup>53</sup> Consider again Aristophanes' use of the term *euruprōktos*, which includes the species of smooth-talking public poet who sings like a woman but is really a man.<sup>54</sup>

In addition, the very act of description has a disintegrating effect on the body. This Barthes attributes to "the spitefulness of language," which cannot capture the body in its entirety. Thus, he argues, "the total body must revert to the dust of words, to the listing of details," a reversion marked by the use of the *blason* (Eng. "blazon").<sup>55</sup> This figure predicates a general characteristic – say, for our purposes, rapacity – on a series of anatomical

<sup>52</sup> Barthes 1974: 214–15.      <sup>53</sup> Barthes 1974: 162.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Agathon in Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae* and see further in ch. 2.

<sup>55</sup> Barthes 1974: 113–14. Cf. Lanham 1991: 61, who defines "blazon" by the Latin *effictio*, the technique common in elevated, laudatory erotic poetry of listing the attributes that make the beloved beautiful. But cf. Bakhtin 1984: 426–27, who argues that the *blason* in medieval French usage originally denoted praise or blame: "a systematic dissection and anatomization of woman in a tone of humorous, familiar praise or denigration" (427). Consider, e.g., Herrick's "False in legs, false in thighs:/ False in breast, teeth, hair, and eyes" ("Upon Some Women," 1648 [1963]: 109; and Rochester's "Her hand, her foot, her very look's a cunt" ("The Imperfect Enjoyment"), 1680 [1999]: 14, line 18). In Greek comedy, where the focus tends to be more on the male body, this "disintegration" may ramify outwards:



attributes (e.g., mouth, throat, belly, anus). The body is thereby reduced to its parts, which in turn are reassembled under a signifying standard (*blason*) rather than as a whole body.

This disintegration of the body in language helps to account for why the mouth becomes the body part most saturated with meaning in Attic comedy and, indeed, in the larger iambic discourse about public speaking, even attracting attributes that are usually dispersed elsewhere (e.g., sexual and gender connotations).<sup>56</sup> Thus it is not merely that the mouth of the debased body utters abuse; this is in any event not always the case. More importantly, it, its associated organs, and their activation serve as central metonymies for that body. Repeatedly disintegrated by the figurative strategies of abusive language, the body is also reassembled in monstrous form by means of a series of crude juxtapositions with the mouth and entered under a blazon that cements these new and shameful connections.<sup>57</sup> The mouth thus stands in for other body parts, but it also indexes aggressive or ignoble oral activities of many kinds.

Close attention to such semiotic patterns helps to illuminate the complex intersection of the body in public performance (i.e., on the comic stage or oratorical platform [*bēma*]) and its reconfiguring by iambic imagery. This is, of course, the ultimate irony of the discourse of comic drama as well as oratory: that as much as the language of abuse dismantles the body, this is also consistently countered by its reconstitution in debased or elevated form on stage. Other scholars have focused on the visible profile of the comic body, and a few have shown interest in the deportments (*schēmata*) of the orator.<sup>58</sup> The present study aims to supplement this discussion as well, by considering how the linguistic codes and conventions of these performance genres affect our understanding of the symbolic significance of the iambic body's abused and abusive parts.

cf. Strepsiades' depairing conclusion to being hounded by his debtors: "bereft of money, bereft of skin,/ bereft of soul,/ and bereft of shoe" (φροῦδα τὰ χρήματα, φρούδη χροιά,/ φρούδη ψυχή, φρούδη δ' ἔμβόας, *Nub.* 718–19).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. Barthes' analysis of the castrato's voice: "[It is] as though, by selective hypertrophy, sexual density were obliged to abandon the rest of the body and lodge in the throat, thereby draining the body of all that *connects* it" (1974: 109).

<sup>57</sup> In comic contexts (including the satyr play) another figure is also prominent: what Aristotle calls analogy, a metonymic exchange that fashions a similarly monstrous body by means of trade-offs between body parts and inanimate objects (e.g., calling the belly a ship's hold [*skapnos*] in Euripides' *Cyclops*). This figure turns up in prose usage as well, but not with the same frequency; see further in chs. 2 and 3.

