

A Linguistic Commentary on
Lysias, On the Murder of Eratosthenes, §§6, 7

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I. Textual and Contextual Overview

Lysias (459/8–c.380 BCE) was a prodigious *logographos* whose eloquence and stylistic clarity secured his inclusion in the classical canon of the ten Attic orators. His speech *On the Murder of Eratosthenes* (Lysias 1) is the first item in the *Corpus Lysiacum*, preserved in the twelfth-century manuscript *Palatinus* 88. The forensic defence speech was composed after the restoration of democracy in 403 BCE for a private prosecution for homicide (δίκη φόνου), which was admitted but defended as lawful thus probably tried before the *ephetae* at the Delphinion.¹ The transmission of the speech within the manuscript tradition attests to its authenticity as a genuine work of Lysias composed on behalf of Euphiletos,² though it cannot be dated with greater precision than the general span of the orator's career.³

The case presents Euphiletos' claim of justifiable homicide after catching Eratosthenes *in flagrante delicto* with his wife while the prosecution (the victim's relatives) alleges premeditated entrapment. The conflict between lawful defence and calculated revenge underlies Lysias' rhetorical and linguistic strategy.

Uniquely among surviving Attic orations, the speech provides rare insight into domestic life and the Athenian law on adultery and, as a result, has attracted considerable scholarly attention.⁴ Beneath the plain Attic diction and unadorned narrative,⁵ lies Lysias' subtle rhetorical skill. Through *ethos* and *pathos* for shaping perception and evoking emotion,⁶ Euphiletos constructs the persona of a reasonable, law-abiding citizen compelled by necessity to act as he did.⁷

The present commentary analyses the opening of the narrative (διήγησις). The linguistic and literary study along with a brief historical analysis of the passages 1.6 and 1.7 highlight how Lysias crafts a persuasive self-presentation within the social, legal and cultural context of classical Athens. What follows first, is the Greek text accompanied by its English translation.

¹ MacDowell, 1976, pp.14-31

² Tandy, 2005, pp.187-93

³ Gagarin, 2011, p.77

⁴ Wolpert, 2001, p.415

⁵ Dover, 1968, pp.115-40

⁶ Aristot. *Rh.* 1356a1-4

⁷ Cohen, 1989, p.6

II. Lysias 1.6, 1.7 Greek Text and Translation in English

§6 ἐγὼ γάρ, ὦ Ἀθηναῖοι, ἐπειδὴ ἔδοξέ μοι γῆμαι καὶ γυναῖκα ἡγαγόμην εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν, τὸν μὲν ἄλλον χρόνον οὕτω διεκείμην ὥστε μήτε λυπεῖν μήτε λῖαν ἐπ' ἐκείνη εἶναι ὅ τι ἂν ἐθέλη ποιεῖν, ἐφύλαττόν τε ὡς οἷόν τε ἦν, καὶ προσεῖχον τὸν νοῦν ὥσπερ εἰκὸς ἦν. ἐπειδὴ δέ μοι παιδίον γίγνεται, ἐπίστευον ἤδη καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐμαυτοῦ ἐκείνη παρέδωκα, ἡγούμενος ταύτην οἰκειότητα μεγίστην εἶναι·

Now, Athenians, once I decided to get married and brought my wife into my home, for some time, I was disposed neither to harass her nor to allow her too much freedom to do whatever she might wish. But I kept a watch on her as much as it was possible, and paid as much attention as was reasonable. When my child was born, from that moment, I began to have full confidence in her and I placed all my affairs in her hands, reckoning that this was the strongest bond of intimacy.

§7 ἐν μὲν οὖν τῷ πρώτῳ χρόνῳ, ὦ Ἀθηναῖοι, πασῶν ἦν βελτίστη· καὶ γὰρ οἰκονόμος δεινὴ καὶ φειδωλὸς [ἀγαθὴ] καὶ ἀκριβῶς πάντα διοικοῦσα· ἐπειδὴ δέ μοι ἡ μήτηρ ἐτελεύτησε, πάντων τῶν κακῶν ἀποθανοῦσα αἰτία μοι γεγένηται·

In those early days, Athenians, she was the best of all wives. For indeed, she was a skilful housekeeper and thrifty, controlling everything with precision. But when my mother died, her death was the cause of all my troubles.

