

Carneades' Quip: Orality, Philosophy, Wit, and the Poetics of Impromptu Quotation

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In spite of a long and influential philosophical career, when Carneades of Cyrene (214-129 BC), head of the Academy in its skeptical phase, died at age eighty-five, he left behind no written works. There were, we are told, some letters extant in Diogenes Laertius' time addressed to Ariarathes, king of Cappadocia, but Carneades' philosophical opinions were conveyed orally and transmitted to posterity in written form only by his students (D.L. 4.65).¹ In this respect Carneades resembles not only Pythagoras and Socrates before him and Epictetus later, but also his Skeptic predecessors Pyrrho and Arcesilaus, whose refusal to commit their ideas to writing was a conscious protest against philosophical dogmatism.²

And yet, while not a writer, Carneades' devotion to the word was total and complete: he let his hair and fingernails grow weirdly long, Diogenes Laertius reports, because he was so engrossed in philosophical debate (*ἀσχολία τῇ περὶ τοῦς λόγους*; D.L. 4.62), and his skills as a dialectician, conversationalist, and orator were by all accounts astounding. Indeed, Carneades' mastery of forms of oral expression became the stuff of legend: his booming voice brought him humorously into conflict with the local gymnasiarch (D.L. 4.63). Professional orators, it is said, would cancel their own classes in order to attend his lectures (D.L. 4.62). He became

¹ Chief among whom was the Carthaginian Hasdrubal, Carneades' prolific successor, known by his adoptive Greek name, Clitomachus. None of Clitomachus' many works survive, though Cicero and Sextus Empiricus preserve a good deal of Carneades' thought. All extant fragments and testimonia with commentary may be found in Mette 1985:55-141; select passages with English translation and commentary in Long and Sedley 1987, vol. 1:438-88 and vol. 2:432-75.

² Cf. D.L. 4.32 (of Arcesilaus), with Long 1985:80, 94. Plato's injunction that the philosopher should consider writing nothing more than an amusement (*paidia*; cf. *Phaedrus* 274b-76d) was perhaps also a factor.

something of a celebrity in 155, when, as one of three philosopher-envoys the Athenians sent to Rome in order to appeal a large fine, Carneades gave a stunning pair of lectures before the Senate on successive days, one in defense of justice and one against. His rhetorical *tour de force* on that famous occasion not only fired the imaginations of a whole generation of young Roman intellectuals (much to the chagrin of Cato the Censor), but it somehow managed to succeed in reducing the fine as well.³

Another verbal art form at which Carneades seems to have been adept is the spontaneous quotation of poetry, and this paper explores aspects of orality, philosophy, and wit in the Hellenistic age using Carneades' quotations as a lens. Our specific topic is a short series of one-liners from Homer and Sophocles—a short cento, in fact⁴—that was exchanged between the philosopher and one of his pupils (an episode preserved in Diogenes Laertius' life of Carneades: D.L. 4.63-4). This passage, at one level so typical of the anecdotes one finds in Diogenes, has attracted practically no attention,⁵ yet it is a case study in miniature that provides an illuminating glimpse into the reception and reworking of oral and orally-derived poetry and myth in the Hellenistic age. Of particular interest are traces of the kind of associative thinking that characterizes oral poetic composition.⁶ But Carneades' cento also suggests that the aesthetics and communicative power of “traditional referentiality”—Foley's shorthand term for the way oral poetic structures (and thus the orally-derived texts that were read by ancient readers) convey meaning differently than literary ones—did not die out completely with the establishment of literacy, but were operative even in the

³ The other members of the delegation were Critolaus the Peripatetic and the Stoic Diogenes of Babylon. On the historical background, see Habicht 1997:264-69. On the cultural fallout of this diplomatic mission at Rome—a case of *Graecia capta* if ever there was one—see Astin 1978:169-81.

⁴ A cento (from a Greek word meaning “embroidery” or “pastiche”) is a poem or literary work consisting of material taken from other, pre-existing source texts. For an overview of the form, see Salanitro 1997.

⁵ Salanitro (1997:2328), following Stemplinger (1912:194), makes passing reference, but offers no analysis.

⁶ The point of departure here is Jousse's 1925 study of the mnemotechnics of an oral style, which demonstrated how and why oral habits of composition persist in literate traditions. Recent work on the cognitive psychology of memory by Baddeley (1990) and applied specifically to oral arts forms by Rubin (1995) and others (e.g., Minchin 2001) has corroborated Jousse's findings.

most learned circles of the Hellenistic period (a stereotypically “bookish” age that saw the proliferation of libraries and the editing of classical texts on an unprecedented scale) and could be invoked, as we shall see, to score humorous and rather sophisticated philosophical points.⁷

Before we proceed to an analysis of this passage, it bears saying something at the outset about the relationship of Carneades’ rhetoric (including his use of quotation) to his philosophy. It is now generally agreed among modern scholars of ancient philosophy that Carneades’ use of antilogy and argument throughout his career was no mere sophistical display of arguing both sides of an issue or of making the weaker argument the stronger, but was philosophically motivated:⁸ to persuade someone of the truth and simultaneous untruth of two opposing sides of any argument only served to underscore the problems inherent in a person’s ability to accurately interpret the “impressions,” or *phantasiai*, that present themselves to the senses and buttressed the Skeptics’ belief that, in view of those problems, human beings should suspend ultimate judgment on all matters of truth.⁹ Seen in this light, Carneades’ displays of verbal prowess are closer to Socratic interrogation (*elenchus*) than to epideictic oratory.¹⁰ His virtuosity, in other words, was aimed primarily at debunking unsupportable opinions and dispelling illusions.

