English 309A: An Introduction to Classical Rhetoric
Fall, 2002
Professor Michael MacDonald
Office hours (HH 255): M 12:00-1:00, W 11:00-12:00, and by appointment

According to the Ernest Renan, the French historian of religion, inventing the art of rhetoric was the “only mistake the Greeks made.” One of the central aims of this introductory survey of ancient Greek and Roman rhetoric is to reveal the injustice of Renan’s charge. In an effort to situate the emergence of rhetoric in its social and historical context, the first part of the course will examine the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy of Classical Greece (with excursions into Greek law, science, politics and medicine). With this context in mind, we will then examine the role of rhetoric in the legal, political, and educational life of the ancient Romans, who viewed the pursuit of oratory as the loftiest ideal of human existence -- and the means to a “world-empire” (Cicero). By the end of the course it will become apparent that the invention of rhetoric by the Older Sophists, far from being a “mistake,” represents one of the Prometheus achievements of Western intellectual history.


Requirements:
20% Participation (attendance, discussion, group work)
30% Class presentation (5pp.)
50% Final essay (10pp.)

Syllabus

September
10 Administration
12 Introduction to Classical Rhetoric
17 Gorgias, “Encomium of Helen”
19 Gorgias, “Encomium of Helen”
24 Plato, Phaedrus
26 Plato, Phaedrus

October
1 Plato, Phaedrus
3 Isocrates, “Against the Sophists,” “Antidosis”
8 Aristophanes, Clouds
10 Aristophanes, Clouds
15 Aristotle, Rhetoric
17 Aristotle, Rhetoric
22 Longinus, “On the Sublime”
24 Cicero, Of Oratory
29 Cicero, Of Oratory
31 No Class (conference)

November
5 Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory
7 Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory
12 Augustine, On Christian Doctrine
Guidelines for Presentations:

The purpose of the class presentations is twofold: first, to survey a wide range of essential texts in the history and theory of rhetoric, and second, to familiarize students with the special difficulties involved in presenting scholarly work in a public forum. Since your colleagues are not required to read the text under discussion (although it is hoped they will), your first task is to provide a detailed exposition of the main points of the argument; you are then asked to explore the concepts or themes that most interest you, offering an assessment of their significance for the history and theory of rhetoric (as you have come to know it). Be sure to support your exposition and argument with relevant citations from the text.

Presentations:

September
17 Isocrates, “Against the Sophists,” “Antidosis”
19 Plato, Gorgias (part 1): “Gorgias’ speech”
24 Plato, Gorgias (part 2): “Polus’ speech”
26 Plato, Gorgias (part 3): “Callicles’ speech”

October
1 Anonymous, Rhetoric ad Herennium
3 Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory (part 1)
8 Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory (part 2)
10 Augustine, On Christian Doctrine
15 Erasmus, De Copia
17 Ramus, Arguments in Rhetoric Against Quintilian
22 Wilson, The Arte of Rhetorique
24 Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding
29 Vico, On the Study Methods of Our Time
31 No Class

November
5 Campbell, The Philosophy of Rhetoric
7 Blair, Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres
12 Whateley, Elements of Rhetoric
14 Day, Bain, Hill and Hill on composition
19 Burke, Language as Symbolic Action
21 Burke, A Grammar of Motives, A Rhetoric of Motives
26 Weaver, Language is Sermonic; “The Phaedrus and the Nature of Rhetoric”
28 Gates, “The Signifying Monkey and the Language of Signifyin(g)”