English 309A: Rhetorical Theory in Classical Antiquity  
Professor Michael MacDonald  
Office hours: Wednesday and Friday from 3:00-4:30 in HH 250  
m2macdon@artsmail.uwaterloo.ca

According to 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 order to situate the origins of rhetoric in its social and historical context, we will begin by exploring the complex relationship between rhetoric and culture in Classical Greece (law, science, politics, theatre, and philosophy). With this context in mind, we will then examine the appropriation of Greek rhetorical theory by the Romans, who viewed the pursuit of rhetoric 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, far from being a “mistake,” represents one of the Promethean achievements of Western intellectual history.

Texts  
Selections from: Gorgias, “Encomium of Helen”; Plato, Phaedrus; Aristotle, Rhetoric; Aristophanes, Clouds, Lysistrata; Cicero, The Orator; Quintilian, Institutes of Oratory; Shakespeare, Othello, Antony and Cleopatra; Saint Augustine, On Christian Doctrine, Confessions

January  
4 Introduction  
6 Introduction to Rhetoric  
11 Introduction to Rhetoric  
13 Gorgias, “Encomium of Helen”  
18 Aristophanes, Clouds  
20 Aristophanes, Clouds  
25 Plato, Phaedrus  
27 Plato, Phaedrus

February  
1 Sophocles, Antigone  
3 Sophocles, Antigone  
8 Aristophanes, Lysistrata  
10 Aristophanes, Lysistrata  
15 Aristotle, Rhetoric  
17 Aristotle, Rhetoric  
22 Break  
24 Break

March  
1 Shakespeare, Othello  
3 Shakespeare, Othello
8 Cicero, *The Orator*
10 Cicero, *The Orator*
15 Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*
17 Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory*
22 Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*
24 Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*
29 Saint Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*
31 Saint Augustine, *Confessions*

Requirements

20% Weekly Responses and Participation
Write a paragraph (1 pg.) in which you offer three reasons as to why the text under discussion is important to the study of rhetoric. Be prepared to read and/or discuss your paragraph in class. Please submit your responses at the end of each class. Late submissions will not be accepted. Responses will be read but not graded; you will receive credit for completing the assignments (double spaced; 1” margins; 12 point).

30% Midterm Essay (8 pp.)
Write an essay in which you compare and/or contrast any two texts on the first half of the syllabus (from Gorgias’ “Encomium of Helen” to Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*). Do not merely summarize these works. Instead, evaluate their contribution to the field of rhetorical studies. Be sure to support your argument with relevant citations from the text. Format: 12 point; Times New Roman; 1’’ margins.

50% Final essay (12 pp.)
Write an essay in which you compare and/or contrast any two texts on the second half of the syllabus (from Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* to Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra*). Do not merely summarize these works. Instead, evaluate their contribution to the field of rhetorical studies. Be sure to support your argument with relevant citations from the text. Format: 12 point; Times New Roman; 1’’ margins.