III. Linguistic Commentary on *Lysias* 1.6, 1.7

In passages 1.6 and 1.7, Lysias develops the narrative (διήγησις), the power of which resides mainly in his portrayal (ἡθοποιΐα) of Euphiletos, a man of such ingenuous simplicity that the treachery ascribed to him by the victim's kin seems wholly implausible. Earlier in the proem (προοίμιον), Euphiletos has appealed to the shared indignation of men deceived by their wives, aligning the jury with his moral outrage and invoking the severest penalty permitted by Athenian law. The passages serve as a preliminary narrative (προδιήγησις)⁸ preparing the audience for the main account.

The opening phrase, ἐγὼ γάρ, ὦ Ἀθηναῖοι, places the speaker in the courtroom with the vocative ὦ Ἀθηναῖοι directly engaging the jury. The particle γάρ links Euphiletos' personal narrative to his defence. It has an epexegetic force, marking transition or elaboration ("now")⁹ rather than serving the confirmatory function it often assumes after declaration or exhortation structures as in 1.37, 1.41-42 or in other Lysias' speeches (7.9, 14.5, 19.22). The syntax of the temporal clause ἐπειδὴ ἔδοξε...οἰκίαν conveys measured deliberation: the two aorist indicatives, the active ἔδοξε of δοκέω followed by its object γῆμαι, (active aorist infinitive of γαμέω) and the middle ἡγαγόμην of ἄγω followed by its accusative object, γυναῖκα, (a term commonly used of bringing a new wife home),¹⁰ reflect the calm rationality of Euphiletos' decision to marry, while the coordination with the conjunction καὶ produces a sense of moral simplicity. The active γῆμαι marks the man's agency in marriage. As often in Greek, verbs of (hetero)sexual or marital activity are active for males and middle or passive for females (i.e. γαμέω/γαμοῦμαι, μοιχέω/μοιχεύομαι),¹¹ reflecting social hierarchy in linguistic form.

A change to continuous, sustained behaviour emphasising Euphiletos' consistent management of his household is marked by the narrative shift to the progressive aspect of διεκείμην, imperfect indicative of διάκειμαι, accompanied by the accusative τὸν μὲν ἄλλον χρόνον, marking duration of time, which appears to recur in Lysias' corpus (3.20, 7.4).¹² The result

⁸ Edwards, 1999, p.67

⁹ Denniston, 1954, p.58

¹⁰ LSJ

¹¹ Todd, 2008, p.53

¹² Carey, 1989, p.67

clause ὥστε μήτε...ποιεῖν₁ signposted by οὕτω and governed by the present infinitives λυπεῖν (of λυπέω) and εἶναι to state his intention,¹³ judiciously portrays Euphiletos as neither dominating nor indulging his wife excessively.¹⁴ The verb λυπεῖν may euphemistically suggest that the defendant refrained from making undue sexual demands on his wife,¹⁵ which highlights how Lysias' language reinforces the speaker's moral self-control within the *oikos*.

The structure μήτε...μήτε is linguistically and morally balanced: Lysias moves from the infinitive λυπεῖν with the implied personal subject (ἐμέ) to an impersonal expression (μήτε...ποιεῖν) broadening the statement from individual action to general principle. While the sentence follows secondary sequence, the indefinite clause ὅτι ἂν ἐθέλῃ employs the present subjunctive of the verb ἐθέλω with the particle ἂν, and is governed by the present infinitive ποιεῖν introducing vivid immediacy and thereby enhancing the sense of spontaneous, sincere narration. The prepositional phrase ἐπ' ἐκείνῃ (dative singular feminine of ἐκεῖνος) expresses dependence, consistent with the portrayal of the wife's controlled freedom. The whole sentence suggests that the wife's liberty is granted within controlled bounds, reinforcing the speaker's image as a husband who allows autonomy without relinquishing authority, and highlighting Lysias' careful construction of a balanced domestic ethos. Unsurprisingly, Euphiletos neither names his wife here, as she is still socially respectable (πάντα τὰ ἑμᾶντοῦ ἐκείνῃ παρέδωκα), nor, even later in the narrative (§§10-14), identifies her through her male relative (*kyrios*)¹⁶ as is often the case in the orators.¹⁷ His silence casts her as a fellow-victim rather than an accomplice.

