

## Farnsworth's Classical English Rhetoric

By Ward Farnsworth

David R. Godine, 254pp, \$26.95

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Reviewed by Geoffrey K. Pullum

In classical times, all advanced learning was founded on the linguistic topics of the trivium: grammar, rhetoric, and logic. Only when those had been mastered could the student proceed to arithmetic, astronomy, music, and geometry (the quadrivium). Rhetoric is distinct from both grammar (the syntactic form of sentences) and logic (the drawing of inferences from sentence meanings). It deals neither with structure or meaning but with effect: the persuasive deployment of sentences.

The ancient Greeks and Romans developed elaborate arrays of technical terminology for talking about all three parts of the trivium. Farnsworth's book undertakes a systematic survey of classical rhetorical terminology, liberally illustrated with quotations.

The 22 figures of speech covered are: epizeuxis (consecutive word repetition); conduplicatio (non-consecutive word repetition); epimone (consecutive phrase repetition); epanalepsis (repetition at both the beginning and the end of a sentence); anaphora (repetition at the beginning of a sentence --- modern linguists use this term in a completely different sense); epistrophe (repetition at the end of a sentence or sentence-sequence); symploce (repetition at both the beginning and the end of a sentence); anadiplosis (repeating the end of one sentence at the start of the next); polyptoton (repeating a root with a different inflectional ending); isocolon (repetition of similar structure); chiasmus (reversal of structure); anastrophe (inversion of conventional order); polysyndeton (use of additional coordinators); asyndeton (omitting coordinators); ellipsis (omitting words more generally); praeteritio (saying something by saying that you will not say it); aposiopesis (breaking off); metanoia (self-correction); litotes (saying something by denying its opposite); erotema (rhetorical questioning); hypophora (asking a question and

answering it); and prolepsis (anticipating an objection and answering it).

If you knew every single one of those terms, then my compliments to you, and to your classics teacher. But it won't mean you have no use for this book, for its glory lies not just in the clear expositions of the meanings of the terms, but in the copious illustrations provided. Farnsworth has selected passages of choice, juicy rhetorical prose (and occasionally poetry) by a selection of politicians, novelists, and essayists. (I should note that they are pretty much all dead guys: page 8 has one sentence from Mary Shelley, bless her, but save that one example from *Frankenstein* I don't think I found any quotes from women at all.)

The examples are rich and chocolatey, making the book not just educative, but fun — a browsable for the shelves in the guest bedroom rather than a desk reference for the study.

One rhetorical device not mentioned in the book is exemplified in its title (I believe the Yiddish technical term for it is chutzpah): the epithet "Farnsworth's" of the title subliminally suggests that this is a major reference work from long ago by a famous senior scholar from the 18th or 19th centuries (and the 1765 cover painting of debaters in wigs reinforces this impression). But in fact Farnsworth is a young professor of law at Boston University, and the book is brand new.

Now, I am no advocate of false modesty — I say let your light shine forth rather than embushel it. But prefixing the genitive form of your surname to the title of your own book to lend it more gravitas?

Perhaps Professor Farnsworth or his publisher had seen this sort of thing on the spines of books of a certain vintage edited by modern scholars (the obvious example is *Fowler's Modern English Usage*), and imitated the device quite innocently. But it shocked me. The literary public may perhaps prefix your surname to the title of your magnum opus when you're long dead and much admired, but doing it yourself here and now looks pushy.