And yet, like the speeches and verbal give-and-take between Socrates and his interlocutors in Plato’s dialogues, Carneades’ dialectic is no less playful because it happened to have this serious philosophical end in view. As Huizinga noted long ago (1955:151), one looks in vain for any “clear and

⁷ For “traditional referentiality” see Foley 1991:38-60.

⁸ That this is now the *opinio communis* is indicated well enough by Striker’s article (2001) on Carneades in the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. See, too, Long 1985:80, 94. Yet it must be said that Carneades’ rhetoric is still sometimes misunderstood as sophism by modern commentators, e.g., Gruen 1984:342 (“The Athenian’s speeches were showpieces, a dazzling display of rhetorical virtuosity, seductive and disarming”), who follow ancient sources that were hostile to Academic skepticism (sources and discussion in Mette 1985; see also Garbarino 1973, vol. 1, testimonia 80-82; vol. 2, 365-70).

⁹ For a succinct account of the Skeptics’ position on this issue and Carneades’ contribution, see the discussion and helpful diagram in Long and Sedley 1987, vol. 1:455-60; for this position as a reaction to Stoic teachings on the matter: *ibid.*, 249-53. For a lucid orientation to the philosophy of ancient (as distinct from modern) Skepticism, see Striker 2001.

¹⁰ A point intimated by Brennan (1923:17-18), and well put by Wilkerson (1988:136-42).

conscious demarcation between play and knowledge” in philosophy. Huizinga’s stimulating (and to my mind convincing) discussion of the origins of philosophy in contests of wit and riddle-solving should remind us that ancient philosophy, for all its syllogisms, categories, and abstractions, remained in practice very close to the world of orality: “Leaving aside the question of how far the word ‘problem’ itself (πρόβλημα)—literally ‘what is thrown before you’—points to the *challenge* as the origin of philosophic judgement,” Huizinga writes (115),

[W]e can say with certainty that the philosopher, from the earliest times to the late Sophists and Rhetors, always appeared as a typical champion. He challenged his rivals, he attacked them with vehement criticism and extolled his own opinions as the only true ones with all the boyish cocksureness of archaic man. In style and form . . . philosophy [is] polemical and agonistic.

Implicit in Huizinga’s formulation is that philosophy is also—at least in its penchant for controversy, disputation and debate—highly oral. Such antagonism, even flyting,¹¹ among Hellenistic philosophers is, of course, a familiar “psychodynamic” of orality (to use Ong’s term; 1982:43-45), and another reminder that philosophy after Plato had not completely severed itself from its oral past, contrary to what is sometimes said.¹² Carneades’ quip, to which at last we now turn, is a case in point.

A certain Mentor of Bithynia, the anecdote informs us, an aspiring docent in the Academy,¹³ was found to have made sexual advances toward Carneades’ mistress. This situation soon came to Carneades’ attention, and when Mentor ventured to the Academy one day as usual to hear Carneades lecture, Carneades interrupted his lesson and rebuked Mentor publicly with a

¹¹ A representative example of this is the name-calling by Epicurus at D.L. 10.8, to say nothing of the vitriolic *ad hominem* attacks of Diogenes the Cynic (cf. D.L. 6.24-26, directed at Plato).

¹² Take, for example, Havelock (1986:116), who says with respect to the death of the oralist Socrates that “by the time it was Plato’s turn to leave, in the middle of the fourth century, the Greek Muse had left the whole world of oral discourse and oral ‘knowing’ behind her. She had truly learnt to write, and to write in prose—and even to write in philosophical prose.”

¹³ That Mentor is not just a fictitious straw man in this episode, but a real philosopher (from Nicaea) with connections to the Academy, is confirmed by his appearance in Philodemus’ *Index Academicorum* (Mette 1985:T 3b). See Capelle 1932.

concatenation of two lines from the *Odyssey* and a third from Sophocles' *Antigone*. The source (D.L. by way of Favorinus) specifically says that Carneades did this spontaneously, or “off-the-cuff” in the midst of speaking—μεταξὺ λέγων (see Liddell 1996: s.v. μεταξὺ I.2.a)—a key detail in ascertaining the degree of “residual orality” or “recomposition-in-performance” at work in this encounter.¹⁴ Here is the relevant passage, followed by a working translation:¹⁵

οὗτός [= Carneades] ποτε Μέντορος τοῦ Βιθυνοῦ μαθητοῦ ὄντος
καὶ παρ' αὐτὸν ἐλθόντος εἰς τὴν διατριβήν, ὡς ἐπίερα αὐτοῦ
τὴν παλλακὴν ὁ Μέντωρ . . . μεταξὺ λέγων παρώδησεν εἰς
αὐτόν

πωλεῖταιί τις δεῦρο γέρων ἄλιος νημερτής, (= *Od.* 4.384)

Μέντορι εἰδόμενος ἡμὲν δέμας ἡδὲ καὶ αὐδὴν.