<sup>58</sup> See Foley 2000 on comic bodies; also Dover 1978 on Timarchus; Hall 1995 on forensic speakers; Zanker 1995 on Socrates, Demosthenes, and Aeschines; Gödde 2001 on bodily image in tragedy.

## THE DISCURSIVE SCHEME

My discussion begins in chapter 1 with an overview of archaic poets' ideas about the balance and fair exchange that should govern both spoken interactions and dinner-table etiquette. In settings from Homer to Pindar slander is analogized to ravenous gobbling (e.g., Hom. *Od.* 18.1–9; Pind. *Nem.* 8.21–25), while appropriate speech is marked by an attention to the fair portion (e.g., *Il.* 19.186, *Od.* 4.266, 14.509; cf. Hipponax fr. 128 W).<sup>59</sup> The insightful work of scholars on such equations in archaic poetry has revealed their programmatic quality in the formulation of iambos, where impotence of a hungry, rude outsider draws connections between food and talk. Early iambos clearly engages this insulting scheme, as Bowie and other have explained; this chapter considers as well elements of the genre that prefigure themes and imagery in iambic discourse of the classical period.<sup>60</sup> Besides becoming crucial to character representation in Attic comedy (as chapter 2 explores), connections between speech and consumption also pave the way for those drawn in Athenian tragedy between the speaker and his appetites.<sup>61</sup> Tragedy famously makes pervasive use of the imagery of sacrifice, a practice with potential to taint its participants and thus to impede their abilities to speak in a lucid and communicative manner. This is clearly the case in Sophocles' *Antigone*, where the impious treatment of Polyneices' body infects the speech of the Theban citizens and gluts the city's altars with polluted carrion.<sup>62</sup>

Chapters 2 and 3 treat more comic settings, which are far more influential on abusive language in prose writing. In both old comedy and the satyr play, the programmatic attention to consumption frames characters as mercenary, craven types who are ripe for insults, especially those involving bodily appetites. The influence of iambic insult in these genres shapes oppositions between the voracious, monstrous demagogue and the effeminate, polished sophist. While extant titles reveal that the satyric genre and comedy show some overlap in subject matter, comic imagery – as the product of a genre that developed out of fertility rituals and adopted the apotropaic use of insult talk as its central mode – is much ruder and more confrontational. It thus indulges freely in the abusive vocabulary that comes to shape iambic discourse in the classical period. Aristophanic comedy in particular emerges as very influential in the development of this discourse, to the extent that

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Nagy 1979: 222–36; Steiner 2001b, 2002.

<sup>60</sup> Bowie 1986; also Bartol 1993: 51–74; Ford 2002: 25–39.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Saïd 1979; Nagy 1979: 225–35; Steinrück 2000; Steiner 2001b, 2002.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Seaford 1994: 281–301.

its imagery and vocabulary turn up in fourth-century rhetorical settings, even though the more obscene plays that contributed important elements to the discourse were no longer being performed. This suggests that the lexical and imagistic schemes had entered the common idiom, since otherwise audiences would not respond to such schemes and writers have no use for them.

Thus, for instance, Aristophanes' repeated depiction of the polished (*kompsos*) style as woman's chatter (*lalia*), which O'Sullivan has shown characterizes Euripides, Socrates, and the sophists, shapes later portrayals of weak or effeminate speakers in other genres, where invoking such distinctions may have a startling impact on audience or interlocutor.<sup>63</sup> Comic use of such attributions, however, underscores the license of the genre. In *Frogs*, for example, the sophistic Euripides promotes a style too glib and finely wrought, while *Knights* contrasts this polished style with that of the shouting, gobbling, agora-swaggering Paphlagon – a stage name for Cleon, the demagogue whom Aristophanes repeatedly depicts as a threat to Athens. His opponent the Sausage Seller is an equally reprehensible denizen of the marketplace, although he shows signs of more effeminate, lubricious behaviors that indicate his self-prostituting type. Like tragedy, comedy often employs the imagery of sacrifice, but *Knights* in particular formulates this as an analogy between politicians' slavish pandering and the manipulations of mercenary chefs.

