Berti, E. 2007. *Scholasticorum studia. Seneca il Vecchio e la cultura retorica e letteraria della prima età imperiale* (Biblioteca di "Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici", 20). Pisa, Giardini editore. 408 p. (pb).

Like most other works on declamation, Berti's impressive study begins with an observation which, regrettably, still needs to be made again and again: declamation is a valuable object of study, not just for its rhetorical properties, but also for its pivotal position in the literary culture of the Roman Empire. His book, the commercial edition of his *Tesi di perfezionamento*, focuses on both these aspects as they come to the fore in the Seneca the Elder's *Oratorum et rhetorum sententiae divisiones colores*. This wondrous collection consists of fragments from hundreds of *controversiae* (mock-forensic speeches) and *suasoriae* (mock-political speeches) held by dozens of declaimers heard by Seneca during his lifetime. These fragments are arranged according to the declamations' themes (74 *controversiae*, 7 *suasoriae*), and then subdivided into *sententiae* (memorable aphorisms), *divisiones* (argumentational structures) and *colores* (motives). They are grouped into eleven books, each of which is provided with a preface which highlights one or several speakers and gives a wealth of literary criticism.

Dividing his work into two distinct parts, Berti first discusses the nature and characteristics of the declamations recorded by Seneca the Elder and their development from school exercise to autonomous literary genre, then dedicates the second part to the interplay of declamation with other literary genres. The work is richly documented, full of sharp and interesting observations, provided with sound indexes and an abundant bibliography, and obviously written by a scholar whose command of rhetoric matches his eminent grasp of Latin language and literature in general. But it has two defects.

Firstly, in a sense, the scope of the book is too narrow. To present a picture of the characteristics of declamation, its development and its relation to other literary genres, Berti makes exclusive use of Seneca's collection because, as he asserts, these fragments are our paramount source of information about *rhetorica scholastica*. Even if this were the case, the reader will be left with an incomplete picture. Perhaps one could leave out Calpurnius Flaccus' fourth-century collection of excerpts, which are mainly of interest because of their subject matter and sometimes extravagant *sententiae*. But the other two remaining collections are indispensable. The *Declamationes minores* ascribed to Quintilian closely reflect the educational tradition of declamation as a genuine preparation for the lawcourts; leaving them out means suggesting that there was a straightforward development from school to literary declamation, whereas in fact both continued to exist alongside one another. The nineteen *Declamationes maiores*, also ascribed to Quintilian, are the only complete declamations that have come down to us; without neglect-

ing argument and law, they are textbook examples of literary declamation and veritable tapestries of intertextuality.

But from a different angle, the work is too extensive. Outstanding works have already been written on Roman declamation—by Bonner and Winterbottom, to name just two prominent experts.¹⁾ The Elder Seneca himself is the subject of excellent monographs by Borneque, Sussman and especially Fairweather.²⁾ While Berti frankly admits this, he still repeats their efforts and divulges a great deal of information which may be interesting for novices, but which will be superfluous for most of his readership. A brief survey of the book's contents will make clear, however, that its merits outweigh these flaws.

After an extensive introduction on the familiar subjects of Seneca, his life, his prodigious memory, and the contents, structure and goal of his work, we come upon the first part of the book: "La retorica della declamazione". Its first chapter is the least successful. Using as an example the only text in Seneca which is not fragmentary, but merely condensed (Marcus Porcius Latro's rendering of *Con.* 2.7), it discusses theme, *status* (main legal or factual issue), *exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio* and *epilogus* of a declamation to show "com'è fatta una declamazione". Although the chapter bears witness to the author's impressive knowledge of rhetoric and—anticipating the second part of the book—contains a number of interesting *Anklänge* of declamation and elegy, it has little to offer in the way of fresh information, and a text taken from either collection ascribed to Quintilian would have served the purpose much better. The second chapter, "*Scholastica materia: temi e controversiae*", also treats familiar topics. After the usefulness of *controversiae*, their 'bones and meat' (*divisio*, argument and style), we find sections on the inhabitants of declamation's fictitious universe—Russell's well-known Sophistopolis—and Seneca's account of the history of declamation, which has been discussed conclusively in, e.g., Sussman and Fairweather. But if these topics are somewhat hackneyed, their triteness is more than made up for by a beautiful appendix in which all 74 *controversiae* are grouped according to the *status* they were meant to illustrate. The third chapter too contains a great deal of well-known material—it deals with declamation's development from *exercitatio* to *ostentatio*—but even so it is the best illustration yet of the paradoxical condition that declamation moved away from the *forum* (by becoming an autonomous genre) while

¹⁾ Bonner, S.F. [1949] 1967. *Roman Declamation in the Late Republic and Early Empire* (Berkeley/Los Angeles); Winterbottom, M. 1980. *Roman Declamation*, extracts edited with commentary (Bristol).

²⁾ Borneque, H. [1902] 1967. *Les déclamations et les déclamateurs d'après Sénèque le Père* (Hildesheim); Sussman, L.A. 1978. *The Elder Seneca* (Leiden); Fairweather, J. 1981. *Seneca the Elder* (Cambridge).

entering it at the same time (by influencing orators). “L’arte della sententia”, the next chapter, is excellent, rich in examples that are scrupulously analysed and rightly defining *sententiae* as *lumina* rather than γνῶμαι (*epiphônêmata* are the most frequent species) and as Seneca’s paramount criterion for *controversiae*. We are made to observe how *sententiae* prompt creative *imitatio* and *aemulatio* and how they can even become catchphrases independent from their context. Seneca’s own criticism of declamation, which obviously takes the genre for granted and never calls it into question, is the subject of the fifth chapter. Although his collection contains no systematic discussion of his criteria, Berti has managed to sift a few general principles from an abundance of usually casual remarks, the most important one being that *sententiae*, *loci communes*, *exempla* added for their own sake are inevitably harmful to one’s case. The final chapter, I feel, could have taken the form of a few brief references. Instead, we find a rehash of the over-familiar criticism of declamation by Seneca himself, Votienus Montanus, Cassius Severus, Petronius, Tacitus and Quintilian.

Part II is easily the best part of Berti’s book. It does not exactly broach new territory, but gives a fascinating and extremely rich survey of reciprocal influences between declamation and other literary genres. An introductory chapter defines and describes the ancient principles of *imitatio* and *aemulatio*, Greek role-models and the differences between rhetorical and literary *imitatio*. Declamation and poetry are discussed in the eighth chapter, where we find declamatory imitations of Homer, Vergil and Ovid—including two fine digressions on the histories of the idioms *belli mora* and *plena deo*—and Ovid using declamatory *sententiae* in his *Metamorphoses* and *Amores*. The final chapter takes a close look at the way declamation passed on traditional motifs to Silver Latin authors such as Seneca the Younger, Lucan and Statius. We find tragic paradigms (Jocasta, Thyestes), horror (Cicero’s decapitation; Flamininius’ bloody banquet; the scarred bodies of war heroes), and Alexander the Great as the embodiment of *superbia*, which ends with the fragment of Albinovanus Pedo in *Suas*. 1.15.

There, Berti’s book ends abruptly—but leaving this reader at least quite satisfied. Setting aside the flaws mentioned above, which do somewhat unbalance the work, Berti has given an impressive and eminently readable survey of literary declamation and its interplay with other genres.

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