

The Panegyric and the Personal: Dracontius at the Wedding

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Abstract

Although the personal voice of the panegyrist has a very limited role in formal encomia, it is accepted that in introducing an epithalamium, he may explain why he has come forward to honour the family. In his two epithalamia (*Rom.* 6 and 7), Dracontius takes advantage of this convention to tell of his fall from grace and imprisonment. In *Rom.* 6 (*Epithalamium in Fratribus Dictum*), which honours the family whose intervention saved him from prison, the brief narration of Dracontius' history supplies material for encomium. *Rom.* 7 (*Epithalamium Ioannis et Vitulae*), however, was written while the poet was still in jail and the families of the bride and groom had turned their backs on the poet. The epithalamium which resulted was, thematically and generically, one of a kind.

1. Menander Rhetor 399.23-7

...or else explain the reason why you have come forward to speak: 'I am a relative of the parties by marriage, I was invited to speak, I am returning a service for benefits received before', or again: 'I am indulging friendship', or whatever of the kind comes to mind.

2. Menander Rhetor 399.12-16

[The epithalamium] is a speech which hymns bridal chambers and alcoves, bride and bridegroom, family, and above all the god of marriage himself. It delights in stories of charm and love...

3. Dracontius, *Rom.* 6.34-40

*quorum umbone tegor uel quorum munere uiuo:
post uarios casus, post tot discrimina uitae
porrexere piam placido pro tegmine dextram
et, quod maius erat, laeso tribuere salutem
fortunamque mihi reducem pietate nouarunt.*

the house which is my shield, and by whose gift I live:
after much misfortune and life's crises
they stretched out a loving hand as peaceful shelter;
and what was more, though I'd offended, gave
salvation, and with love restored my fortune.

4. Dracontius, *Rom.* 6.1-2

*Egregii iuuenes, [o] gloria summa parentum
foedus amicitiae, solamen grande clientum*

Splendid youths, your parents' highest glory,
pledge of friendship, ample comfort to their clients.

5. Dracontius, Rom. 6.34-40

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6. Dracontius, Rom. 6.87-9

*quae mercede sua multos coniunxit egentes:
haec inopes dotare solet uel pascere egenos,
legibus et nostris nudas uestire puellas'.*

their mercy has enabled many indigent to marry,
they are used to dower the poor and feed the hungry,
and in keeping with my laws clothe naked girls.

7. Matt 25:35-6

For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in: naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me.

8. Dracontius, Rom. 7.1-4, 6-7

*Carminis Idalii cuperem nunc ebrius esse
nobilium thalamis Fabiani sanguinis index.
quod mihi si felix hodie fortuna dedisset,
non inhonorus eram, sed laude redemptus adirem ...
emerito referens generosas auspice laudes,
et Vitulae canerem taedas per uota Ioannis.*

I'd wish now to be drunk on wedding songs,
witness to the noble match of Fabian blood.
If happy chance had given this to me today,
not dishonoured but redeemed by praise I'd come ...
I'd offer splendid praises when the auspices are taken,
and hymn the match of Vitula to Johannes.

9. Claudian, c.m. 25.1-2

*Carmina per thalamum quamuis festina negare
nec uolui genero nec potui socero*

Asked to write a hasty poem for the wedding, I was unwilling
to deny the son-in-law, could not refuse the father-in-law...

10. Dracontius, Rom. 7.12-14

*impubes lasciuus, atrox, uiolentus, amoenus,
lis pacis tacitusque loquax, fur garrulus audax,
nudus et armatus, ferus et pius, improbus insons ...*

her boy too, playful, savage, brutal, charming,
rowdy, taciturn, glib, thieving, chatty, bold,
nude but armed, wild and gentle, bad but guiltless.

11. Dracontius, Rom. 7.21-4

*uel quibus, ipse furor, Mars est accensus amore,
Vesticolae niueos peteret cum uirginis artus,
ut daret aeternum Romana in saecula Quirinum
et post fata deos faceret super astra senatum.*

or those [arrows] which kindled love in Mars, mad rage himself,
when he sought the Vestal's snowy limbs,
to give eternal Quirinus to Roman ages,
deified in death, above the stars he'd make the senate.

12. Dracontius, Rom. 7.25-7

*Sed quia captiuo fas non est dicere carmen
nec reticere licet festiuo in tempore uati,
ista canant pueri, qui carmine uera loquentur;*

But since a captive may not sing, nor can
a poet mute his voice in festive times,
let boys sing this, who'll speak the truth in song.

13. Dracontius, Rom. 59-60

*cana Fides Pietasque iugent et casta Voluptas
brachia constringat celeres uisura nepotes.*

Let fair Trust and Duty join, let chaste Pleasure
link the arms of those who'll soon see grandchildren.

14. Vergil, Aen. 1.292-3

*cana Fides et Vesta, Remo cum fratre Quirinus
iura dabunt*

Fair Trust and Vesta, Quirinus with his brother Remus
will make laws.

15. Dracontius, Rom. 7.64

ista canant iuuenes ...

