

Menage à deux

The panegyrist, the contract and the mirror

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Latin panegyric, one of the most peculiar literary genres within Roman literature, has been increasingly discussed in the last years. Attention has been directed either to the reconstruction of the historical context or to the literary background of the panegyrists. Only a few contributions have focused on broader cultural issues such as the ritual context of the delivery of the speeches at the court, or the rhetorical ability of the panegyrist as a political instrument. Illuminating work has included S. McCormack on the ceremonial context of panegyric delivery, S. Bartsch's reading of Pliny the Younger's *Panegyricus* as theatrical "doublespeak" and the volumes edited by I. Cogitore and F. Goyet (*Devenir roi* and *Éloge du prince*).

In this paper I will pursue these fascinating perspectives in order to explore the literary nature of the Latin panegyric text in its unique constellation. I will focus on the corpus of the *Panegyrici Latini*, showing that the communication is based on a sort of tacit literary contract between the speaker and the Emperor. This contract will be analyzed as a tool for construction of authorial identity: the panegyrist has to depict his own *imperator* and in doing so he enacts literary strategies of the representation of the self. My reading of the *Panegyrici* will highlight the intrinsic reciprocity of this genre, making reference on the one hand to Latin texts belonging to other genres (e.g. the episode of Narcissus in the third book of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, or the proems of didactic epic) and on the other hand to modern theories of representation of the self (Foucault, Deleuze, Eco, Agamben). I argue that Latin panegyric turns out to be a kind of "mirror writing" as a tool for effecting an identification: between Emperor and orator, between sincerity and falsity, between master and slave, between power and literature.