Chapter 3 considers the interconnections between comic depictions of oral excess and the characterization of the voracious Cyclops in Euripides' satyr play. While the lexicon of this genre is notably more elevated than that of comedy, it does represent the moment of unwinding at the end of the tragic trilogy, when the audience as well as the chorus of satyrs were likely to be indulging certain appetites, especially bibulous ones. An opposition between types familiar from comedy – and the metaphors of intemperance that accompany it – also mark the face-off between a glib, wary Odysseus and the greedy, talkative Polyphemus.<sup>64</sup> The play thus extends my discussion in an important direction, insofar as it reveals that satyric drama participated in iambic patterns of imagery if not so much in abusive vocabulary.<sup>65</sup> The monstrous sophist, whom commentators have likened to Calicles in Plato's *Gorgias*, is a rapacious speechifier who systematically coopts and reconstitutes the careful, fair-sharing speech delivered by Odysseus, refashioning his hopeful references to feasting as sacrifice, with the guests

<sup>63</sup> O'Sullivan 1992: 131–33. Cf. discussions in chs. 3, 4, and 6. <sup>64</sup> Cf. Worman 2002b.

<sup>65</sup> That the Cyclops narrative turns up in comic drama and that certain comedies had satyr choruses further support this overlap. Cf. Cratinus, *Odysseuses*, *Dionysalexandros*, and *Satyrs*; Callias, *Cyclopes*.

as victims. Both comedy and the satyr play, then, make use of distinctions among excessive speaking styles and correlate these with other uses of the mouth. Both also set the confrontations in the context of feasting and sacrifice, matching verbal modes to these ritualized forms of consumption.

In the second half of the book I turn to prose texts, particularly to the ways in which the discourse of oral excess helps to shape critiques of character and technique in writings on rhetoric and in oratory. These chapters represent the more essential component of my overall argument, in that they demonstrate the persistence of iambic discourse in fourth-century prose texts and thereby reveal a crucial transposition that proves influential in later periods. In fact, the appropriation of the comic vocabulary and tropes centered on the mouth by fourth-century orators and writers on rhetoric may well have contributed essential tools for the crafting of character assassination in Roman prose, whether in oratorical invective or novelistic lampoon.<sup>66</sup>

Chapter 4 examines the development of iambic characterization and vocabulary in Plato's depictions of Socrates and the sophists. It thus addresses material that initiates a shift of this abusive talk to fourth-century prose works. In the fourth century more generally, iambic language moved effectively from the comic stage to the oratorical platform. As comedy became less political in focus and less crude in diction, orators adopted its vocabulary to denigrate opponents, while rhetorical theorists such as Plato reframed its application as mock abuse of Socrates, the chief critic of civic leaders and their teachers. Plato's adoption of the language of insult from dramatic genres for use in prose dialogues signals the performative nature of these dialogues, as well as their participation in the characterological schemes that shape iambic discourse. In this more private setting and more overtly intellectualized genre, the comic abuse isolates Socrates as a lowbrow outsider who challenges his elite interlocutors with rude and unfamiliar questions about their moral attitudes.

Plato's portraits tend to avoid easy oppositions between speakers, but debasing language familiar from comedy frames the confrontations between Socrates and his sophistic interlocutors. Platonic dialogue thus appropriates abusive talk from the comic stage in order to dramatize Socrates' outsider status and lampoon the conceits of the sophists. As in comedy Plato's use of iambic imagery tends to align the misbehaviors of professional speakers with other oral activities. But while Aristophanes is primarily interested in the impact of demagogues in public arenas, Plato focuses attention on the

<sup>66</sup> See further in the epilogue.

sophists' putative corruption of elites in quasi-private settings. As critiques of professional speakers, the Platonic dialogues that focus on sophists thus transpose comic invective to a more privileged forum while maintaining the dramatic force of the abuse.

Chapter 5 treats the imagery deployed by those who, unlike Socrates, employed their mouths to full effect in the courts; it analyzes the transformation of comic insult into a formidable weapon for use in momentous forensic cases. This chapter is especially concerned with the defamatory portraits forged by Demosthenes and Aeschines of each other. It demonstrates that their focus on oral imagery reworks Aristophanic and Platonic usage by implementing it in civic arenas whose functions are quite distinct from those of either comedy or philosophical dialogue. The overtly political nature of oratorical abuse in the courts and the assembly influences public decision-making by promoting ideas about appetitive types and their relationship to sound policies. The use of comic insult in this context is more polite in certain regards (e.g., sexual innuendo is rarer and more oblique), and more brutal in others, since the piling on of abusive detail aimed at the ruin of one's opponent.

