THE STENCHY PISO –AN ACCUSATION STRATEGY IN M. T. CICERO`S *IN PISONEM*–

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Abstract: The invective against Piso constitutes one of the most important *post-reditum* speeches of Marcus Tullius Cicero. On his return from exile the former consul delivers a speech wishing to verbally express his "gratitude" to all those who either by means of their blissful actions have actively taken part in his banishment or merely by their silence have been accomplices in it. Piso was one of them and Cicero, in his invective, attempts by almost every possible means to destroy any remaining credibility of Piso. In order to do so the orator exploits all kinds of opportunities even those given by certain odour associations.

Keywords: Cicero, rhetoric, invective, smell

Rhetoric and rhetorical speeches were greatly appreciated in ancient (Roman and Greek) democracies, without which jurisdiction and political life would have been unimaginable within democratic framework.

Rhetorical speeches of that time range from laudatory speeches to ruthless attacks indulging in personalities. Although the term invective (i. e. the *invectiva oratio*) has been used by orators since the 4th century B. C., its precise definition has not been accepted yet. The Latin verb *inveho3* means to attack, to assault, but the broader sense of the word also includes to launch a verbal attack against somebody, to mock at somebody. Features of the invective can be identified in Archilochus' and Alkaios' works, in the ancient Attic comedy as well as in the Attic orators' works. This genre was often used by the Romans, too, when they gave names or threw insulting curses[1] (Fraenkel 1925: 187); it can be found in their short mocking rhymes sung on marriage ceremonies or in the bantering verses scanned at triumphal processions (Pap 2015). It is also present in literature – both in poetry and rhetoric (cf. Kostler 1980). M. T. Cicero also exploits the possibilities offered by the genre. Scipio Aemilianus, one of the characters of his work '*On the Republic*', claims that *vituperatia non iniusta* (rightful criticism) is more powerful than laws because it is able to retain men of high prominence, leaders of the state and simple citizens from committing illegal acts[2]. The works of the famous Roman statesman and orator range from speeches of defence - uttered in order to protect the interests of the

[1] De re publica 4.10.;

[2] *...civitatibus, in quibus expetunt laudem optumi et decus, ignominiam fugiunt ae dedecus. nec vero tam metu poenaque terrentur, quae est constituta legibus, quam verecundia, quam natura homini dedit quasi quendam vituperationis non iniustae timorem. hanc ille rector rerum publicarum auxit opinionibus, perfecitque institutis et disciplinis, ut pudor civis non minus a delictis arceret quam metus. atque haec quidem ad laudem pertinent, quae diei latius uberiusque potuerunt.* De re publica 5.6.8.

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state and of individuals – to attacks directed both against his own and the state's enemies. His speeches belonging to the second group contain invectives that

the orator employs…at those key points in career at which he needs to shape new aspects of his public identity: as a righteous young prosecutor (Against Verres), as an elected head of the state (Against Catiline; Ont he Agrarian Law), as a former exile reestablishing authority (Against Vatinius; Against Piso), and as an elder statesman exercising that authority for the last time (Philippics). (Corbeill 2002: 198)

The invective, the forceful attack made it possible for the orator to persuade his audience even when some points of accusation contained a higher degree of probability than it was required (Nisbet 1961:192-197). By employing examples of features that do not usually characterise the citizens of Rome, Cicero ventures onto fields where he can launch an attack ignoring the rules of legal accusations because, as mentioned above, maintenance of law and order would tolerate 'unusual' approaches, as well. Research into ancient Greek and Roman invectives has reached considerable results in the past decades. Nisbet's (1961), Opelt's (1965) and Koster's (1980) monographs broadened the horizon of research, while Corbeill (1996, 2002) acquainted his readers with the way invectives appear in Cicero's works. Basing on Cicero's *Division of Oratory*, and having in view the great orator's classification of the topics of praise and blame *(corpus, animus, externa)*, Corbeill identifies the following – typically Roman – accusation topics: "*1. servile heritage; 2. barbarian (non Roman) background; 3 having a non-elite occupation; 4. thievery; 5. non-standard sexual behavior; 6. estrangement from family and community; 7. melancholy disposition; 8. unusual appearance, clothing, or demeanor; 9. cowardice; 10. bankruptcy*." (Corbeill 2002: 201-202; cf. Süss 19752: 247-254; Nisbet 1961: 192-197; Opelt 1965: 129; Koster 1980: 2).

