

É. WOLFF: *Dracontius: Oeuvres: Tome IV: Poèmes profanes VI–X; Fragments: Texte établi et traduit* (Collection des Universités de France publiée sous le patronage de l'Association Guillaume Budé). Pp. 334. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1996. frs. 295. ISBN: 2-251-01398-9.

With this fourth volume W. brings to completion the Budé edition of Dracontius and in particular the *Carmina Profana* begun in Volume III, where readers will find the appropriate introduction to the present volume. As before, the text and translation format is accompanied by copious notes arranged both at the bottom of the pages carrying the translation and on more than 140 pages at the end (half the book in fact). Such generosity of provision continues to make the edition an extremely useful one not only for students of fifth-century literature and society, but for anyone wishing to trace thematic developments in thought and myth. Within the present collection W. deals with the five remaining poetic works of the Romulea, which fall into three categories: *epithalamia* (poems 6 and 7), *epyllia* (poems 8 and 10), and one rhetorical work (poem 9). Taking the *epithalamia* first, these are a curious pair, not simply because they are patently back to front within the manuscript in terms of chronology, but also because of the great contrast in tone and approach they contain. The earlier poem (7), for instance, celebrating the marriage of Johannes and Vitula, is far from the expected panegyric; instead the overall impression is one of deeply felt resentment against those who continue to allow him to languish in prison. For this reason D. introduces the usual themes of the genre only to declare himself incapable of treating them effectively and delegate the task to a choir of young people. Following this, instead of the expected praise for the young couple and their parents, D. launches upon a eulogy of their ancestors, accusing the families themselves of indifference to his plight, and only returns to the theme of marriage, somewhat grudgingly, in the final twenty lines with their even more brusque two-line ending of 'enough said'. Poem 6, while differing from poem 7 in tone (understandably so since it is a composition of happier times, and D. is ready to express his gratitude for favours bestowed), nevertheless mirrors it in structure, with a complex and in places obscure first part followed by altogether more traditional themes in the second.

The *epyllia*, *De Raptu Helenae* and *Medea*, continue to show at one and the same time the poet's deep indebtedness to classical literature and the distinct deviation from a classical approach to myth that marks D.'s fifth-century mind. Both poems also continue the twin themes of forbidden love which leads inevitably to disaster, seen earlier in the *Orestis Tragoedia*, and of emotion taken to extremes, which similarly results in tragedy. We see too the poet's tendency to concentrate upon his female characters, who in general display more initiative and courage than their male counterparts—the traditional heroes of the myth. So, for instance, it is Helen who suggests elopement from Cyprus with Paris, Medea who proposes marriage to Jason. The males, in contrast, seem hardly capable of either any emotional response at all in the situations in which they find themselves, or of decisive action that might avert ruin. The apparent shift of interest that marks such fifth-century literature is also clear in the mythological and thematic innovation that characterizes much of D.'s approach to his work: in particular his tendency to treat the myths as a series of rhetorical episodes which might be developed in their own right, almost as separate tableaux, without reference to the whole, and his neglect of events which had previously had much greater prominence. In terms of mythological innovation one thinks of Jason's death, caught up as he is, like Creon, in the conflagration that engulfs his new bride. As an example of unexpected neglect of episodes there is the theft of the golden fleece, the murder of Apsyrtos, and the escape from Colchis, all of which is dealt with in eight lines.

In poem 9, *Deliberativa Achillis an Corpus Hectoris Vendat*, we find not so much a *deliberatio* but a *suasoria*, in that D. has produced a piece in which a speaker (in W.'s view D. himself) attempts to persuade Achilles to take a certain course of action.

Rounding off the volume are the shorter poems, the *De Mensibus* and the *De Origine Rosarum*, together with two fragments. All in all, then, W. has produced in this volume a worthy conclusion to the series, combining as it does scholarly appreciation of the poet's work and idiosyncrasies with a translation which captures well the flavour of the original.

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