# Landmark Essays

on
Rhetoric and Literature

Edited by
Craig Kallendorf

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## *About the Editor*

Craig Kallendorf is Professor of English, Classics, and Speech Communication at Texas A&M University. He is the author of two monographs (*In Praise of Aeneas: Virgil and Epideictic Rhetoric in the Early Italian Renaissance* and *Virgil and the Myth of Venice: Books and Readers in the Italian Renaissance)*, four bibliographical studies, and two textbooks, as well as some thirty articles in journals such as *Renaissance Quarterly*, *Studies in Philology*, *Modern Philology, Journal of the History of Ideas*, and *American Historical Review*. From 1993 to 1997 he edited *Rhetorica*, the journal of the International Society for the History of Rhetoric.

# Introduction

## by Craig Kallendorf

From the beginnings of western civilization, rhetoric has been closely connected with the theory and practice of literature. For the ancient Greeks, the origins of rhetoric as a conceptual system could be traced to the speeches in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and rhetoricians like Quintilian continued to turn to literature for examples of effective communication. Indeed, rhetorical theorists and literary critics often explored the same concepts, so that treatises like Demetrius' *On Style* and Longinus' *On the Sublime* proved equally valuable for the analysis of speeches and poems. Even philosophers like Aristotle, whose system made a clear division between rhetoric and poetics, freely admitted that the two arts shared several key features.

The connection between the two arts remained close in postclassical culture. One of the three major divisions of medieval rhetoric, for example, involved instruction in poetic composition, and treatises on poetics like Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* show how difficult it would be to appreciate Renaissance poetry without understanding the rhetorical figures. The early evolution of literary prose is based on changes in models of rhetorical style, and some of the most interesting developments in modern literature are connected to the new directions taken by contemporary rhetorical studies. Many great works of literature, in short, were written by men and women who knew something about rhetoric, which should encourage us to examine exactly what the writers we study knew and how the practice of literary criticism might be enriched through rhetorical knowledge. And since language works in much the same way no matter how it is used, rhetoric also remains a valid mode of criticism for those literary works that cannot be shown to have incorporated specific rhetorical features by design.

The essays reprinted in this volume were selected to exemplify the close connection between rhetoric and literature in western culture. The arrangement is chronological, with two essays selected for each of six major periods: Antiquity, Middle Ages, Renaissance (including Shakespeare), Seventeenth century, Eighteenth century, and Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries.

Baldwin's "Rhetoric in Ancient Criticism of Poetic" begins at the beginning, using liberal quotations from Greek and Roman critics to show how pervasively the ancients viewed literature through a rhetorical filter. Williams' "Figures of Thought in Roman Poetry," in turn, demonstrates how a modern reader can use this basic apparatus of rhetorical criticism to track subtle developments in literary history. Some rhetorical devices, Williams argues, postpone or complicate understanding, while others generate immediate, emotional responses. Ovid and the poets after him moved their emphasis from the first group of figures to the second, so that poetry of the late Republic and early Augustan Age has proved difficult for later readers to appreciate.

In 1300, as Curtius notes, poetry was still conceived as a species of eloquence. "Poetry and Rhetoric" explores how this came to be. Curtius returns to antiquity to show how the failure to distinguish composition in prose clearly from composition in poetry led to a thorough rhetoricization of poetry in the Middle Ages; he then moves to what he calls rhetorical "topoi," or themes, which structure medieval poetry and whose rhetorical character must be understood by anyone who wants to appreciate the literature of the period. "Dramatic Rhetoric and Rhetorical Drama: Orators and Actors" turns to a different area of medieval culture: the connections between giving speeches and acting. Both orators and actors, Enders argues, focused on delivery, a part of the rhetorical tradition that has received comparatively little attention. From antiquity through the Middle Ages, however, delivery served to connect legal rhetoric and the development of the drama, offering us a greater appreciation of both discourse fields.