(= *Od.* 2.268=401)

τοῦτον σχολῆς τῆσδ' ἐκκεκηρῦχθαι λέγω

(≈ *Soph., Antig.* 203)

καὶ ὃς [i.e., Mentor] ἀναστάς ἔφη

οἱ μὲν ἐκήρυσσον, τοὶ δ' ἠγείροντο μάλ' ὄκα.

(= *Il.* 2.52=444)

One time, when Mentor of Bithynia, Carneades' pupil, came to hear him lecture, Carneades composed a parody against him in the midst of speaking, since Mentor was trying to seduce his mistress:

Here comes an old man from the sea, unerring,

Having assumed the form of Mentor in speech and appearance.

This man I declare has been banished from this school!

Whereupon Mentor stood up and said:

[The heralds] made the pronouncement, and [the army] gathered

tout de suite.

The processes of verbal selection and combination in this spontaneous linguistic performance are intimately connected to the context in which these lines appear in their respective source texts. Each verse, in other words, like a link in hypertext, opens up a window onto a much larger set of semiotic and aesthetic parameters to activate meaning.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ong's and Nagy's terms, respectively: see Ong 1982:57; Nagy 1996:15 and throughout.

¹⁵ Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this paper are my own.

¹⁶ “Selection” and “combination” are, of course, Saussurean terms; on the concept of thematic “activation” in an oral tradition, see Bakker 1993.

The first line Carneades uses is spoken by Eidothea to Menelaus during the hero's sojourn in Egypt, where the "unerring old man from the sea" is the shape-shifter Proteus, Eidothea's father. The second line, *Od.* 2.268 (repeated at 2.401), describes Athena taking on the form of Mentor, the philosopher's namesake, at Ithaca. The slight grammatical accommodation of the participle in that line (from feminine to masculine) to make it work in this new context is itself an established technique of Homeric poetics—a habit of composition that is not only pervasive in Homer proper, but found in Homeric centos as well, which I have argued elsewhere are a "regeneration" of Homeric verse that utilizes many of the same (oral) techniques that produced the original poems.¹⁷ Carneades' Mentor, it is implied by the use of the word *eidomenos* ("having assumed the form"), is only a phantom of the "real" Mentor of Homer, the loyal guest-friend of Odysseus that Athena impersonates, who was entrusted by Odysseus with watching over his house and his wife while he was away at Troy (*Od.* 2.225-27). Rather, his pupil Mentor is chameleon-like and elusive, more like the shape-shifting Proteus, who, in an interesting parallel, was himself entrusted with a similar responsibility—the task of hospitably—and chastely—detaining Helen in Egypt, while the phantom (*eidolon*) of Helen was taken by Paris to Troy.¹⁸ Whether or not there was ever a tradition that Proteus himself violated trust by trying to keep Helen as his own wife our extant sources do not say, though in Euripides' *Helen* the whole plot revolves around Proteus' son, Theoclymenus, trying to do this very thing.¹⁹ But what is truly remarkable here is how in the space of only two spontaneously quoted lines from Homer, Carneades is situating Mentor and his alleged treatment of the mistress in a whole nexus of mythological

¹⁷ Discussion and examples—Homeric and centonic—in Usher 1998:35-56. The change of gender renders Carneades' version of the line mildly unmetrical, though to count the resulting short syllable in the participle as long, coming as it does at the caesura, is not without precedent in Homer (cf. *Il.* 1.19 and elsewhere).

¹⁸ On the Proteus legend, see O'Nolan 1960; on the development of this post-Homeric aspect of the Helen myth, see Austin 1994.

¹⁹ Euripides' Proteus, who is dead and buried at the opening of the play, is portrayed as having been completely honorable in his intentions regarding Helen. But given the degree of invention in Euripides' treatment of the myth, one wonders what lost material like Aeschylus' satyr play, *Proteus*, might have contained. (As it is, too little survives to even guess; see Mette 1963:76-77.) From the scholiast on *Od.* 4.228 (= Hellenic frag. 153 Jacoby 2005) we learn that the Egyptian king Thon once tried to rape Helen.

examples of trust and its violation, especially trust pertaining to the guardianship of women (Penelope on Ithaca, Helen in Egypt).²⁰

