

Review

J. E. LENDON, *THAT TYRANT, PERSUASION: HOW RHETORIC SHAPED THE ROMAN WORLD*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2022. Pp. xviii + 302, illus. ISBN 9780691221007. £25.00.

How did the intensive rhetorical training that constituted the final stage of Roman elite education influence real-life actions? Moving beyond familiar studies of rhetorical influence on Hellenistic and Roman literature, J. E. Lendon's most recent book seeks to pin down the specific ways in which rhetorical training spilled over into and shaped real-life actions and patterns of thought and behaviour.

The book is organised into four sections, ringed by a brief Preface and Conclusion. The first section, 'The Strange World of Roman Education', offers a helpful synthesis of the emergence in the Roman imperial period of a distinctive pattern of elite male education that culminated in declamation (ch. 1). While there was some attention to theory, practice and performance were emphasised above all, so that the training had more in common with a modern conservatory or other performing arts institute than with the modern university. L. emphasises ancient perceptions of the value of declamation, its competitiveness highlighted by metaphors of the arena, and virtuoso qualities suggested by the lore and lure of sophists. He argues against modernising evaluations of Roman education that would find it lacking in technical and intellectual content, foregrounding the prime importance of training in public speaking for success in the Roman Empire (ch. 2).

The second section, 'Killing Julius Caesar as the Tyrant of Rhetoric', opens with a gripping retelling of the murder of Caesar and its immediate aftermath, highlighting the haphazard planning of the conspirators and the attendant confusion (ch. 3). L. then focuses on aspects of the conspiracy and its aftermath that have puzzled modern scholars and, to some extent, Cicero, such as the failure to kill Antony as well as Caesar. He argues that the conspirators' odd behaviour was conditioned by the prominence of the individual tyrant in the declamatory exercises in which they had been trained, with tyrannicide as the natural response, and a stirring speech as the grand conclusion (ch. 4). Other historical figures, such as Domitian and Caesar himself, found the rhetorical tyrant exceptionally good to think with, as they developed their distinctive political personae by both trying on and avoiding autocratic tropes (ch. 5).

In Section Three, 'Rhetoric's Curious Children: Building in the Cities of the Roman Empire', L. explores the ways in which rhetorical training influenced the shape of cities in the Greek East. While stock features of the rhetoric of praise favoured the building of nymphaea and colonnades, city walls were discouraged by the biases of deliberative rhetoric (chs 6–7). The final section, 'Lizarding, and other Adventures in Declamation and Roman Law', opens with an ancient interpretation of the enigmatic term 'lizarding', referring to a variety of crime that had not been written into law but that could still be pursued by legal action (107–9). This discussion introduces the compelling topic of the relationship between contemporary Roman law and the legal universe of the rhetorical curriculum, a heady mixture of ancient Roman, Greek and pure invention (ch. 8). The preoccupations of the rhetorical repertoire occasionally got translated into actual laws enacted by Roman emperors, tending towards the lurid: adultery and poisoning, the rights of 'ravished' women, and 'eye for an eye' justice (ch. 9). As L. argues, the semi-fictional hotchpotch that passed for law in rhetorical training was likely to have had a broader influence on actual legal practice, given that Roman governors adjudicating local situations in the Empire tended to be non-specialists, relying on their general education (140–1).

L.'s approach is for the most part staunchly empirical, which can be a strength of the book. The organisation by discrete themes lends precision, even if it does not particularly encourage the emergence of broader questions. L. meticulously dismisses conflicting arguments, and generally avoids theory. He is impatient with 1980s and 1990s tendencies to insist that rhetoric reinforces the socio-political status quo, or, alternatively, subverts it, in L.'s eyes a restrictive and modish 'accident of life in the modern university' (20). He avoids comparative approaches that might have helped to pinpoint the peculiar conditions of Imperial Rome. This is surprising, given that his title, *That Tyrant, Persuasion*, tags a line of a speech given by 'Agamemnon' in Euripides' *Hecuba* (816), hinting at contemporary Athenian debates about access to rhetorical education and its use and abuse.

L. sometimes allows himself to fly. This can be exciting to watch, as when he muses on the different resonances that all those practised meditations on tyranny and tyrannicide might have had for subjects making sense of and navigating the constraints imposed by Roman monarchy and, at the same time, the real possibilities of local government, while putting faith in legal proceedings (148–53). This is a particularly interesting spin on Mary Beard's earlier questions about how to understand Roman declamation's preoccupations ('Looking (Harder) for Roman Myth', in F. Graf (ed.), *Mythos in mythenloser Gesellschaft. Das Paradigma Roms* (1993), 44–64). When L. thinks big like this, one can imagine *That Tyrant, Persuasion* in productive conversation with, for example, studies of modes of organisation and categorisation peculiar to the Roman imperial world, such as the configuration of space or the arrangement of lists. There is much to inspire future work here.

Harvard University
dench@fas.harvard.edu

EMMA DENCH

doi:10.1017/S007543582400042X

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.