

This paper considers the crossings, reapplications, and innovations by which established genres (philosophical argument, political didactics, epistle, comic and forensic abuse) gave rise to a varied discourse of “philosophical politics” among the students of Plato and Isocrates during the reign of Philip II of Macedon. I focus on two points:

1. The adaptation of the genre(s) of address to a ruler. Specifically, how do we get from Isocrates’ *Philip* to the *Letter to Philip* by Plato’s successor Speusippus? Isocrates’ later addresses to Philip, in their authoritative didactic posture, are still rooted in the confidence of the Athenian *scholē*, but Speusippus’ letter seeks the monarch’s favor by pillorying Isocrates for this very confidence. The rise of Macedon has altered the situation, as the writers from these scholastic circles feel forced to reckon with the royal court’s power and even to refer their contests to the courtly arena. Several genres come to inform these writers’ interactions with political power. Despite the pathetic spectacle of political compromise, intellectuals are still dealing in specifically literary and philosophical capital, while contentiously redefining “older” genres of the “address to the ruler” (epidictic, didactic) in terms of newer norms (a new kind of historiography of current and debated events; newly encomiastic expectations for addressing Philip; etc.), with some constants (e.g., the epistle).

2. The question of which literary traditions have been appropriated in the *abusive* aspect of these authors’ literary interaction. My answer here builds on an important article by G.E.L. Owen (“Philosophical Invective,” *OSAPh* 1, 1983) but revises his way of dealing with the confusing oscillation between the two poles of the serious and the playful; I suggest that (just as in Plato’s dialogues) comic elements often indicate the author’s most serious differentiation of himself from his competitors, and that these authors use a subtle combination of all the available discourses of praise and blame (from forensic prosecution to panegyric). The accelerating intensity of philosophers’ invective can again be explained by the increasing political pressure under which they carried out their literary careers, but there is also a purely literary evolution underway in this case.

The resultant story revises common notions in two ways. First, this group of writers—those who can plausibly be connected with Plato and Isocrates’ schools—have not usually been classified and studied together, precisely because of the apparent incongruity of the literary genres they practiced (philosophy, oratory, historiography, etc.). However, when they are taken together, their many (and usually competitive) connections raise the question whether as a common *audience* they did not, in their mutually interesting literary activities, fashion some new genres of literary contest that are missed by scholars’ traditional classificatory divisions (schools of philosophy, pro- and anti-Macedonian political factions, “rhetorical history,” traditions of epidictic oratory, etc.). Second, light is shed on how the adaptations of genre occurred not only for creative and intellectual authorial motivations, but also in response to changing political and social pressures—specifically, those associated with the rise of Philip of Macedon.