

Cambridge University Press

0521820057 - Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity: Authority and the Rhetorical Self

Erik Gunderson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

DECLAMATION, PATERNITY, AND ROMAN IDENTITY

This book explores the much maligned and misunderstood genre of declamation. Instead of a bastard rhetoric, declamation should be seen as a venue within which the rhetoric of the legitimate self is constructed. These fictions of the self are uncannily real, and these stagey dramas are in fact rehearsals for the serious play of Roman identity. Critics of declamation find themselves recapitulating the very logic of the genre they are refusing. When declamation is read in the light of the contemporary theory of the subject a wholly different picture emerges: this is a canny game played within and with the rhetoric of the self. This book makes broad claims for what is often seen as a narrow topic. An appendix includes a new translation and brief discussion of a sample of surviving examples of declamation.

ERIK GUNDERSON is an Associate Professor in the Department of Greek and Latin at the Ohio State University. He is the author of *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World* (2000).

Cambridge University Press

0521820057 - Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity: Authority and the Rhetorical Self

Erik Gunderson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

DECLAMATION, PATERNITY, AND ROMAN IDENTITY

Authority and the Rhetorical Self

ERIK GUNDERSON

Ohio State University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press

0521820057 - Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity: Authority and the Rhetorical Self

Erik Gunderson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain

Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa

<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Cambridge University Press 2003

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeface Adobe Garamond 11/12.5 pt. *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 82005 7 hardback

Cambridge University Press

0521820057 - Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity: Authority and the Rhetorical Self

Erik Gunderson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For Jason

Contents

<i>Preface: Acheron</i>	<i>page</i> ix
Introduction: A praise of folly	I
PART I: WHERE <i>EGO</i> WAS . . .	
1 Recalling declamation	29
2 Fathers and sons; bodies and pieces	59
3 Living declamation	90
4 Raving among the insane	115
PART II: LET <i>ID</i> BE	
5 <i>An Cimbrice loquendum sit</i> : speaking and unspeaking the language of homosexual desire	153
6 <i>Paterni nominis religio</i>	191
By way of conclusion	227
<i>Appendix 1: Further reading</i>	238
<i>Appendix 2: Sample declamations</i>	240
<i>List of references</i>	265
<i>Index locorum</i>	273
<i>General index</i>	278

Cambridge University Press

0521820057 - Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity: Authority and the Rhetorical Self

Erik Gunderson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

Acheron

The learning of the Sophists is thus directly the opposite of ours, which only aspires to acquire information and investigate what is and has been – it is a mass of empirical matter, in which the discovery of a new form, a new worm, or other vermin is held to be a point of great importance.

Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*¹

Not even the most febrile fits of authorial vanity would incline me to believe that the world eagerly awaits the present volume. Relatively few know what declamation is, and of those who know something about it, most are satisfied with their knowledge, and do not care to know more. Perhaps the author of a full-length study on such a topic possesses an admirable dedication to the production of knowledge in its own right, to the documenting of every scrap about the past no matter how tattered and uninteresting. Or perhaps such an author is merely dedicated to the production of verbiage and to wallowing in the mire. General readers can be excused from perusing the first sort of text; sensible ones will avoid the second.

Producing knowledge and producing verbiage, though, are themselves – or at least they should be – issues within declamatory criticism. They are not mere metacritical issues. Can seemingly empty speech from antiquity really have been all that empty? Just try to say something and have it mean nothing. Have you come up with a clever bit of non-meaning? Remember, its meaninglessness is still governed by the condition that it be meaningless. It means, then, precisely nothing. And even if you can produce that one meaningless thought, you must also accept that others did the same over the course of centuries. It would be easier just to admit that something might be in such a corpus than to insist doggedly that scores of hands had so successfully managed to speak empty volumes. Worse still, they were

¹ Hegel 1974: 352.

Cambridge University Press

0521820057 - Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity: Authority and the Rhetorical Self

Erik Gunderson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

Preface

not obviously trying to mean nothing. To read declamation should not be considered deigning to calculate a sum that always yields zero as its result. Nor are we condescending to know more about an empty rhetoric. Instead let us call it descending into the rhetorical underworld.

Freud's *Die Traumdeutung* strikes the eye as follows:² one sees the title page and upon it in large print and all capitals the words DIE TRAUMENDEUTUNG; turning the page reveals on its obverse a single Latin line in small capitals and set in quotation marks. Specifically one sees: „FLECTERE SI NEQUEO SUPEROS, ACHERONTA MOVEBO“. The next page is headed “Vorbemerkung.” The Latin thus comes before the remarks that come before the argument. “If I can not sway the gods, I will move Hell.”

