

Greek declamation can be divided into themes based on comic stereotypes, mythology, and history (Russell 1983). Historical declamations can be further subdivided into what we might call pure historical fiction and “alternate history” (Gibson, *CP* 2004). Historical declamations of the first type elaborate on the historical tradition by supplying speeches for known individuals (or plausible anonymi) at particular points in Greek history. In this way they are similar to modern historical novels. For example, “someone proposes after the Persian Wars to march against those who Medized” (Apsines 219.9 [Kohl (1915) 44]); this is a theme inspired by the deliberations mentioned but not recorded in Herodotus 9.86. The other type of historical declamation may profitably be characterized as alternate history, after its superficial similarities to a popular subgenre of science fiction (Hellekson 2001). Just as in declamations of the pure historical fiction type, the speakers in the alternate history type are known individuals (or plausible anonymi) who deliver speeches in identifiable historical settings; however, in this type of declamation the specific event that provides the occasion for the speech (or what I call here the point of divergence) represents an informed and intentional departure from the historical tradition. For example, “Philip demanded Demosthenes’ surrender; Demosthenes fled for refuge to the Altar of Pity; he was dragged away and handed over; and now, having been released by Philip, he proposes that the Athenians tear down the altar” (Libanius *Decl.* 22 [Kohl 305]). This theme, by contrast with the previous one, represents a significant departure from historical tradition.

Drawing on a complete survey of extant declamations, as well as historical themes collected from late-antique rhetorical manuals, my purpose in this paper is to explore how and to what ends historical declamation of the alternate history type generates its points of divergence. Precisely what happens at that critical moment when a declaimer departs from historical tradition to create a new fiction? Upon what mental and cultural resources does he draw, and to what ends does he engage in imagining an alternate history for his actors?

I argue two main points. First, declamatory fictions located in an identifiable historical milieu allow the declaimer and his audience to participate actively in the historical tradition by taking on the guise of famous historical personages at key moments in Greek history (cf. Bowie 1970, Anderson 1993, Schmitz in Zimmermann 1999). This is true of both types of historical declamation. Second, although declamation themes of the alternate history type invite participants to become original contributors to the historical tradition, their original acts of fiction are subject to constraints that tend to push ostensibly original creative impulses along certain predictable lines. These parameters include the shared moral values of the declamatory community, established conceptions of individual and national character, and the apparently inviolable rule that internal references to history prior to the point of divergence must not depart from known details of the historical tradition. I close with some suggestive comparisons between Greek historical declamation and modern alternate history stories.