As Consul for the year 63, Cicero considered the exposure of the Catilinarian conspiracy and the exemplary punishment of those involved in the plot the most outstanding achievement of his political career, but it was also the cause of his failure. After his tenure as Consul he became victim of political games, being forced into exile for having the conspirators executed without a trial. His exile ended in 57 B. C., and soon he turned back to Rome, where he tried to take revenge on his enemies. One of them was Lucius Calpurnius Piso, Consul for the year 58 B.C., who had taken an active role in Cicero's banishment[3]. In return to forcing Cicero into exile, as a reward, Piso was appointed governor of the province Macedonia, which

[3] In the beginning Piso and Cicero had a good relationship, and Piso felt positive about Cicero's firm attitude against the Catilinarians. He opposed, however, their execution. Two laws against Cicero were passed during Piso's tenure as Consul: the *lex de exilio Ciceronis* and the *lex de capite civis Romani*.

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he ruthlessly exploited for two years. Eventually, in 55 B. C. the Senate named Quintus Ancharius head of the province. During the debate on Piso's revocation Cicero took a firm position against his enemy, who, on his return from Macedonia, did not hesitate to express his indignation. Instead of trying to reach reconciliation, Cicero addressed the speech *In Pisonem* against his enemy. In this vehement invective, Cicero refers to most of the accusation topics mentioned above, emphasizing the *servile heritage* and *barbarian (non-Roman) background* of Piso's family (Pis. I. frg. IX. XIV. a) and his *non-elite occupation (Pis. 25. frg. XI. a.)*. The speech also includes accusations on Piso's *unusual appearance, clothing, or demeanor* (Pis. 1. 13. 22. 37. 67.) and on the *cowardice* he manifested during the punishment of those involved in the Catilinarian conspiracy, thus threatening the security of the state (Pis. 14-15. 16.). Cicero also accuses Piso of *estrangement from family and community*, bringing the journeys made by Piso and the way he returned to Rome as evidence to demonstrate the truth of this point of accusation (Pis. 51-54. 55. 92-93. cf. Pap 2015: 25-27.). Cicero makes allusions on Piso's *non-standard sexual behaviour*, too, but without supporting his claim with evidence, because he was probably not convinced of the success of this topic of accusation (Pis. 31. 89.). In order to describe Piso's questionable financial affairs, he uses a quotation from Plautus: "*I' faith, the account is very clear: the money's gone"*[4] (Plaut. Trin. 2.4.). So, according to him, Piso's entire activity in the province is characterized by bankruptcy, insolvency and financial collapse (Pis. 83. 86. 91. 97.).

Beside the accusation topics mentioned in this paper, without wanting to insert an eleventh one (although this possibility should also be considered if it is supported by other researchers), we would like to highlight another strategy of accusation: the use of associations related to unpleasant odours to undermine the targeted person's reliability. Being aware of the fact that within the limits of the present paper, this phenomenon cannot be analysed in the whole *corpus Ciceronianum*, we only focus on *in Pisonem*, the most vehement invective among the *post reditum* speeches.

Little if any research has been made on the role of different smells and odours in ancient literature. A recent volume edited by Bradley (2015) entitled *Smell and the Ancient Senses*[5] proves the necessity of further research into the topic. None of the studies included in the volume analyses smells as accusation topic, fact which reiterates the necessity of our investigation.

Smelling is one of the most complex and sophisticated human senses. Although a new-born baby has a well-developed olfactory system, it develops further for ten years. On average, people are able to identify more than 5000 different smells (some being able to differentiate up to 10,000

[4] *Ratio quidem hercle apparet: argentum oichetai.*

[5] The same publishing house published a volume on synaesthesia and ancient *scenes* edited by Butler and Pruves (2013) and another volume edited by Classen, Howes, Synnott (1994)

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different kinds of odours). The olfactory system transmits the signals to the brain, which analyses them. During our 5-10-year-long learning period we learn and store in our memory a large variety of smells of different type and value (ranging from pleasant fragrances to repulsive stenches). An important role in the process of storage and identification is played by our *presemantic* memory, which makes connections between places, people, activities and certain smells. When smelling a certain odour, one can recall the reference points which the odour is connected with. If we smell a pleasant odour, we recall the experience linked with it with pleasure, and vice versa, we feel horrified of unpleasant stenches.

In ancient societies people were particularly sensitive to smells. Religious rituals were often accompanied by different fragrances. Men and women wore perfumes. Of course, irritating, unpleasant smells associated to negative experiences such as dead animals or unwashed people were not unknown to people of that time. Different odours with the negative or positive mental pictures associated to them appeared in literature, as well.