In their disputes over the embassy to Philip (Aesch. 2, Dem. 19) and over whether Demosthenes should be crowned as a public benefactor (Aesch. 3, Dem. 18), the character types that both speakers formulate for each other repeatedly associate the mouth with various types of intemperate behavior. The booming voice of Aeschines encourages his opponent to offer it as evidence of a voracious and low-class type. The timorous chatter of Demosthenes, in contrast, suggests to Aeschines his enemy's softness and effeminacy (Aesch. 1.126–31; cf. Dem. 18.180).<sup>67</sup> Demosthenes claims that Aeschines has sold his vocal talents in both the theater and public speaking, depicting him as a marketplace hack (18.127, 131, 262). Aeschines characterizes Demosthenes' voice as squeaky and discordant (2.157; cf. 3.229), while also suggesting that his mouth may be open for another kind of business (2.23, 88). Neither type seems likely to be very trustworthy as a leader of Athens in a time of crisis.

In these contexts, then, the spectrum of styles runs the gamut from violent, voracious shouting to polished chattering. Excessive verbal modes are poised in relation to other types of oral intemperance: on the one end is violent excess, on the other gabbling weakness. This contrasting pattern, although often inflected with more complex associations, comports with the ways in which Aristotle argues that one falls short of the virtuous mean. In

<sup>67</sup> See Dover 1978: 75; for a contrasting view, see Yunis 2001.

the *Nicomachean Ethics* (2.2, 2.6) he aligns types of intemperance (*akolasia*) with faults of excess or weakness. Both Aristotle's treatments of character (especially those in the *Rhetoric*) and Theophrastus' portraits in *Characters* indicate the importance of such distinctions to rhetorical technique, as well as their centrality to the public performance of the orator more generally.

Chapter 6 examines the realm of rhetorical theory, assessing how Aristotle and especially Theophrastus characterize the relationship between oral activities and oratorical styles. The discussion demonstrates the significance of those points at which they focus on uses of the mouth to highlight essential distinctions among speakers. We may observe, for example, that when Aristotle addresses the representation of character in the oratorical setting, he associates excesses of emotion and verbal versatility with the young (*Rhet.* 1389b4–11), loquacity and querulousness with old men (1390a9–10, 22–24). While Theophrastus' *Characters* records the distinct behaviors of private citizens, it also delineates some types as weak and chattering and others as aggressive and loud. The idle chatterer engages in talk that is so copious and insistently pointless that he is impossible either to engage or to avoid. The boor, in contrast, is apt to slurp down his rustic gruel (*kukeōn*) on the way to Assembly (4.2) and drink his wine too strong, both of which suggest a different kind of oral excess. In their focus on the average citizen, Theophrastus' sketches also pursue the trajectory initiated by Plato's Socrates, who so frequently positions himself as a private, pedestrian sort up against the polished verbiage of the professional speaker. The sketches recalibrate the habits of well-known teachers and orators to suit the particularities of ordinary citizens' lives, thereby transforming the intemperate mouths of public figures, which cause such concern in other texts, into little more than an irritating aspect of hanging out in the agora.

Most of these iambic portraits, however, reference oral activities as a central means of mocking putatively brutal demagogues or craven sophists and opposing them to an idealized notion of the Athenian citizen. The recognition that the voice can be capitalized on for mercenary ends, or that the mouth can be used for less honorable activities than powerful speaking, reveals the kind of debasement and servitude most open to ridicule in a community that prided itself on its freedom of speech (*parrēsia*). These denigrating portrayals of the mouth's capacities contribute to a larger abusive discourse that develops around professional speakers during this period, and thus further the understanding of classical Greek attitudes toward both bodily appetite and the power of insult.