In "Rhetoric, Poetics, and the Theory of Praise," O. B. Hardison, Jr. shows how pervasively epideictic, the rhetoric of praise and blame, influenced literary composition and criticism. From antiquity through the Renaissance, efforts to view poetry through the filter of epideictic rhetoric explain otherwise inexplicable phenomena, ranging from the insistence that Virgil's *Aeneid* consistently praises the virtue of its hero to the belief that Aristotle's *Poetics* develops a distinction between poetry that praises virtue and poetry that condemns vice. My "*King Lear* and the Figures of Speech" argues that differences in how the figures of speech are used in this play reveal differences in characterization that lead in turn to the heart of Shakespeare's tragic vision.

The seventeenth century was a time of great change, and the two essays reprinted here suggest how some of the challenges to traditional ways of thinking about language led to new ways of seeing the world and writing about it. Croll begins with the given in traditional Renaissance rhetoric, that Cicero was the model for a polished prose style. His study on "Attic Prose: Lipsius, Montaigne, Bacon" works from this beginning to show how Attic or Anti-Ciceronian prose, in its Stoic, "libertine," and Tacitean forms, came to prominence from 1575 to 1675 as the style appropriate to the literary expression of modern rationalism. In "The Disintegration of Humanist Rhetoric," Sloane begins by observing that the humanist rhetoric of the Renaissance rested in *controversia*, in the idea that truth only emerges through the effort to resolve disagreement in argument. This was replaced by a belief that discursive forms can only serve higher forms of knowledge that are transcendent, conceptual, and non-verbal—that is, logic is antecedent to rhetoric because reason

can exist without speech. According to Sloane, Donne exemplifies the former approach and Milton the latter, leading to the surprising conclusion that "Donne was more the humanist than Milton."

Both the essays included in the Neoclassical section exemplify the application of rhetorical principles to the explication of specific works of literature. In "Swift's Rhetoric in 'A Modest Proposal'," Beaumont shows how Swift relies on key techniques of classical rhetoric, such as form, ethical proof, diminution, and refining (or dwelling on the same topic and yet seeming to say something new), to become a master ironist. In "Henry Fielding, the Novel, and Classical Legal Rhetoric" McClish suggests that Fielding's major novels are marked by a tension between two opposing attitudes toward legal, or forensic, rhetoric: the exuberant confidence with which the narrators rely on it, and the wariness and pessimism with which the same rhetorical procedures are presented within the mimetic world of the stories themselves. This conclusion is significant both in guiding our response to the novels and in enriching our understanding of eighteenth-century culture in general.

As Brian Vickers shows in "Rhetoric and the Modern Novel," traditional rhetorical criticism remains a valuable tool for the interpretation of modern literature, for "rhetorical devices figure in every episode of *Ulysses*." It is important to note, however, that while literary criticism often unfolds from rhetorical principles, the process can work the other way as well. The last essay in this volume, "The Range of Rhetoric," shows how this can happen. Here Burke begins with Milton's *Samson Agonistes* to develop his ideas about "identification," one of the key concepts in modern rhetorical theory, in which speakers and writers join their interests as a unifying rhetorical procedure in the face of the divisions of interest in our world that make communication necessary in the first place.

The essays reprinted in this volume have been selected for a variety of reasons. Each is a "landmark" in its field, either in terms of the content it conveys or the methodological paradigm it develops. Within these parameters, however, I have made a special effort to choose essays that reflect the rich variety of work in this area. Some are more theoretically oriented, while others become exercises in practical criticism. Some cover well-trod ground, while others turn to parts of the rhetorical tradition that are often overlooked. The oldest dates back almost 75 years, the newest but 3, so that a reader who so desires could also follow the relationship between rhetoric and literature as a field of scholarly inquiry by rearranging the essays in the order in which they were originally published, an endeavor which would be assisted by reference to the accompanying bibliography.

Although I hope that scholars in the field will benefit from having this material collected together and reprinted in one volume, the essays included here should also be useful to graduate students and advanced undergraduates, who might find them helpful for course work and general reading. Students of rhetoric seeking to understand how the principles of their field extend into other forms of communication should find this volume of interest, as should students of literature seeking to refine their understanding of the various modes of literary criticism. And in a scholarly environment marked not only by divisions between departments of speech

communication and (say) English, but even by divisions between scholars of literature and composition within the same English department, I hope that the essays collected here might remind all those interested in language and how it is used of what we have in common.