There are other, more subtle nuances in these first two lines of quotation as well. The verb *pōleomai*, for example, means properly “to come and go habitually,” suggesting that Mentor, in coming to the Academy as usual as if nothing were going on behind Carneades’ back, is particularly brazen and shameless. The adjective *halios* predicated of Homer’s Proteus, means, of course, “of, or pertaining to, the sea.” If that is the thought here, perhaps Carneades means simply to suggest Mentor’s provenance, coming as he does from across the sea. (Bithynia is in Anatolian Phrygia, across the Aegean from Attica.) More likely, however, especially given the fondness for puns, double entendres, and semantic abuse (catachresis) in parodies and in centos,²¹ is the possibility that the common, secondary meaning of *halios*—“worthless,” “empty,” “idle”—is in play here, which is also fully Homeric, albeit used mostly of things, not persons. The meaning of the adjective *nēmertês*, “not missing the mark,” “true,” “infallible,” “unerring” (formed from the negative *nê* plus the verb *hamartanô*), is also somewhat fluid in this new context. If predicated of Mentor in a straightforward way, it is of course wickedly sarcastic, especially when paired with *halios* (with the meaning “worthless/idle”). But one is tempted to take it in this context not as appositional, but as a hendiadys of sorts with *halios*; thus *halios nēmertês* = “truly worthless.” This nuance could, in fact, have been made explicit in spoken delivery with a very slight inflection of the voice by pronouncing the word *nēmertes*—the neuter form used adverbially, as it often is (though not in this *sedes*) in Homer.²² Alternately *halios* could well have been pronounced as an adverb, with a similarly slight change—*haliôs*—without upsetting the meter. While admittedly speculative, these possibilities in performance are not completely out of the question, given the blatant parody involved here in the first place. Be that as it may, the irony in calling Mentor *nēmertes* and then proceeding with the idea that he is only a semblance of himself (*eidomenos*, etc.) is surely not accidental, coming as it does from a Skeptic like Carneades for whom appearances were problematical to begin

²⁰ What is more, this Mentor, like the Proteus of Homer (it is also implied), is not likely to give away his secret knowledge without a struggle (cf. *Od.* 4.415-20; 450-59).

²¹ See Usher 1998:46-50.

²² The adverbial form always appears as the penultimate word in the line, and usually with the verb *ennepô*; e.g., *Od.* 3.101—καί μοι νημερτές ἐνίσπες—and throughout.

with. But there is even more philosophical significance here than meets the eye, or ear.

From Sextus Empiricus we happen to know that Carneades used the story of Helen's *eidôlon* as an illustration in his arguments against the Stoics.²³ In particular, the Helen exemplum was invoked to undercut the Stoic position that a "cognitive impression" (*phantasia katalêptikê*)—or "a [mental] impression capable of grasping (its object)" as Long and Sedley more correctly translate the phrase (vol. 1:250)—can be a sufficient and reliable criterion of truth: "When Menelaus returned from Troy and saw the true Helen there in the house of Proteus," Carneades is said to have argued,

having left her phantom on board his ship (over which the war had been fought for ten years), Menelaus took in an impression that was formed and stamped by an existing object and in accordance with that object,²⁴ yet did not give his assent to it. Consequently his cognitive impression was a criterion so long as it had no impediment. But the cognitive impressions that he had on this occasion *did* have impediments because Menelaus simultaneously saw that he had left Helen under guard on his ship and it was not unconvincing to him that this Helen he had found on Pharos with Proteus was not the real one, but an illusion, as it were, or a ghost. Thus, a cognitive impression is not a criterion of truth without qualification, but only when it has no impediment.²⁵

²³ From *Adv. Math.* 7.253-60; Greek text (but no English translation of this portion) in Long and Sedley 1987:vol. 2:250.

²⁴ "Existing object" here is R. G. Bury's translation of the Greek *huparchon*; on this difficult term and the concepts it may represent in Carneades' thought, see Hankinson 1997:168, n. 17.

²⁵ καὶ ὅτε ἀπὸ Τροίας Μενέλαος ἀνακομισθεὶς ἑώρα τὴν ἀληθῆ Ἑλένην παρὰ τῷ Πρωτεῖ, [καὶ] καταλιπὼν ἐπὶ τῆς νέως τὸ ἐκείνης εἶδωλον, περὶ οὗ δεκαετῆς συνέστη πόλεμος, ἀπὸ ὑπάρχοντος μὲν καὶ κατ' αὐτὸ τὸ ὑπάρχον καὶ ἐναπομαγαγμένην καὶ ἐναπεςφραγισμένην ἐλάμβανε φαντασίαν, οὐκ εἶκε δὲ αὐτῇ, ὥσθ' ἡ μὲν καταληπτικὴ φαντασία κριτήριόν ἐστι μηδὲν ἔχουσα ἔνστημα, αὐταὶ δὲ καταληπτικαὶ μὲν ἦσαν, εἶχον δὲ ἐνστάσεις . . . ὅ τε Μενέλαος συνεώρα ὅτι ἀπολέλοιπεν ἐν τῇ νηὶ φυλαττομένην τὴν Ἑλένην, καὶ οὐκ ἀπίθανον μὲν ἐστὶν Ἑλένην μὴ εἶναι τὴν ἐπὶ τῆς Φάρου εὔρεθεισαν, φάντασμα δὲ τι καὶ δαιμόνιον. ἐνθένδε οὐχ ἀπλῶς κριτήριον γίνεται τῆς ἀληθείας ἡ καταληπτικὴ φαντασία, ἀλλ' ὅταν μηδὲν ἔνστημα ἔχη. Emphasis added in the translation.