Who is speaking? Juno, of course (Virgil, *Aeneid* 7.312). In a famous scene she promises suffering for Aeneas in Italy and thereupon engenders the crises that will propel the second half of the epic's plot much as her anger structured the first half. The story of finding Italy and founding Rome is always also the story of an angry godhead. The netherworld she set in motion cannot be forgotten when we contemplate the hero and the favor of the Olympians. The refusal of Juno, of Dido, of Carthage, and of the powers below is a necessary and not an adventitious element of the grand tale proper.

Who is speaking? Freud, of course. Freud prefaces his epic adventure into the workings of the psyche by insisting that one must visit the underworld. He implicitly argues thereby that we must pass through the ivory gate of false dreams if we are ever to reach our destiny of true self-knowledge. That is, Freud is both the outraged goddess and the architect of a vision that goes beyond the merely subterranean ways of passion. Freud sees the way as including its own detour, *Weg* is also *Umweg*. Similarly, the story of Rome is not merely the story of the Roman empire any more than the story of the *Aeneid* is simply the story of Aeneas, or even of the emperor Augustus. And those who cannot trace the genealogy of the present are condemned merely to puppet the fascistic dictates of the superego as a law willfully blind to its own genesis.

In the following study declamation is consistently viewed as the dream state of rhetoric. A fallacious detour from the dream of true, full and authentic speech, it nevertheless reveals truths about “rhetoric proper” that would otherwise remain forever hidden. A journey towards understanding

² I am looking at Freud 1942: v–vii. It is possible, though, to doubt that v and vi are “properly” numbered pages: vii is the first page to actually bear a number at its foot.

Cambridge University Press

0521820057 - Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity: Authority and the Rhetorical Self

Erik Gunderson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*Preface*

xi

the discourses of Rome cannot exclude a journey into the world of shadows, monsters, and passions found below. Certainly the ancients themselves almost invariably visited the Acheron of declamation. Some drank of the river of forgetfulness and never left. Others shrugged it off as merely a dream. To still more it was a real hell and one to be scorned in the name of a heavenly sublime. And some few discovered therein the Isles of the Blessed and lingered among the finest company. In the past one had a variety of relations to the genre. Today we seemingly have no relation at all; but that is a mere semblance.

Let us no longer silence declamation. A genre that is itself so canny about speech and silence awaits our return. In the land of declamation we will no longer be able to formulate the staid proposition that “I am that I am.” Actually, it were better to avoid such as an impiety. Speech is here never self-presence, it is always role playing. Nor is rhetoric any longer mere strategy, an instrument of the will deployed to achieve crass ends: Milo must go free! Declamatory rhetoric is never “mere rhetoric,” words both hiding and revealing some governing intention. Declamatory rhetoric never intends to acquit or to convict. It argues, but never to persuade us to act. In so doing, it reveals all of the dimensions so routinely forgotten when we read for the “conscious” intentions of the rhetorical subject at the expense of the literary unconscious of rhetorical discourse.

Moreover the discourse on rhetoric is itself a rhetoric. Comically it is also declamatory on the question of declamation without realizing that it is such. If we would know ourselves, we ought first to realize the path we have traveled. If our destiny is truly to be manifested in an empire of reasoned criticism, we would do well to meditate on where such empires come from and what gets lost in the process of their formation. We need to look at the rhetorical force of the Latin inscription that comes before and yet within the dream of sublime political oratory. What do we stand to lose if we hearken to declamation’s specious sophistry and participate in its baroque culture? I would answer that we thereby surrender our own pedantry and penchant for cleaving unto the simple maxim that the things that we see in the canonical texts are, and that they are the only reality.³

This book represents the fruits of a variety of moments where various people were willing to take declamation seriously. The project began life as a seminar in the spring of 1997. Few enrolled. It was nearly canceled. But I thank both my then chair Will Batstone and my three graduate students

³ This is a riff on Hegel’s portrait of the pedant (Hegel 1974: 353).

Cambridge University Press

0521820057 - Declamation, Paternity, and Roman Identity: Authority and the Rhetorical Self

Erik Gunderson

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

for taking a risk. I wrote a significant portion of the manuscript while on leave. Here again my department and chair were extremely generous. While not teaching I was residing as a metec at the Center for Hellenic Studies. I very much enjoyed having access to their excellent Latin resources, even if a study of Roman declamation did at first appear to them to be a bit ἄστοπον. Thomas Habinek offered a warm welcome to the completed first draft of the manuscript and encouraged me with both his advice and his support. My colleagues Will Batstone and Kirk Freudenburg have been similarly generous with their time and counsel. John Henderson and the anonymous reader at Cambridge University Press offered a wealth of sage and thoughtful criticism in their turn. And my readers owe them a particular debt of gratitude: they rightly advised a less windy and wordy treatment of this all too garrulous genre. Finally, Victoria Wohl has been unfailingly generous with her ideas and patience over the span of several years. That is a long time to spend weeding in rhetoric's hothouse. Fearing the censor's mark if I say more, with Cato I will pray instead that Jove should thunder.