Stinky people and the general disdain for them appear in the early period of Roman literature. In his play entitled *Bacchides*, Plautus, uses unpleasant smells to express disdain: "*He is of as much value as a rotten (putidus) mushroom is."*[6] Nicobulus snaps at the old Philoxenus with the following words: "*And do you, you rotten (putide) creature, presume to become a lover at your time of life?"*[7] Catullus addresses the words *moecha putida*[8] to the lady who refuses to give the *codicillus* back to him. Horace also refers to a lady with the word *putida*[9]

In Cicero's writings on the theory of rhetoric, unpleasant smells often describe bad speech, having the meaning of *unnatural, disagreeable, affected, disgusting* (Lewis, Short 1879)[10]. He is also aware of the fact that, as shown in the examples above, bad smells are ideal to characterise the targeted person as untrustworthy, and this way to successfully diminish the audience's positive feelings towards him.

We have already listed Cicero's accusations against Piso. Yet, in addition to them, he took advantage of the audience's negative mental images associated with stinky people to undermine his enemy's reputation.

On Piso's remark that Cicero, following Quintus's advice, counted on his help when he was aspiring for a position, Cicero retorted indignantly:

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[6] *…tantist quantist fungus putidus.* Bacch. 4. 7. 23.

[7] *Tun, homo putide, amator istac fieri aetate audes?* Bacch. 5. 2. 44.

[8] moecha putida, redde codicillos,/redde putida moecha, codicillos! Carm. 43. 11.

[9] *Rogare longo putidam te saeculo,/ viris quid enervet meas, / cum sit tibi dens ater et rugis vetus / frontem senectus exaret / hietque turpis inter aridas natis / podex velut crudae bovis.* Epod. 8. 1.

[10] *molesta et putida videri*, De orat. 3. 13. 51.

litterae neque expressae neque oppressae, ne aut obscurum esset aut putidum. De off. 1. 37. 133.

Nam si quis eos qui nec inepte dicunt nec odiose nec putide, Attice putat dicere, is recte nisi Atticum probat neminem. Brut. 82. 284.

…nolo exprimi litteras putidius, nolo obscurari neglegentius, De orat. 3. 11. 41.

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"*Was I, forsooth, anxious to lean on the counsel or protection of that piece of senseless cattle, of that bit of rotten flesh? Was I likely to seek for any support or ornament for myself from that contemptible carcass?*"[11] (Pis. 19.). Metaphors such as *'putida caro'* or *'eiectus cadaver'*

must have sounded quite repulsive even to those who were accustomed to the often penetrating smells on the streets of Rome.

It is known that the Romans liked frequenting taverns and other public places. However, men of prominence, who were concerned about their reputation, entered these places only in cases of *vis maior*. They did so because, according to Roman law, a tavern keeper occupied almost the same social status as a criminal. Like in our days, taverns had an awful odour, and a person reeking of alcohol was not regarded as an example to follow. Thus, one could ask, what kind of person is the Roman consul or senator who regularly frequents taverns seeking the company of disreputable people like the Greeks? This is how Cicero depicts one of Piso's affairs in a tavern: "*But this man, who is not quite so refined in gluttony nor so musical, lay stupefied amid the reeking orgies of his Greek crew."*[12] (Pis. 22) Cicero emphasizes in his other works, too, that taverns are not for decent people and that the tavern keeper is a disreputable person.[13] As far as Piso's 'Greek crew' is concerned, Cicero does not enter in details. Nevertheless, knowing Piso's philosophical ideas and his relationships with the philosophers of his time, we can easily identify them with the representatives of the Epicurean philosophy. It was widely known that Piso was a devoted follower of the Epicurean school of thought, and his philosophical ideas were greatly influenced by Philodemus, an outstanding representative of Epicurean philosophy (Allen, de Lacy, 1939, 53.). Cicero appreciated Philodemus' activity, and was not against Epicureanism, either (cf. Long, 1998, 289-293.), but in this particular occasion, exploiting certain fallacies and prejudices of the society of his time, he deliberately laid emphasis on the hedonistic teachings of this school of thought.

Piso himself must have been aware of the fact that respectable citizens of Rome are not supposed to reek of tavern smell as early as in the fifth hour of the day (approximately 11 o'clock in the morning). Although it is known that the Romans were fond of entertaining themselves, and liked spending their free time in public places, honourable people organised their feasts in private homes. Taverns were run to fulfil the needs of those belonging to the lower ranks of society. Two different kinds of tavern have

[11] *Ego istius pecudis ac putidae carnis consilio scilicet aut praesidio niti volebam, ab hoc eiecto cadavere quicquam mihi aut opis aut ornamenti expetebam.*

[12] *Hic autem non tam concinnus helluo nec tam musicus iacebat in suorum Graecorum foetore et caeno.*

[13] *...atque etiam, ut nobis renuntiatur, hominem multorum hospitum, A. Bivium quendam, coponem de via Latina, subornatis qui sibi a Cluentio servisque eius in taberna sua manus adlatas esse dicat.* Pro Cluentio. 163.

