

SOME DECLAMATIONS IN ENGLISH

PENELLA (R. J.) (trans.) *Stock Characters Speaking. Eight Libanian Declamations Introduced and Translated*. Pp. xii + 155. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2023. Cased, US\$70. ISBN: 978-0-472-13333-8.

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P. has produced several excellent books of translations and commentary of late antique texts. Among them are 2007's *Man and the Word: the Orations of Himerius* (where he assembled the fragments of this sophist) and 2020's *The Private Orations of Themistius*. In 2020, he also wrote a book on Libanius' declamations – *Ten Mythological and Historical Declamations: Introduction, Translation and Notes* –, in which he considered declamations relating to named figures from history and myth. The book reviewed here, which comprises eight of Libanius' declamations, plus another from Gregory of Cyprus, presents anonymous characters who possess a certain *ethos* ('character') emphasised in the text, individuals who sometimes reappear with similar traits in other declamations. R. Foerster edited the texts of all 51 declamations in two volumes (*Libanii Opera*, vols 6 [1911] and 7 [1913]), remarking that some were of dubious authenticity, but others, such as 37 and 46, were written with great skill, were highly appreciated by the public and were transmitted in many manuscripts.

Declamations were exercises for students of rhetoric. But they also had a life among the general public, especially among people who maintained a love of the literary exercises they had encountered in their youth. In antiquity people of every age were fond of declamations, responding enthusiastically when they were presented to the general public. In the preface to his volume of *Controversiae* (8–10) Seneca the Elder lamented that young men who were supposed to compose and listen to declamations were spineless and debased, and that they were uninterested in rhetoric, though the general public enjoyed these speeches very much. One of the many attractive aspects of declamations, which is visible in those under review, was that they were sprinkled with pithy phrases called *Sententiae* that people enjoyed and memorised. Thus, in Declamation 35 the phrases 'Let him die and you eat' or 'he is my enemy, but many others will be enemies to many' (18 and 23) serve as examples.

In 1996 D. Russell translated fourteen declamations (D.A. Russell, *Libanius: Imaginary Speeches*). Six of them concerned historical and literary personages, but the remaining eight declamations are similar to those in P.'s volume. In all of them a person defends themselves, accuses another or is accused, either in court or in front of the council. Emotions of different kinds are emphasised, as people reveal passionate concerns and desire to harm. A man is strongly attached to a life of luxury and cannot bear to have lost his patron (29). Another is consumed by envy and cannot tolerate that a neighbour has become rich (30). As in the previous declamation, he asks for permission to die by suicide. Other texts reveal a dysfunctional family life, where fathers deliberately cause pain and distress to their sons and disown them (34, 46 and 47). The old men are passionately attached to their wealth and want to rule tyrannically over their sons. The latter are presented as noble young men who are willing to help when fathers are in need, youths who express great attachment to their young wives. In 46 the father imposes a new marriage on a young man whose wife chose to die instead of him. In the course of the declamation (39–44) we discover that the father wants to have grandchildren soon.

P. rightly considers the influence of Menander, whose comedies were still performed. But I note that Aristophanes' *Clouds* are evoked in the difficult search for a wife, the disappointment of the central figure, Strepsiades, and his distress about the cost of raising a son. In 34.16–17 the old man is distraught about the money spent when his wife has a son and, when he is told that he must sacrifice a bull or a bear to the gods, he proceeds to sacrifice the infant. At this point one can hear Libanius laugh. It would have been helpful to present Libanius' thoughts on humour in the context of these declamations (see R. Cribiore, *The School of Libanius in Late Antique Antioch* [2007], pp. 18–19). He was proud to be called 'Libanius the Charmer'; and when he discovered later in life that some people considered him *barys* ('heavy to bear, annoying'), he was horrified (see *Or.* 2.19–20). Some of his letters reveal that he liked to joke in the company of his friends and assistants. In class, he sternly demanded perfection, but at the same time he encouraged cheerfulness.

P. includes a well-executed commentary with each declamation, mainly addressed to scholars. Here P. expands on the various components of the declamation, such as the *prooimion* ('preliminary remarks'), the narration and the antithesis. Considering that these declamations are also read by undergraduate students, I find P.'s commentaries somewhat confusing. I prefer Russell's presentation, as he includes what he calls the 'analysis' of the text. This involves dividing the declamation according to the theory of Hermogenes into parts such as the *prooimion*, *katastasis*, narration, antithesis and epilogue. Such a simple division would not apply to all the declamations, as some can be divided into further segments, but the format is easy to follow.

It is necessary to try and place the *Declamations* within the large corpus of Libanius' works, in order to investigate the degree of complexity of the various genres. Undoubtedly, his speeches are the most challenging in terms of style and intricacy, followed by his letters. In the letters, the addressee is often unknown, and the message is very condensed. Declamations and *progymnasmata* follow. The latter are rhetorical exercises for beginners that usually can be translated without much labour. Parts of Libanius' early works are also 'summaries' (*hypoteseis*) of Demosthenes' speeches. Declamations are exercises of medium difficulty, but sometimes they present passages that require attention. P. has always been an authoritative translator, and in this book he once again shows his ability to understand and interpret rhetorical Greek. His translations are usually literal and can be read by intermediate students, though at times he has to lengthen a pithy, terse expression in Greek to make it comprehensible in English. For example, in Declamation 35.36, the Greek πολλοῖς γὰρ αἰ γνῶμαι τῆς τύχης βελτίονες is rendered as 'the intelligence of many is higher than the station into which they were born'. Moreover, the interpretation of some terms may be debatable, for instance, in Declamation 34.21, one of the most enjoyable, that centres on a sick father and his son at the beginning of the text, when the young man timidly makes the suggestion to call a doctor, the miser is unhappy, but attributes the advice to 'the time, the circumstance', ἐλογιζόμεν δ' αὐτοῦ τὸ πάλισμα τῷ χρόνῳ, but not, as P. translates, to 'the son's young age'. The father discovers that his son had promised a talent to Asclepius and in court seeks to disown him.

These translated declamations can serve the interests of scholars at every level, from those who are interested in late antique Greek and the works of Libanius to those who care for rhetoric and the genre of declamation. Undergraduate students will thoroughly enjoy them and will be amused when trying to replicate them in English.

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