Let young men sing this song

16. Dracontius, Rom.7.69-72

*Ast ego, qui nequeo captus mea plectra mouere
carmine sollicito, dederant quia carmina clades,
et modo sic positus, Cythereae cantibus absens,
sollicitus tabidus temerarius, anxius audax:*

But I, a captive who can't stir my lyre
to troubled song, because my songs brought me disaster,
and now I'm placed here, far from Cytherea's hymns,
harassed, wasting, reckless, troubled, bold.

17. Dracontius, Rom. 7.48-53

*sic puer Idalius permiscet mella uenenis,
sic rosa miscetur spinis, medicina cerastis
perficitur stimulisque fauos apis alma tuetur:
sic pia uirginitas non tollitur ante, pudoris
unguibus infensis quam uulnerat ora mariti
et prior ante sui uindex est ipsa cruoris,*

So Cupid mixes honey in his poisons,
so the rose has thorns, medicine comes from snakes,
the kindly bee protects its hives with stings:
so pure Virginitas's not taken till
the hostile nails of modesty have scratched
her husband's face, and in advance avenged her blood.

18. Dracontius, Rom. 7.110-17

*pontifices sacri Statulenus Optatianus
moribus innocuis, sancta pietate modesti,
religione pii, castis altaribus apti,
quorum cana fides per sacra palatia pollens
floruit (unus erat Latialis mysticus aulae,
alter apud Danaos sacrata mente dicatus);
quorum sanguis adest, quos omina fausta iuuabunt:
ex hac progenie iunctis et gente togata
coniugio tali speremus numina nasci!*

I myself will bring a few songs to the two picked
from both clans, whom I will hymn:
the holy priests, Statulenus and Optatianus,
gentle in their character, humble with pure piety,
devout in duty, fitted for chaste altars,
whose fair trust flourishing in palace rites,
was honoured (one was prelate in the Latin court,
the other's devout mind was given to the Greek
whose blood is here, whom happy omens will delight:
from the union of this race and lawyer's stock,
from such a match let's hope that gods are born!

19. Dracontius, Rom. 7.118-37

*nam mihi quod teneor non < tam > dolor alter acerbus
 quam quod apud tales obliuio longa moratur
 nominis inclusi. sed si me claustra fatigant
 temporis immodici, nec uos impune tacetis:
 < poena > est non leuior uobis quatiante pudore,
 quod licet exiguum tamen inter iura poetam
 temnitis immemores facunda mente peritum.
 quod prodest seruasse hominem post tanta pericla
 et clausum liquisse diu sub clade salutis?
 non male peccaui nec rex iratus inique est,
 sed mala mens hominis, quae detulit ore maligno,
 et male suggestit tunc et mea facta grauauit.
 poscere quem ueniam decuit, male suscitatur iras
 et dominum regemque pium saeuire coegit.
 nam deus omnipotens compunget corda regentis,
 quando iubet pietate sua ueniamque relaxat.
 at cum liber ero domino ignoscente reductus,
 dum tacet os uestrum nec nos sermone iuuatis,
 nomina uestra reor praeconia nulla manebunt.
 Sed ne maesta canens concludat carmen amoris...*

That I am captive is a bitter sorrow equal to the fact
 that long oblivion has erased the prisoner's name
 from their minds. But if prison for such
 boundless time tires me, your silence is no shield:
 your penalty's no lighter as you're shamed
 that without thought you scorn a poet, slight
 in verse but skilled in law and eloquent.
 What use to save a man through so much danger,
 then confine him for so long, so that his safety's lost?
 My crime was not so bad, nor was the king
 unjustly vexed, but one man's malice, wicked words,
 denounced me, then twisted and enlarged my deeds.
 He should have sought me mercy: evilly he
 provoked wrath, drove my good lord and king to rage.
 But all-powerful God will needle the king's heart,
 when in his love he bids him grant me pardon.
 But when I'm free, restored by my forgiving
 lord, since your mouths are mute, your words no help,
 I think no herald will await your names.

A love song should not end with grim predictions...

20. Ovid, Tristia, 2.207-8

*perdiderint cum me duo crimina, carmen et error,
 alterius facti culpa silena mihi*

Though two crimes, a poem and a blunder have brought me ruin,
 of my fault in the one I must keep silent

21. Dracontius, Satisfactio 93-4
culpa mihi fuerat dominos reticere modestos
ignotumque mihi scribere uel dominum
 My fault was to be silent on the topic of forbearing lords,
 and praise instead a stranger as my lord.
22. Ovid, Tristia 2.77-8
a! ferus et nobis nimium crudelior hostis,
delicias legit qui tibi cumque meas
 Alas! harsh was he and too cruelly an enemy of mine,
 who read to thee my playful verse.
23. Dracontius, Rom. 7.123-4
quod licet exiguum tamen inter iura poetam
temnitis immemores facunda mente peritum
 that without thought you scorn a poet, slight
 in verse but skilled in law and eloquent.
24. Ovid, Tristia 4.9.19-20
nostra per inmensas ibunt praeconia gentes
quodque querar notum qua patet orbis erit
 my herald-call shall pass through limitless peoples,
 my complaints will be known at the world's end.
25. Dracontius, Rom. 7.135-6
dum tacet os uestrum nec nos sermone iuuatis,
nomina uestra reor praeconia nulla manebunt.
 since your mouths are mute, your words no help,
 I think no herald will await your names.

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