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## by Charles Sears Baldwin

### *A. The Pervasiveness of Rhetoric*

The Aristotelian distinction of poetic from rhetoric has been sometimes blurred, sometimes ignored, by criticism. Such confusion as thus arises became more common in ancient criticism with the waning of ancient art; it was widespread in the middle age; it has reappeared many times since the Renaissance.[1] For consistent development of poetic as a technic distinct from rhetoric is beyond the occasion of most criticism, whether ancient or modern. At an ebb tide of creation especially, the average critic is likely to confine his observations to style; and there the two technics have much common ground. Even in criticism of composition we have seen often in our own time such familiar terms as unity, emphasis, and coherence restricted to their rhetorical definitions, and yet imposed in these senses on composition whose actual control was quite different. The unity of the *Ancient Mariner*, for instance, has been interpreted as the logical control of the proposition "He prayeth best who loveth best," though surely that composition was unified quite otherwise. Or the term coherence is permitted to suggest that the progress of Burke's speech on *Conciliation* from paragraph to paragraph is like the progress of *Othello* from scene to scene, though the two technics have little resemblance. Such warping of poetic has sometimes been even urged by ancient or modern schoolmasters and text–books. It has seemed thrifty to make Molière, for instance, exhibit those principles of composition which pupils must use in writing essays upon him. But even without such pedagogical perversion it is easy to think of poetic in terms of rhetoric; for rhetoric is in everybody's head.

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Reprinted from Charles Sears Baldwin, *Ancient Rhetoric and Poetic, Interpreted from Representative Works* (New York: Macmillan, 1924), pp. 224–47.

It was so much more a preoccupation of ancient thought that the conception of poetic as a distinct movement seems to have become less and less active. Though a few critics, even under the Empire, held the Aristotelian distinction, generally ancient poetic was more and more warped toward rhetoric. With rhetoric determining education, with even Cicero and Tacitus discussing poetic as contributory, with the later *declamatores* habitually blending the two, with even poets yielding to the common tendency, poetic could hardly be conceived often as a distinct movement of composition. While Vergil's art revealed a critical conception unknown to Seneca and Lucan, Horace could repeat Aristotle without following his distinctive idea. Cicero and Tacitus, best of Latin critics, naturally contemplate in poetic rather its imagery than its movement;[2] and Quintilian,[3] even more naturally, explores only its treasures available for orators. That ancient criticism never lost the Aristotelian distinction altogether appears in the anonymous and undated *De sublimitate*[4] and in a few of the many words of Dio Chrysostom;[5] but Plutarch's poetic is indistinguishable from rhetoric.

## *B. Criticism from Grammarians*

The overwhelming preponderance of rhetoric in critical thought followed naturally from the dominance of rhetoric in education.[6] Formal schooling in poetic, what we now call primary instruction in literature, began with *grammaticus*,[7] and he was committed in advance to preparing his boys for their studies in rhetoric. With his task of inculcating correctness in reading, speaking, and writing were associated his lectures (*praelectiones*) on the poets. Though these may often, given the highly selected group of students, have done much for appreciation of literature, they can hardly have ranged far in poetic. *Grammaticus* probably confined himself in most cases to what is known in French schools as *explication des textes*. Within its limits this is admirable; but given the age of the pupils and their specific object, it cannot often have gone beyond words and sentences into the poetic composition of the whole. Criticism *ad hoc*, the detailed study of a particular poem passage by passage, is a method not only necessary for schooling but valuable more widely. By sheer prevalence it must always be influential; illumination must in fact have come oftener from such interpretation than from a systematic treatise on poetry. None the less it needs more correction and extension from other forms of criticism than was usually possible in the ancient world. By itself it tends toward a pedestrian analysis of diction and toward emphasis on those aspects of poetic which are available for rhetoric.

Criticism by labels, the classifying of authors by accepted adjectives, is not, unfortunately, confined either to antiquity or to grammarians. A certain amount of criticism, apparently, must always be devoted to telling people what they ought to say. But the classifying habit seems to have been especially prevalent in ancient criticism. At any rate, the labels affixed by grammarians were widely repeated. Even so discerning a critic as Quintilian thus makes his tenth book a convenient "survey." The satisfaction of an audience in neat and recognizable characterization is given by Apuleius.

