

Bdelygmia Exercise

A Bdelygmia (pronounced "de-LIG-me-uh" and derived from the Greek word for "abuse") is a sequence of abusive phrases or statements. It is often called "a perfect rant." The 'litany of abuse' of bdelygmia often includes quite elaborate language and multiple adjectives and appears in a wide variety of texts and speeches. It indicates the speaker's violent opposition to something or someone. In their extremeness, they indicate that the speakers are so horrified and appalled at such terrible transgressions that they have temporarily lost control over what may be a normally mild and civil manner.

By implication, the subject of the speech is deemed to be particularly bad, wicked and evil, and that others should avoid it and not support it in any way or else be subject to the speaker's continued ire.

When done well, these are often humorous and highly effective rhetorical devices. When not done well, they can rebound on the speaker, portraying them as intolerant, offensive, dogmatic and otherwise an unpleasant and nasty person. Effective ones use many of the components of style that we've discussed this semester:

- Sound qualities
- Breath units
- Emphasis
- Parallelism in coordinate and subordinate structures
- Deliberate diction choices

Here are some examples:

- "A custom loathsome to the eye, hateful to the nose, harmful to the brain, dangerous to the lungs, and in the black, stinking fume thereof, nearest resembling the Stygian smoke of the pit that is bottomless." (King James I, "Counterblast to Tobacco")

- "I do know a con when I see one. And in politics, I see them all the time.

We are courted by blow-dried, focus-grouped, stage-managed, photo-opped, sloganeering, false-smiling, hand-clasping, back-slapping would-be leaders who say they feel our pain and understand our concerns and maybe sometimes they do, but all too often, it seems they feel little and understand less.

Superficiality gleams in their perfect teeth and scripted lines. They work hard to make style look just like substance." (*Miami Herald* columnist Leonard Pitts critique of politicians prompted by the news of Senator John Edwards' \$400 haircut in 2007)

- You're a rotter, Mr. Grinch
You're the king of sinful sots
Your heart's a dead tomato splotted with moldy purple spots

Your soul is an appalling dump heap
Overflowing with the most disgraceful
Assortment of deplorable rubbish
Imaginable, mangled up in tangled up knots

Assignment: Write a bdelygmia on the topic of your choosing. Be ready to read them aloud to the class during the next class period.