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to be mentioned: the *caupona*, which, apart from satisfying the basic needs of eating and drinking, also provided women for the guests, and the *popina* (frequented by Piso), which is the ancient equivalent of the Eastern-European pub of the socialist era providing limited menu, poor-quality wine, and women, who, when they offered the guests their services, had to be taken somewhere, because *popinae* did not have rooms for overnight accommodation. These places were, indeed, notorious for the bad smell of poor wine because, having in view the customers who frequented the inn, it was not worth for the innkeeper to sell quality products. Wine was often doctored, a proof to which is an ancient graffiti saying*: "What a lot of tricks you use to deceive, innkeeper. You sell water but drink unmixed wine."* (VI.14.37 CIL 4. 3498.) The bad smell of poor wine was often disguised by spices and flowers.[14]
People frequenting such places probably did not gain the respect of the audience.

"Do you recollect you infamous fellow, when about the fifth hour of the day I came to you with Caius Piso, that you came out of some hovel or other with your head wrapped up, and in slippers? and when you, with that fetid breath of yours, had filled us with the odour of that vile cookshop, that you made the excuse of your health, because you said that you were compelled to have recourse to some vinous remedies? and when we had admitted the pretence, (for what could we do?) we stood a little while amid the fumes and smell of your gluttony, till you drove us away by filthy language and still more filthy behaviour?"[15] (Pis. 13.)

Two thousand years later Piso's reaction would be described as a typical example of *psychological defence*[16]. Trying to disguise his habit of excessive consumption of alcohol, he claims that he is under medical treatment.

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[14] This is what one of Plautus' characters says about wine:
nam omnium unguentum odor prae tuo nautea est,
tu mihi stacta, tu cinnamum, tu rosa,
tu crocinum et casia es, tu telinum,
nam ubi tu profusu's, ibi ego me pervelim sepultam. Cur. 1. 2. 100-105

[15] *Meministine, caenum, cum ad te quinta fere hora cum C. Pisone venissem, nescio quo e gurgustio te prodire involuto capite soleatum, et, cum isto ore foetido taeterrimam nobis popinam inhalasses, excusatione te uti valetudinis, quod diceres vinulentis te quibusdam medicaminibus solere curari? Quam nos causam cum accepissemus—quid enim facere poteramus?—paulisper stetimus in illo ganearum tuarum nidore atque fumo; unde tu nos cum improbissime respondendo, tum turpissime ructando eiecisti.*

[16] "*Psychological defenses(mental defense mechanisms) are normal and universal features of the human mindthat operate consciously, half-consciously and unconsciously to protect the ego from awareness of difficult or painful feelings, facts and ideas. It is not the existence of these natural and necessary mental defense mechanisms but their maladaptive application that causes problems for people*." (Floyd P. Garrett, Addiction and Its Mechanisms of Defense http://www.bma-wellness.com/papers/Addiction_Defenses.html)

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Cicero also wants to assure his audience that his statements are well grounded in reality and are based on relevant evidence.

"Do you imagine that we have inquired in only a cursory manner into the disgraces incurred during your command, and into the losses suffered by the province? We have investigated them, not tracking your footsteps merely by scent but marking every wriggle of your body, and every seat where you have left your print."[17] (Pis. 83)

He uses a suggestive picture to reiterate that the investigation was not superficial: *not tracking your footsteps merely by scent*. Basing on what we know about the ancient Romans' hygienic habits (they had a bath at least once a week and washed their feet every day), only the most unpretentious person could be identified from the smell of his footstep. By making reference to foot odour, Cicero probably succeeded in triggering certain associations in his audience's mind, who had had the opportunity to *enjoy* such people's company before, raising the suspicion that the person in case is not a respectable, clean Roman citizen.

To sum up, it can be asserted that the invective is the genre Cicero finds the most suitable for letting out his anger on his enemy. He used all the rhetoric figures to spoil the image of the targeted person. As far as his speech against Piso is concerned, Cicero even goes beyond the usual tropes, describing in minute details all the points by means of which he can banish his *enemy* from the company of respectable citizens.

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[17] *…an vero tu parum putas investigatas esse a nobis labis imperi tui stragisque provinciae? quas quidem nos non vestigiis odorantes ingressus tuos sed totis volutationibus corporis et cubilibus persecuti sumus.*

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