> Any speech composed by Avitus will be found everywhere so consistently perfect that Cato would not miss in it his dignity, nor Laelius his smoothness, nor Gracchus his vehemence, nor Caesar his warmth, nor Hortensius his clear plan, nor Calvus his subtleties, nor Sallust his conciseness, nor Cicero his richness. Apuleius, *Apologia*.

Each orator has the right label, as in a cram-book; and the same classifying neatness disposes of the poetic of Philemon.

> You who are sufficiently acquainted with his talent, hear briefly of his end. Or will you hear somewhat also of his talent? This Philemon was a poet, a writer of the Middle Comedy. He wrote pieces for the stage in the time of Menander, and in competition with him, perhaps not as an equal, but certainly as a rival. In these contests, I am sorry to say, he was often the winner. At any rate, you will find in him much that is piquant, plots neatly woven, recognitions clearly unfolded, characters adequate to the action, thoughts approved by experience, humor not too low for comedy, seriousness not involving tragedy. Seductions in his plays are rare; even legitimate loves are treated as aberrations. None the less he shows the perjured pimp, the passionate lover, the shrewd slave, the deceiving mistress, the interfering wife, the indulgent mother, the scolding uncle, the conniving crony, the bellicose soldier, not to mention greedy parasites, stingy fathers, and voluble harlots. Apuleius, *Florida*, XVI.

Nor was the habit confined to rhetors. It was widespread in the "three styles"[8] of oratory, in the ten canonical Attic orators, in "Asianism" versus "Atticism," in the bias of even Dionysius of Halicarnassus[9] toward classification. True, it appears generally in criticism of rhetoric, and is common enough in modern times; but in ancient criticism it amounts to a preoccupation,[10] and is more readily carried over into poetic.

Grammar in those wider reaches now comprehended in the term philology has much to contribute to the criticism of older poets. Theon, for instance, whose manual of school exercises (*progymnasmata*[11]) has come down to us from the time of Augustus, annotated with *scholia* the tragic and the comic poets. The tradition of the Alexandrian grammarians included, besides syntax and exegesis, textual criticism. But such criticism depends for much of its value on science little explored by the ancients; and typically it makes little contribution to poetic.[12] By no good fortune, then, "philology and poetry went hand in hand in the ancient and classical literature of Italy."[13] The result of this companionship was not, indeed, always nor necessarily so arid and confined as the criticism of the second-century lexicographer Aulus Gellius;[14] but at most it had little range.

## *C. Criticism from Professional Public Speakers*

Not only did the prevalence of rhetoric make poetic generally subsidiary, but the prevalence of *declamatio*[15] in later teaching and practise tended actually to confuse the two. This rhetoric was itself largely poetic, largely an art of appeal by description. Sometimes carrying descriptive dialogue into a sort of oral fiction, it had no

occasion for poetic movement. The pattern of a speech sufficed as well as another where the opportunity was less of the whole than of the parts.[16] Immediate popular oral effects were then, as now, gained rather by stinging epigrams and dramatic realizations than by any onward course. The poetic that shall win a crowd on the spot is more likely than the poetic that shall be savored by individual readers to be sensational. Sensational in fact it was commonly, to judge by examples ranging all the way from Seneca's *Controversiae* well into the Christian centuries.