The Helen example appears again in Sextus' summary of Carneades' thought to explain the related notion of an "undiverted impression" (*aperispastos phantasia*), one that is "convincing" (*pithanê*—a Stoic term) by virtue of the percipient having no simultaneous impression that casts it into doubt.²⁶ For Carneades, undiverted impressions were better than diverted ones, but ultimately he argued (against the Stoics) that "there is not, in any unqualified sense, any criterion of truth—not reason, not sensation, not impression . . . not any other existing thing. For all of these alike deceive us."²⁷ In Carneades' view, the best that could be said about mental and sensory impressions as a basis for judgments was that they could be more or less "persuasive," or "convincing," and his reworking and refinement of the Stoic notion of a *pithanê phantasia* became the lynch-pin (and by-word) of Carneades' whole epistemology.²⁸

Once the quotation is considered with such an epistemology in view, the words *demas* and *audê* ("body/mien" and "voice") in *Od.* 2.268 take on further significance. Compare, for example, Carneades' enumeration of physical attributes like these as being a part of a complex set of sensory stimuli that a person must negotiate in interpreting an impression. Taking Socrates as his example, Carneades says:

Someone who takes in an impression of a man necessarily also gets an impression of things to do with the man and with the extraneous circumstances—things to do with him like his color, size, shape, motion, conversation, dress, footwear . . . and everything else. So whenever none of these impressions diverts us by appearing false, but all with one accord appear true, our belief is all the greater.²⁹

²⁶ *Adv. Math.* 7.176-84; translation from Long and Sedley 1987:vol. 1:452, text in vol. 2:447-48. On Carneades' notion of an undiverted impression, cf. *ibid.*:vol. 1:458: "Undivertedness . . . indicates the contribution of coherence and mutual corroboration to the strength of the judgements people make."

²⁷ Sextus Emp., *Adv. Math.* 7.159: οὐδέν ἐστι ἀπλῶς ἀληθείας κριτήριον, οὐ λόγος, οὐ αἴσθησις, οὐ φαντασία, οὐκ ἄλλο τι τῶν ὄντων. πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα συλλήβδην διαψεύδεται ἡμᾶς (text: Long and Sedley 1987:vol. 2:452; translation: vol. 1: 460).

²⁸ Cf. Long and Sedley 1987:vol. 1:459-60.

²⁹ Sextus Emp., *Adv. Math.* 7.176.3-10: ὁ ἀνθρώπου σπῶν φαντασίαν ἐξ ἀνάγκης καὶ τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν <ὡς> χροᾶς μεγέθους σχήματος κινήσεως λαλιᾶς ἐσθῆτος ὑποδέσεως . . . τῶν ἄλλων πάντων. ὅταν οὖν μηδεμία τούτων τῶν φαντασιῶν περιέλκη ἡμᾶς τῷ φαίνεσθαι ψευδῆς, ἀλλὰ πᾶσαι συμφώνως

Also relevant here are the Stoic Chrysippus' views on *audê* as a sensory stimulus (which he differentiated from *phônê* and *dialektos*). As Clay observes in her analysis of this formula line from the *Odyssey*, Chrysippus' philosophical views were "manifestly an interpretation of Homeric usage,"³⁰ so Carneades may be poking some fun there as well since so much of Carneades' thought is a reaction to Stoic ideas. This is, after all, the man who said—with a parody of the classic statement of the Stoic school's debt to its greatest sage—"Were it not for Chrysippus, I would not exist" (D.L. 4.62).³¹

Given the philosophical positions sketched above, we now see that Carneades is using the Homer quotations to declare Mentor to be—tongue, no doubt, in cheek, but with some resentment perhaps as well—a diverted impression: as an accused philanderer, Mentor seems other than what he was previously thought to have been by the percipient (Carneades). More to the point, we also see why the *Odyssey* quotations came to Carneades' mind in composing his impromptu indictment. These lines arose spontaneously (*metaxu legôn*) because the contexts in which they occur in Homer are thematically related to a philosophical illustration that was already in Carneades' repertoire—namely Menelaus' disbelief in seeing the real Helen and the whole cluster of themes associated with that episode. As is well known from the study of "composition by theme" in Homer and other oral-traditional poetry, familiar contexts bring to mind appropriately familiar words and phrases (that is, formulas).³² Carneades' realization of these lines from the *Odyssey* involves similar mental processes. To put it another way, based on his competence as a reader and auditor of Homer, Carneades is readily able to recall (and adapt) Homeric lines to suit his purpose.³³

φαίνονται ἀληθεῖς, μᾶλλον πιστεύομεν (text: Long and Sedley 1987:vol. 2:447; translation: vol. 1: 452).

³⁰ Clay 1974:131-32, citing *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* II, 144.

³¹ εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἦν Χρύσιππος, οὐκ ἄν ἦν ἐγώ, parodying the Stoic boast εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἦν Χρύσιππος, οὐκ ἄν ἦν στοά ("Were it not for Chrysippus, the Stoa would not exist"; D.L. 7.183).

³² The classic discussion of "composition by theme" is by Lord (1951 and 1960:68-98); on the related phenomenon of the type-scene, see Arend 1933 and the overview of type-scene scholarship in Edwards 1992.

