



Readings in Classical Rhetoric

Thomas W. Benson, Michael H. Prosser

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Rhetoric -- the theory of oral discourse -- affected and indeed pervaded all aspects of classical thought. Bearing the stamp of its impact were the Homeric hymns, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, the great dramatic tragedies, the elegiac and lyric poetry, and the literature of the Romans, often formed in the Greek image. The rhetorical notion of probability had direct implications for the classical philosopher and mathematician as it does today.

Departments of speech, English, philosophy and classics provide the key centers of interest in the new and the classical rhetorics. Despite the considerable enthusiasm for the study of rhetoric, no single work provides large selections of primary materials written by the classical rhetoricians themselves. Until now, only secondary sources containing tiny excerpts, or entire and expensive translations of the ancient rhetorical writings were available. This large anthology of primary readings of the classical rhetoricians in translation fills this large gap.

The continuity and coherence of ancient rhetorical traditions is emphasized by organizing large excerpts into the topical divisions that later classical writers agreed upon. The first unit of this anthology sets forth major issues in the definition and scope of rhetoric, and its appropriate place among other modes of thought and discourse. Parts 2 through 5 are organized according to the traditional canons of oratory -- invention, disposition, style, memory, and delivery. In organizing the readings this way, the editors represent both the philosophical and theoretical issues in rhetoric and its pragmatic functions as a craft for making effective discourse.

Selecting excerpts that illustrate the major conflicts within the unfolding tradition enables a sampling of not only the major points of view, but also the arguments supporting them. This volume includes selections not only from writings of the standard classical rhetoricians but also from less typical works which have special value. The editors have utilized the best accessible translations while remaining absolutely faithful to their texts.

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