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NANCY WORMAN. *Abusive Mouths in Classical Athens*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008. xi + 385 pp. Cloth, \$99.

It's not as simple as "you are what you eat," but Worman argues that we can all recognize who you are by what you do with your mouth. In this richly argued and important book Worman uncovers connections between various types of oral activities (yelling, gulping, sucking, etc.) and an array of public figures (sophists, demagogues, et al.) throughout several centuries of Greek literature, from Homer to Theophrastus. Her ultimate focus is on how certain genres use low-register poetics to deploy mouth-centered invective as part of an ongoing civic debate about where particular individuals or character types fit into the workings of democratic Athens. She constructs her argument around careful literary analysis bolstered by a clear and satisfying methodological framework and a model of continuity (innovative and controversial in its own right) for an "iambic discourse" that runs through all of the texts she studies. Before discussing the details of her thesis directly, therefore, it will help to elaborate upon these two foundations of her larger arguments.

Since the publication of Ralph Rosen's study of the iambic dimensions of Old Comedy (*Old Comedy and the Iambographic Tradition* [Atlanta, Ga., 1988]), the exploration of iambic elements outside of *iambos* narrowly understood has become quite common, but what Worman suggests, most explicitly in the introduction and chapter 1, goes further than most. She posits an ongoing "iambic discourse" rooted in a consistent low-register lexicon of abuse and a focus on the degraded body as a primary battleground for invective that orators and philosophers inherited from the poets of Old Comedy and, indirectly, from the archaic iambographers themselves. For those archaic poets, "the appetitive and debased body constitutes a central common element, a body whose needs are focused around the open mouth" (44). For Worman, then, we can spot this "iambic discourse" in the gaping masks of comic characters parodying public figures in Aristophanes; in the aggressive banter and gormandizing in Euripides' *Cyclops*; in the sarcastic quips of the Platonic Socrates chatting with slick-tongued sophists; in the scathing backbiting between Aeschines and Demosthenes centering on the former's career as an actor and the latter's feeble voice; and in the often subtle nuances between various of Theophrastus' unsavory characters. The last sections of chapter 1 even demonstrate that matters of oral excess pervade the higher register genres of epic, epinician and tragedy. Although their tone and ethos remain more elevated than that of *iambos*, "these genres all contribute significant details to what the mouth, as a metonym for the appetitive body, can mean in contexts marked by verbal strife and, frequently, physical violence" (60).

This model of a long-standing, genre-crossing "iambic discourse" presents a major challenge to the status quo for the later reception of iambic poetry (although Worman's model is primarily geared toward her more political argument). Overall, I find her approach refreshing and persuasive, although I found myself bothered by two issues from either edge of her temporal range. When

discussing the earliest evidence of this iambic discourse, she assumes roles of primacy for epic and dependency for *iambos* that seem unnecessary and, perhaps, limiting (e.g., 35, 40). As Barker and Christensen have recently argued in their discussion of the newly deciphered Telephus fragment of Archilochus, it is just as likely that the two genres exerted a reciprocal influence on one another (“Flight Club: The New Archilochus Fragment and its Resonance with Homeric Epic,” *MD* 57 [2006]: 9–41). From the other end of the spectrum, Worman occasionally points to a variety of later literary environments where this mouth-centered iambic discourse reappears (e.g., Roman oratory), but she never addresses the boom market for nouveau iambic poetry in the Hellenistic era. While the rise of the Hellenistic kingdoms put an end to the contentious political environment at the center of her study, Worman’s model of an iambic discourse would be even more compelling if it could be expanded to account for the increased interest in iambic poetics in this very different political landscape. Might, for example, Callimachus, Herodas or others have been responding to the hijacking of this iambic discourse by classical philosophers and orators? Could the “crucial conjunction between the body as a social entity and ancient political discourse” (2) have continued in a Hellenistic kingdom? Or does Worman’s model come to a dead-end with the loss of democratic freedom in Athens, leaving the quirky Hellenistic revivals of iambic poetry to be iambic in form only and not in discursive spirit?

As for Worman’s theoretical orientation, she relies heavily on the “three-B’s”: Bourdieu, Bakhtin, and Barthes. From Bourdieu, she takes the idea of language as a full-body social performance and the recognition that the mouth works as the focal point for both verbal and many appetitive practices. Thus, the high art of declamation sits cheek-by-jowl with base indiscretions, such as burping, slurping, spitting, hollering, and chugging. From these low-register cousins of highfalutin’ rhetoric, it is an easy step into the Bakhtinian world of grotesque market humor that verbally debases and dissects that body and overturns the pretensions of elite society. Just as each expert speaker’s mouth offers indications of his hidden appetites, so each lofty genre of literature has an iambic shadow that eats away at claims to high-minded purity. Barthes is the final ingredient, and from him Worman adapts the idea of “metonymic falsehoods” that allow us to dismantle and re-wire the dissected body in various ways. One version of this shows that what a public speaker does with his mouth can, by a metonymic shift, give us clues about what he does with his anus. Is he sex-obsessed? Penetrable? Or again, his speaking style may suggest habits of consumption such as gluttony, a taste for delicacies, drunkenness, or teetotalism.

When we turn to the application of this analytical matrix to the idea of an ongoing iambic discourse, we can see Worman’s ultimate payoff: a dialogue encoded in literature about the role of public speakers in charting the course for democratic Athens. Surprisingly, this goal is often achieved in a roundabout way. For it is not simply that verbal habits indicate the true metal of a leader but rather that verbal habits hint at something more intimate, hidden, and sordid, and once we intuit this implied turpitude we can then surmise a public figure’s weaknesses.