That the rebuke of Mentor was understood in antiquity to have had the philosophical dimension I am suggesting it had here is clear from a brief report about this episode in Numenius of Apamea's fragmentary history of the Academy.³⁴ Numenius was an admirer of Carneades' talents as a dialectician and orator, but was not himself sympathetic with Carneades' thought,³⁵ and so, looking back at this episode over two centuries later, he saw in it a humorous indictment of Carneades' radical skepticism:³⁶

Mentor was a close acquaintance of Carneades at first, but by no means did he become his successor. For while he was still alive, Carneades discovered Mentor having sex with his mistress and experienced no mere "persuasive impression" (*pithanês phantasias*), nor, so to speak, did he fail to take in a "cognitive impression" (*mê kateilêphôs*)³⁷ of the matter, but fully believing his own eyes, took in what he saw (*katalabôn*)³⁸ and disbarred Mentor from the school. And so Mentor left and began to rival Carneades in cleverness and rhetorical skill, refuting (*elengchôn*) the "incomprehensibility" (*akatalêpsian*) of his discourses.³⁹

³³ On the use of "competence" and "generation" (Chomskyan terms) of the reception and reproduction of oral poetry by literate persons, see Usher 1998:10. That philosophers could be fluent in such composition is noted briefly by Stemplinger (1912:278), who attributes this fluency to the rhetorical training they would have received in school. On the influence of declamation on cento composition, see Usher 1998:28-31.

³⁴ This is the only other reference to the Mentor affair. It is preserved in Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* (= frag. 27 des Places 1973:78, who provides text, notes, and French translation).

³⁵ In fact, the purpose of his account of the Academy is to show how far Academics had fallen from Plato; see Dillon 1996:365-66.

³⁶ Numenius subjects Carneades' predecessor, Lacydes, and the Skeptic doctrine of "suspension of belief" (*epochê*) to similar ridicule with a story about Lacydes' predictable reaction to slaves caught red-handed stealing from his storeroom (frag. 26 des Places 1973; cf. D.L. 4.59).

³⁷ As des Places notes, "le verbe καταλαμβάνειν," here and throughout Numenius' account, "fait penser à la καταληπτική φαντασία" (1973:77 n. 7).

³⁸ Or, with a play on the word, literally "caught Mentor in the act."

³⁹ Καρνεάδου δὲ γίνεται γνώριμος Μέντωρ μὲν πρῶτον, οὐ μὴν διάδοχος · ἀλλ' ἔτι ζῶν Καρνεάδης ἐπὶ παλλακῇ μοιχὸν εὐρών, οὐχ ὑπὸ

Just how skillful and clever Mentor was in his rebuke on this particular occasion we shall see presently. (We know nothing else about him or his subsequent career.) For the moment, however, it remains to consider the third line in Carneades' rebuff. It too exhibits the same kinds of thematic correspondence and habits of impromptu composition that we have seen at work in the *Odyssey* quotations.

The line, from Sophocles' *Antigone* (verse 203), is spoken by Creon about Polyneices, who by Creon's decree has been forbidden burial at Thebes. Carneades' reworking of Sophocles' line involves at least one substitution of a word and a change of case—from “city” to “school” and from the dative case to the genitive: “I herewith declare this man banished *from this school*” (τοῦτον σχολῆς τῆσδ' ἐκκεκηρῦχθαι λέγω). Like grammatical accommodation (seen here and above in the *Odyssey* quotation about Mentor), the substitution of individual words and phrases (here *scholês têsδ'* for Sophocles' *polei têid'*) in “template” phrases or “structural formulas”—a hallmark of oral poetics—is typical of cento composition and parody as well.⁴⁰ Carneades' change from “city” to “school” was of course necessary in this new context and intentional, but his use of λέγω, also at odds with the received text of Sophocles, is a more complicated and interesting affair. It is instructive to follow this trail for a moment, since it traverses important territory concerning the relationship of texts to oral traditions that is relevant to Carneades' performance here. A conspectus of Carneades' version of the line juxtaposed with the reading of the manuscripts and the various other readings that have been proposed by modern editors will give an indication of the nature of the problem:

1. τοῦτον σχολῆς τῆσδ' ἐκκεκηρῦχθαι λέγω = Carneades
2. τοῦτον πόλει τῆδ' ἐκκεκηρῦχθαι τάφῳ = codices

“πιθανῆς φαντασίας” οὐδ' ὡς μὴ κατειληφώς, ὡς δὲ μάλιστα πιστεύων τῆ ὄψει καὶ καταλαβὼν παρητήσατο τῆς διατριβῆς. ὁ δὲ [i.e., Mentor] ἀποστάς ἀντεσοφίστευε καὶ ἀντίτεχνος ἦν ἐλέγχων αὐτοῦ τὴν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἀκαταληψίαν (frag. 27 des Places 1973).

⁴⁰ See Usher 1998:38-44. On the formula as a mental template, see Nagler 1967; on “structural formulas,” Russo 1976. With Carneades' substitution here, compare Nero's parodic reworking (in the context of the great fire at Rome) of an unattributed line from Greek tragedy—ἐμοῦ θανόντος γαῖα μειχθήτω πυρί (“When I am dead, let the world be confounded in fire”)—the participle of which Nero was in the habit of changing in quotation to *zōntos* (“[nay] when I am *alive!*”; Suet., *Nero* 38.1).