The last main verbs in the sentence, ἐφύλαττον (ἐκείνῃ supplied as indirect object) and προσεῖχον τὸν νοῦν ('paid attention', common translation with the accusative of νοῦς), elaborate the stance of moral responsibility: the shared imperfect aspect underscores ongoing moderation, aligning the speaker with the social ideal of self-control (σωφροσύνη).¹⁸ Lysias employs the simple τε here as a connective, a seemingly 'old-fashioned' feature of his style and uncommon in the

¹³ Smyth, 1956, pp.505-7

¹⁴ Edwards, 1999, p.67

¹⁵ Pomeroy, 1995, p.85

¹⁶ Cantarella, 2005, pp.245-6

¹⁷ Isae. 2.18; Dem. 27.56; 40.12

¹⁸ Dover, 1974, pp.63-8

orators.¹⁹ The phrasing tempers Euphiletos' naivety and shows that his trust became complete only once he deemed it justified. ὥς οἷόν τε ἦν (from οἷος τε εἰμί, followed by infinitive, a standard idiom meaning 'I am able to') and ὥσπερ εἰκὸς ἦν (εἰκὸς, the neuter perfect participle of ἔοικα), both impersonal in imperfect tense, function as adverbial expressions of degree or manner to frame Euphiletos' actions as both practically possible and socially appropriate respectively.

A marked shift is introduced by the temporal clause ἐπειδὴ...γίνεται, signalling a new stage in the marital relationship. The historic present γίνεται is used for vividness to emphasise the birth, and by employing the singular dative personal pronoun μοι, Lysias intentionally underscores the legitimacy of the male offspring (since his wife's illicit affair began only later)²⁰ and their role in perpetuating Euphiletos' *oikos*. In the main clause, the imperfect indicative active ἐπίστευον (of πιστεύω) denotes the speaker's continuing trust with the adverb ἤδη indicating that he had not been credulous before. The main clause πάντα...παρέδωκα marks a definite act of commitment, contrasting gradual confidence with its practical culmination. The aorist indicative active παρέδωκα (of παραδίδωμι) together with its object πάντα τὰ ἐμαντοῦ as a hyperbolic expression underscores the considerable domestic authority that Athenian wives could exercise in managing the household.²¹ Although the extent of this authority varied between households according to wealth and social status, wives were generally responsible for the running and the supervision of domestic affairs.

Finally the nominative singular masculine middle present participle ἡγούμενος (of ἡγέομαι) frames Euphiletos' reasoned decision. His complete trust is reinforced by the superlative adjective μεγίστην, which is predicative to οἰκειότητα (accusative singular, as the subject of the infinitive εἶναι). The noun itself operates within the semantic field of οἶκος, the cognates of which occur frequently throughout the speech emphasising its domestic focus and the moral order of the household.

The strategic allocation of attention to specific details of the marriage²² guiding the jury's perception of Euphiletos' character continues in 1.7 with the sentence ἐν μὲν...βελτίστη. In one

¹⁹ Denniston, 1954, pp.497-8

²⁰ Edwards, 1999, p.68

²¹ cf. Xen. *Oec.* 7.17, 32-36, 38; Dem. 59.122; Ar. *Lys.* 494-5; *Eccl.* 211-12

²² Fredal, 2020, p.152-3

more attempt to strengthen the speaker's rapport with his audience and draw attention to his plea within the civic framework of the trial, the speaker addresses the jury directly, ὦ Ἀθηναῖοι, while the prepositional time phrase in dative ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ χρόνῳ underlines the early days of their ideal marriage yet it leads the jurors to anticipate a discussion of his wife's change of conduct. The nominative singular feminine superlative βελτίστη (of the adjective ἀγαθός), which is predicate to ἐκείνη (implied) with the genitive plural feminine of comparison, πασῶν (of πᾶς, πᾶσα, πᾶν), illustrate the portrayal of the ideal wife in the city.²³ The point nevertheless resurfaces sharply in 1.10 through σωφρονεστάτην (the chastest), highlighting the speaker's cynicism toward wives who appear virtuous.