The two character types that recur most frequently in Worman's discussion are the loud-mouthed demagogic glutton, like Paphlagon-Cleon in *Knights*, and the effete, sophistic quack, like Socrates' students in *Clouds*. In the discourse about public figures, both "risk debilitating association with female appetites, the one for his monstrous greed, the other for his louche inclinations" (62). Thus, the demagogic type, although something of a manly-man in certain ways, reveals himself to be voracious and insatiable, while the sophistic type comes across as too precious, practiced, and prissy.

In each genre that Worman surveys in chapters 2 to 6, this dynamic plays out in a different guise. Chapter 2 shows how Aristophanes' humor (and occasionally that of other comic playwrights) presents various twists on the sophistic and demagogic types giving in to their baser passions. For example, although both the Paphlagon and Sausage-Seller in *Knights* exhibit traits connected with the bold, loud, and insatiable demagogic type, the Sausage-Seller's babbling and water-drinking and his trick of hiding meat in his ass reveal traits of the glib and prancing sophistic type (107–10). Such narrowly focused insights influence how we read the play in its entirety: the Sausage-Seller, who can easily be viewed as being cut from the same cloth as the Paphlagon, actually represents a departure from that style and, therefore, a new type of civic leader. From here the audience can follow the trail back toward the public figures behind the parodies. Even as comedy displays uproarious and exaggerated oral excesses, such scenes "aim at instruction and regulation" within a social framework of elite control (71).

When we move to Euripides' satyr play *Cyclops* in chapter 3, we find a reconfiguration of the same mouth-centered iambic discourse about public figures. The more tragic diction of satyr drama necessitates "a more complicated and tenuous connection to *iambos*" (123) than in other chapters, although "the satyr play also enacts a pointed debasement of tragic themes" (124). The mythical parody pits the hungry, clever, and desperate Odysseus against the more physically powerful Cyclops who envisions his human interlocutors as so many meals ready to be chewed up. Both characters draw upon issues raised in earlier chapters: Euripides' Odysseus works within the tradition of the Homeric Odysseus as proto-iambic beggar, which Worman discusses in chapter 1; and Polyphemus is associated with the figure of the *mageiros* ("cook" or "butcher"), who is connected in chapter 2 with sophistic characters in comedy. On Worman's reading, these two crafty speakers spar with one another over issues of hospitality and consumption while attempting to twist the other's words against him. Odysseus first appears as a hungry beggar-thief-trader, much in the vein of the demagogue, and Polyphemus is quick with sophistic rejoinders. But in the end, Polyphemus emerges as a proto-Rabelaisian grotesque chef, while Odysseus takes on more of the flavor of the crafty sophist.

In chapter 4 we switch from poetry to prose as Worman asserts that Plato's Socratic dialogues form the iambic link between Old Comedy and the invective sniping of fourth-century orators. Plato creates an opposition between the sophists' elegant rhetoric, which approximates the elevated status and register

of rhapsodic poetry (155), and Socrates' selective adaptation of Bakhtinian marketplace traits and speaking styles (157). Plato's Socrates, who takes over many of the details of Aristophanes' portrayal from *Clouds*, serves as a laughable and annoying corrective to the elite pretensions of professional speakers, and the fact that Plato typically surrounded his leading man with a crowd of aristocratic youths suggests that this contentious, hierarchy-busting figure offered a civics lesson to the generation who would soon assume political control of the city. Chapter 5 focuses on two of the orators who wielded such authority in the last years of Athens' independence: Demosthenes and Aeschines. The abuse slung back and forth between these two can be traced back to the comic stage, and each describes the other in terms reminiscent of the comic type that approximates his actual speaking style. Thus, the thin-voiced and timid Demosthenes is recast by Aeschines as effete and sophistic, and the bombastic Aeschines is attached to the loud-mouthing, gluttonous market-bounder. Here we have the most immediate examples of Worman's overarching interest in how invective speech intersects with democratic decision-making. The barbed attacks and counterattacks of these two professional speakers "reflect concerns that were central to Athens during a period of increasing menace from a monarch famous for choking off freedom of speech" (273).

The final chapter deals with Aristotle and Theophrastus, two thinkers from the same camp whose surviving literary output could hardly be more different. Worman approaches Aristotle's comments on invective within the larger framework of his dismissive attitude toward performative aspects of oratory, especially those associated with that most mimetic of body parts, the mouth. "Aristotle's emphasis on the voice as the primary conveyor of dramatic effect in oratory and on its debasing effects thus critiques both the baroque stylings of a Gorgias and the slick deceptions of a Euripides" (293). The book concludes (except for a brief epilogue) with the delightful and understudied Theophrastus. Worman's comments are of great value both on the level of detail (e.g., her discussion of Theophrastus' *Eiron*) and in her general conclusion that his "sketches . . . effectively lower the gaze from the speaker's platform to take in the 'rabble' that crowd it, reflecting in demeaning detail the variety of foibles that mark the typical denizens of downtown Athens" (317).

Abusive Mouths is a challenging and rewarding study that can be digested piecemeal, for anyone interested in a particular author or genre, but which deserves to be gluttonously devoured in its entirety in order to fully appreciate the temporal scope of Worman's thesis within a variety of carefully historicized contexts.

TOM HAWKINS

OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY
e-mail: hawkins.312@osu.edu