*The mouth and its abuses in epic, lyric, and tragedy*

κᾶν Σαλμυδ[ησσ]ῶ γυμνὸν εὐφρονε[  
 Θρήικες ἀκρό[κ]ομοι  
 λάβοιεν. ἔνθα πόλλ' ἀναπλήσαι κακὰ  
 δούλιον ἄρτον ἔδων,  
 ῥίγει πεπηγόντ' αὐτόν· ἐκ δὲ τοῦ χνόου  
 φυκία πόλλ' ἐπέχοι,  
 κροτέοι δ' ὀδόντας. ὡς [κ]ύων ἐπὶ στόμα  
 κείμενος ἀκρασίη

And in Salmydessus may the top-knotted Thracians  
 graciously take him in, naked,  
 where he will carry out many lowly tasks  
 eating slave's bread,  
 seized by cold; and from the foam  
 may he clutch heaps of seaweed,  
 chattering his teeth, mouth down like a dog  
 lying in helplessness.

A dog's life, snappish talk, the ravenous mouth: these rude images cluster in the language of insult from early on in Greek poetry, often crystallizing in the form of curses such as this one.<sup>1</sup> While the features of iambic literature clearly developed piecemeal, disparate settings for poetic performance offer strikingly similar figurative language to capture the speaking styles and characterizations of both those who deploy insults and their targets. In the broadest sense, this abusive talk runs the gamut from invective and character assassination on the one hand, to mockery and lampoon on the other; that is to say, some modes are quite vitriolic, others more droll. The genres in which such abuse appears reflect this diversity. Indeed, I would submit

<sup>1</sup> This elegiac fragment has been attributed to Archilochus by Reitzenstein 1899 and to Hipponax by Blass 1900. West follows Blass (= fr. 115). Hendrickson 1925 emphasizes its form (an imprecation in response to a transgression of oaths), which is a central mode of iambos and a narrative element in the *vitae* of famous iambic poets. See further below.

that abusive modes shadow many, if not most, genres, often functioning in irreverent, devious, or sinister contrast to the perspectives openly valued by the given text.

This book more generally treats those settings in the classical period in which such contrasts are most informative and consequential in the shaping of abusive vocabulary and tropes. The present chapter pieces together speech modes, character types, and imagery that influenced the beginnings of an iambic discourse centered on the mouth, and argues that this discourse developed, during a period of shifting ideas about community, out of the chafing between praise genres and the insult talk they attempt to foreclose. The chapter thus focuses not only on iambic poetry per se but also on figures and speech types in epic, lyric, and tragedy that open out toward iampos: the appetitive deviser, the devilish talker, as well as the denigrating and potentially damaging speech modes and settings that reinforce their unheroic statures. In Homeric epic, for instance, dog epithets are a common form of abuse, and a beggared, doggish Odysseus exchanges cruel abuses with other lowly types. Pindar and writers of tragedy, on the other hand, distance their genres from the language of blame by associating it with designing women or sly, sophistic types – especially Odysseus. Indeed, the figure of Odysseus appears to have been curiously inspirational in the development of the voice central to iambic depiction: that of the debased and mocking outsider.<sup>2</sup>

From the perceptible beginnings of iambic discourse, moreover, the rude body is identified with lowly, mischievous talkers who elicit imprecations and scorn from others, who are themselves sensitive to bodily need and therefore make use of clever mockeries and adumbrated curses to gain their ground.<sup>3</sup> The hungry, clownish outsider is a key figure of this iambic imposture, as is the teasing or bawdy low-status female, both of whom seem to have provided entertainment for elites at symposia, perhaps as characters whom aristocratic party-goers or hired actors impersonated. The later books of the *Odyssey* develop the former type as a beggar man of uncertain identity; these books also depict (although less centrally) the mocking servant woman in the figure of Melantho. There are traces in iambic poetry of these stock personas, some better-attested than others. And it is clear that in the cultic tradition of Demeter the figure of Iambe/Baubo embodies a milder form of the mocking female servant; in fact some ancient traditions make her

<sup>2</sup> On Odysseus' connection to iampos, see also Seidensticker 1978; Casolari 2003: 204–05.

<sup>3</sup> Nagy 1979: 229–31 has argued that the *margos* (“greedy”) man is necessarily a blame speaker; the idea that blame poetry is allied with the belly's demands turns up in Homer, iampos, and Pindar.