Καὶ γὰρ, ('for indeed') expands on βελτίστη through the tricolon οἰκονόμος δεινὴ καὶ φειδωλὸς [ἀγαθὴ] καὶ ἀκριβῶς πάντα διοικοῦσα, which intensifies the Athenian wife's role in household administration as above (πάντα τὰ ἐμαντοῦ ἐκείνη παρέδωκα), and foreshadows the irony of her later downfall. This simple sentence structure frequently employed by Lysias in his argumentation (λέξις εἰρομένη)²⁴ creates cohesion, which is further accentuated by the non-forced recurrence of the dental consonant 'δ' in δεινὴ, φειδωλὸς, and διοικοῦσα: one of the rare Gorgianic figures²⁵ to appear in his style, *parēchēsis*, (along with antithesis, particularly common in Lysias' 3 and his epideictic 2, 33, 35) creates a rhythmic and emphatic effect. The bracketed adjective ἀγαθὴ is generally regarded as an interpolation,²⁶ included to prevent φειδωλὸς from suggesting 'miserly' even though the surrounding lexical choices already reinforce the rhetorical strategy to present the wife's virtue as exemplary.

The narrative shifts with the sentence beginning with a temporal clause ἐπειδὴ... ἐτελεύτησε: the death of the mother, traditionally a moral guardian, initiates the moral decline of the household (κακῶν). The use of ἐτελεύτησε, aorist indicative of 'τελευτάω' meaning 'finish, complete', here used euphemistically (passed away) instead of ἀπέθανε, reflects Lysias' rhetorical technique of using a synonym to avoid repetition (see also 1.17, 1.25), as later he uses ἀποθανοῦσα, and for emphasis, a characteristic shared by other Attic orators. The dative personal

²³ Herman, 1993, pp.414-5

²⁴ Carey, 1989, p. 8

²⁵ Allen, 2001

²⁶ Campbell, 1999, p.19

pronoun *μοι* carries a possessive force, emphasising the speaker's personal loss and thus appealing to the jurors' pathos. The relative clause *ἣ πάντων...γεγένηται* presents an unusual syntax lacking a main verb. Among the scholarly interpretations,²⁷ the most preferable is that this can be treated as an anacoluthon, a deliberate break in construction that gives the impression of spontaneous speech, and thus heightens the rhetorical realism and emotional immediacy of the narrative. The present perfect *γεγένηται* (of *γίγνομαι*) expresses a completed action with enduring effect, implying that the mother's death has permanently been established as the cause of all evils, and underscoring the lasting nature of the speaker's misfortune, *πάντων τῶν κακῶν*, an objective genitive governed by *αἰτία*.²⁸ The syntax and aspect together crystallise the permanence of the speaker's adversity.

IV. Literary and Rhetorical Evaluation

Lysias' distinctive contribution to Attic oratory was *ēthopoia*, the art of character portraying, which Aristotle later identified as a key means of persuasion. By shaping the speaker's personality within the speech, Lysias created the impression of spontaneity and sincerity, qualities that strengthened credibility before a jury. His skill in *ēthopoia* often extended into ethical digressions,²⁹ where he characterised opponents or related figures to reinforce his argument, a practice also visible in *Against Eratosthenes* and *Against Agoratos*. Equally valuable is the insight he offered into social codes of behaviour. *Lysias 1* stands as one of the two most revealing speeches on the role and treatment of women in Athenian society, the other being Apollodoros' *Against Neaira* (Dem. 59), which offers a contrasting perspective on women's status through the lens of citizenship and law.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus judged Lysias "incontestably the best of all orators"³⁰ in the narrative section, and with reason: beneath the apparent simplicity of his style lies a deliberate rhetorical construction. In *On the Murder of Eratosthenes*, Euphiletos' narrative, far from objective, was carefully composed to elicit sympathy and moral approval, blending *ēthopoia* with *enargeia* (vivid description). The same mastery appears in *Against Simon* (3.4–6), where circumstantial

²⁷ Carey, 1989, p.67

²⁸ Steadman, 2012, p.5

²⁹ Kennedy, 2011, p.66

³⁰ D.H. *Lys.* 17–18

detail, plain Attic diction and the lifelike portrayal of character enhance credibility. Together, these features exemplify the distinctive balance of clarity and persuasion. Lysias' speeches convince not through ornament, but through the subtle fusion of moral character, linguistic precision and narrative realism.

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