3. τοῦτον πόλει τῆδ' ἐκκεκηρῦχθαι λέγω = Nauck, appealing to this passage in D.L.⁴¹

4. τοῦτον πόλει τῆδ' ἐκκεκήρυκται τάφω = Jebb/Lloyd-Jones-Wilson, following Musgrave⁴²

Nauck, we see, accepted Carneades' *legô*; Jebb and recently Lloyd-Jones and Wilson do not. Jebb, in fact, says baldly: "The line of Carneades . . . is no argument for λέγω in the text of Sophocles" (1900:48). And yet he says on the same page of his commentary that the MSS' unanimous reading of the infinitive *ekkekêruchthai*, which is used also in the Carneades quotation, "can only be explained by supplying λέγω or the like." And yet Jebb's solution, which is followed by Lloyd-Jones and Wilson in the *OCT*, was to change the infinitive *ekkekêruchthai* to an indicative, *ekkekêruktai*, rather than to adopt Carneades' *legô*.⁴³ Jebb speculated that "the MS error may have arisen from a reminiscence of ἐκκεκηρῦχθαι in [line] 27," where it occurs cheek-by-jowl (though Jebb does not say so in his remarks) with the word *taphôî*:

ἀστοῖσί φασιν ἐκκεκηρῦχθαι τὸ μή / τάφω καλύψαι . . . (*Ant.* 27-28)

The word *taphôî* was obviously no good to Carneades, so if that were the original reading at line 203, he would have had to change it. On the other hand, to inform Jebb's own argument with an awareness of the dynamics of oral poetics, one might just as well posit that the contamination in Sophocles—if that is indeed what it is—comes from a different, not strictly textual, source.

Note, for example, how both the indicative and infinitive forms of *ekkêrussô* here are virtually homophonous in pronunciation (*ekkekêruchthai* vs. *ekkekêruktai*). Only the order of the consonants ("rough" chi + theta versus "smooth" kappa + tau) and the accent are different (circumflex on the penult vs. acute on the antepenult), and these features would barely be noticed, and could in fact be masked, de-emphasized or even confused, in

⁴¹ Nauck 1867 *ad loc.*

⁴² Lloyd-Jones and Wilson 1990 *ad loc.*

⁴³ On the principle, no doubt, of *lectio difficilior*, according to which the "more difficult" reading is most likely the correct, original reading intended by the author (that is, less apt to have been changed by a copyist).

spoken delivery.⁴⁴ Consider, too, that the larger context of Creon's speech in the *Antigone* deals with friendship, loyalty, and cohesion in the community. I would argue that these themes, also evoked by the quotations from the *Odyssey*, rather than the desire to impersonate a tyrannical Creon, are what called line 203 to Carneades' mind. Mentor, after all, like Polyneices, is being accused of violating personal trust, and, by extension, in Carneades' view, the trust of his community—the Academy—as well. As it happens, in one of two telling expressions of this theme earlier in Creon's speech Sophocles uses the verb *legô* in the same metrical position as in Carneades' quotation, whereas with the infinitive in line 27, thought by Jebb to be the source of the "MS error" at line 203, he does not.⁴⁵ Given two sources of contamination, I find it more likely that it would come from the closer of the two—and, what is more, it is not so much an "error" as a fact of cognition to repeat similar words and phrases in similar contexts. As Miller notes in his sensible discussion of repetition in oral and orally-derived traditions (1982:45): "Use of a motif, formula, or unusual word restores it to active memory and any subsequent elaboration is apt to contain one or more recurrences of it." None of this of course proves that Sophocles wrote *legô* in his script of the *Antigone*, but it does suggest that Carneades found himself contextually enmeshed in his source text and that his spontaneous realization of *Antigone* 203 was affected by such factors. Carneades' adaptation of Sophocles' line, in other words, bears all the marks of a recomposition-in-performance, one that responds thematically and compositionally to the narrative situation he found himself in with Mentor.

Mentor's reported response—οἱ μὲν ἐκῆρυσσον, τοὶ δ' ἠγείροντο μάλ' ὦκα (*Il.* 2.52=444)—is equally spontaneous and brilliant. Mentor picks up on the key-word *kêrussô* in the quotation from Sophocles and runs with it. Here, too, the poetics of quotation resemble Homeric poetics proper, where key-words often function as "triggers" in composition.⁴⁶ Of the two

⁴⁴ Homophonic substitution is a characteristic feature of the cento. See Usher 1998:49-51.

⁴⁵ Compare *Ant.* 182-83 (ὅστις ἀντὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ πάτρας / φίλον νομίζει, τοῦτον οὐδαμοῦ λέγω) and 186-7 (οὗτ' ἂν φίλον ποτ' ἄνδρα δυσμενῆ χθονος / θείμην ἐμαυτῶ).

⁴⁶ See Clark 1997:53-62; for semantic and lexical triggers in the cento form, see Usher 1998:106-11. See also Jousse 1925:203-25. On the psychology of this phenomenon, see Rubin 1995:161-67, 304-5 (using the term "cues").