Even those rhetors who were not sensational in their own practise were little more likely, in a time of such preoccupations, to conceive poetic distinctively; and rhetors purveyed, among other things, literary criticism. Besides teaching and exhibiting at home, the more popular rhetors traveled as occasional orators and lecturers. Though their speeches were oftenest, of course, occasional, and, when they were rather lectures, were commonly in the fields of philosophy and ethics, still professional public speakers must have purveyed, at home and on their journeys, a good deal of the current literary criticism. Where this was incidental, it need not be taken too seriously. No device of public speaking is more persistent than the flattering of an audience by literary allusions and accepted adjectives of admiration.[17] Such passages, in ancient speeches or in modern, show merely what is regarded as the right thing to say, and are almost always limited to style. But where a rhetor develops a literary topic, even for a paragraph or two, he may be as significant as any other literary critic. The particular rhetor might be a teacher of rhetoric primarily, or secondarily, or hardly at all. Though he hardly ranked as a philosopher,[18] yet he was an active purveyor of philosophy. An expert in public address, he professed a variety of considerable range. Occasional oratory of itself invites ranging in both emotion and thought. Conventional as he appears when considered merely as one of a numerous class, he might nevertheless be an outstanding individual; and even as a type he was at least accomplished and influential.

Apuleius, lively and daring enough in his narrative,[19] seems in the excerpts preserved from his oratory quite conventional. The *Florida* show certain typical *encomia*, two passages of critical labels, three long pieces on philosophy, and several of those *exordia* which traveling lecturers prepared, and still prepare, for extempore adaptation. If the Great Unknown's *De sublimitate*[20] was a public address—and its suggestiveness is strongly oral—its author rose quite above the type without losing the typical opportunity of oral criticism. One may fancy the close of that noble appeal echoing long in the ears of a rapt audience. But without any flight of fancy one may read the possibilities of ancient oral criticism in certain of the orations of Dio of Prusa, often called Dio Chrysostom.[21]

## (1). Dio of Prusa

Dio's speech known as the Olympic, and having for subtitle The Primary Conception of God, opens with a proem characteristic of the form, an introduction separable, adjustable, ostensibly impromptu, but none the less following a type. A fable of the owl—occasional oratory seems inevitably to begin with a story—leads

to other proverbs, to historical allusions, to the speaker's profession of modesty, sincerity, and homeliness. "I am just come from the Getae. Shall I tell you about this interesting people?" A rhetor's offering the choice of theme to the audience might be merely conventional; for Dio effectively recalls it by adding: "Here at Olympia, beside your wondrous statue of the Olympian, shall I not rather speak of Zeus himself?"

So is approached a discourse upon embodiments of deity in poetry and in sculpture, a lecture carefully conducted from point to point, and delivered doubtless in these words, certainly by this plan, in more than one welcoming city. Such a prepared address needed only the adjustment of the proem to the place and the occasion.[22] The lecture itself remained substantially the same. This one makes first the following points.

> The knowledge of Zeus comes through nature; men become aware of him as the nourisher of them all. To such realization is added that of poetry, of cult, and finally of the arts of painting and sculpture, not to mention the theories of the philosophers. Limiting ourselves to poetry and sculpture, let us begin (49) with Phidias, whose marvelous statue here compels our admiration. Does this statue embody deity truly?

That question was answered to the Athenians of the same generation quite differently, by a speaker less different than his conclusion, a Roman Jew of Tarsus, one Paul. Dio goes on, after an encomium of Phidias:

> Phidias might well reply that it is true to tradition as that is conceived and defined by the poets (55–57), that since we yearn for a personal divine, the human body is its best expression, and that Homer too (62) made his gods human.

There follows a comparison of sculpture with poetry (70). Though this stresses unduly, perhaps, the mere range of verbal suggestion, it makes none the less clearly a fundamental distinction.

> Again, besides this, the very conditions of working out a conception in sculpture impose one form for each statue, a form immovable and permanent, [yet] such as to comprehend in itself the god's whole nature and power; but poets may easily include in their poetic many forms and all sorts of shapes, for they add such movements or repose as they think appropriate to each moment, actions too, words, and finally, I think, the illusion of time.
>
> So (Phidias is supposed to go on) my Zeus, embodying in a single representation the typical Greek conception (74) of the ruler of an ordered world, shows him as gentle, grave, serene, as giver, father, savior, protector, and yet does not exclude his other aspects (75). Now could I represent him (78) continually hurling the thunderbolt, sending rain or stretching the rainbow, renewing battle-lust? Our art is adjusted to the immediate and clear test of actual seeing (79).

An encomium of Phidias, a *discours de circonstance*, has been made to involve two large principles of artistic theory. The first is ethical, expressing a fundamental