related contexts in which Mentor's quotation occurs, surely the first is felt most strongly here, *Il.* 2.52, where Agamemnon, having just woken up from a dream that instructed him to rally the troops for battle, proceeds instead to test them, offering them immediate passage home, to see where their true loyalties lie. The thematic connection between Carneades' assertions and Mentor's response becomes readily apparent: the tyrant Creon tests public and personal loyalty in the *Antigone* and it backfires on him, leading to the deaths of both Antigone and his son, Haemon. The tyrannical Agamemnon does the same in the *Iliad*, and it too ends in (momentary) disaster when the troops decide to take him up on his offer to go home. Mentor, in effect, has turned Carneades' *Antigone* quotation against him by indirectly equating the Scholarch—by quotation—with the *Iliad*'s Agamemnon in a context where Agamemnon closely resembles Creon. The semantic link in this thematic chain is the key-word *kêrussô*. Given the context of this line in the *Iliad*, Mentor may also be making a philosophical parry of his own, suggesting that Carneades, like Agamemnon, “is dreaming,” or laboring under a false impression, if he truly thinks him guilty as charged. The dream in the *Iliad* was, after all, a deceptive one, taking on the form and likeness of Nestor (with phraseology reminiscent of Carneades' *Od.* 2.268⁴⁷). Carneades has misread the situation, it is implied, and, like Agamemnon (and Creon), he may come to regret it. Perhaps there is something to be said, too, for the word used to describe Mentor's attempt on the nameless mistress, *epeira*, a common euphemism for sexual seduction,⁴⁸ which also happens to be the theme word of Agamemnon's “testing” of the troops, the episode being known since Hellenistic times as the *diapeira* after its occurrence as a theme word in that portion of Book 2 (cf. *peirêsomai* in 2.73).

Whether Mentor was guilty in the end or not, we shall never know, but the confrontation between him and Carneades provides us with a fascinating glimpse into how the spontaneous quotation of poetry could be an effective medium of invective, philosophy, and wit. The orality of the exchange is evident not only in the agonistic context of a live, public performance, but also in the way these poetic lines are used, adapted, and concatenated. The proposition that one will find oral residue in more literate phases of culture is not in itself controversial or surprising.⁴⁹ The majority of

⁴⁷ *μάλιστα δὲ Νέστορι δίω / εἰδός τε μέγεθός τε φύην τ' ἄγχιστα ἐώκειν* (*Il.* 2.57-58).

⁴⁸ See Henderson 1975:158.

⁴⁹ Cf. Ong 1982:157: a “manuscript culture . . . [is] always marginally oral.”

ancient Greek and Roman readers were, after all, reared on the recitation of oral and orally-derived poetry. But the persistence of oral modes of expression and thought among philosophers is revealing. We are reminded again of Huizinga's account of ancient philosophy as a form of play—a leftover from a more fully oral past. As it happens, Numenius inadvertently corroborates this observation for us in his history of the Academy, for he casts the vicissitudes of the School with an extended metaphor as an intra- and extramural battle of epic proportions. He even composes a cento of his own using formulaic descriptions of battle from Homer to drive the point home.⁵⁰ That the conflicts and controversies in Hellenistic philosophy were also sometimes self-consciously a contest between orality and literacy may be seen in Numenius' remarkable contrast of Carneades with his chief rival, Antipater of Tarsus, head of the Stoic school. Ironically—or perhaps intentionally—this characterization immediately precedes his account of Carneades' fully oral and spontaneous contest with Mentor: “Every opinion of Carneades was victorious and never any other,” Numenius writes,

since those with whom he was at war were less powerful as speakers. Antipater, for instance, who was his contemporary, was intending to write something in rivalry; in fact, however, of the arguments which Carneades kept pouring forth day after day, he never made it public, neither in the Schools, nor in the public walks, nor even spoke or uttered a sound, or, it is said, did anyone ever hear from him a single syllable: but he kept threatening written replies, and hiding in a corner wrote books which he bequeathed to posterity, that are powerless now, and were more powerless then against a man like Carneades, who showed himself eminently great, and was so considered by the men of that time.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Frag. 25 des Places 1973, consisting of *Iliad* 4.447-49, 13.131, 4.472, and 4.450-51.

⁵¹ Trans. by Gifford 1903:795. Πᾶσα γοῦν διάνοια ἐνίκα καὶ οὐδεμία ἤστιον ἄλλων, ἐπεὶ καὶ οἷς προσεπολέμει ἦσαν εἰπεῖν ἀδυνατώτεροι. Ἀντίπατρος γοῦν ὁ κατ' αὐτὸν γενόμενος ἔμελλε μὲν καὶ ἀγωνιᾶν τι γράφειν, πρὸς δ' οὖν τοὺς ἀπὸ Καρνειάδου καθ' ἡμέραν ἀποφερομένους λόγους οὔποτ' ἐδημοσίευσεν, οὐκ ἐν ταῖς διατριβαῖς, οὐκ ἐν τοῖς περιπάτοις οὐδὲν εἶπεν οὐδ' ἐφθέγγετο οὐδ' ἤκουσέ τις αὐτοῦ, φασίν, οὐδὲ γρῦ. ἀντιγραφὰς δ' ἐπανετείνετο καὶ γωνίαν λαβὼν βιβλία κατέλιπε γράψας τοῖς ὕστερον, οὔτε νῦν δυνάμενα καὶ τότε ἦν ἀδυνατώτερα πρὸς οὕτως ἄνδρα ὑπέρμεγαν φανέντα καὶ καταδόξαντα εἶναι τοῖς τότε ἀνθρώποις τὸν Καρνεάδην.

One would be hard pressed to find a starker contrast between the relative merits of orality and literacy and their attendant tensions among philosophers in the Hellenistic age. As Carneades' verbal exchange with Mentor throws into high relief, this contrast is—as Carneades himself might have agreed—the ultimate antilogy.⁵²

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