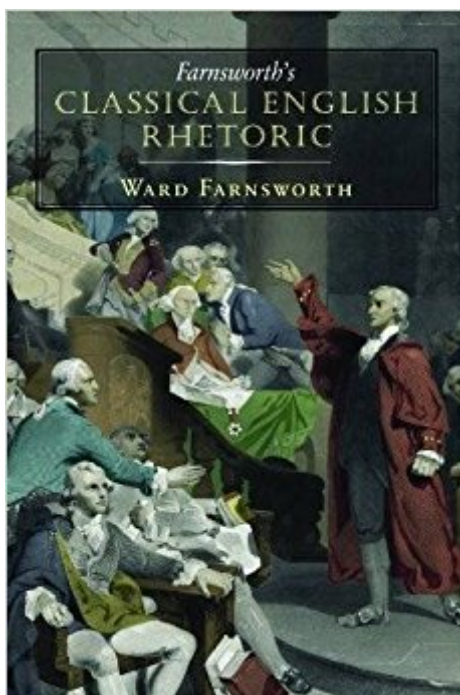


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Farnsworth's Classical English Rhetoric



Synopsis

Masters of language can turn unassuming words into phrases that are convincing, effective, and memorably beautiful. Lincoln and Churchill had this power: having heard their words once, one can scarcely imagine the world without them. What are the secrets of this alchemy? The answer lies in rhetoric, among the most ancient of academic disciplines. This book contains a lively set of lessons on the subject, a tutorial on eloquence conducted by virtuoso faculty: not just Lincoln and Churchill, but Dickens and Melville, Edmund Burke and Thomas Paine. The result is an indispensable book for the writer and the speaker, a highly useful reference tool, and a rewarding source of instruction for all lovers and users of the English language.

Book Information

Paperback: 256 pages

Publisher: David R Godine; Reprint edition (January 28, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1567925529

ISBN-13: 978-1567925524

Product Dimensions: 5.9 x 0.7 x 8.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (40 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

You know, I'm an English major, and I was NEVER treated to a course on Rhetoric. Later on, I was a law student for a short time, and there was no course on Rhetoric. Why? For centuries, Rhetoric was one of the main subjects students paid to study. Why did they pay? Because it would help them to win debates and arguments. As critics have complained for centuries, the art of Rhetoric can be (and has been) twisted into making the worse appear the better cause. But, like the two-edged sword it is, Rhetoric can make the better cause appear the only cause, and the best cause. Look to Churchill's war-time speeches, or to Lincoln's unforgettable "...that the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth." You could paraphrase that, perhaps, as "the republican system of government must survive" --- and it's instantly forgettable. Rhetoric is

the ancient and very effective way to make your words STICK in the minds of other people. If you're at all curious about this subject, you probably want to read this book. Or: "If there remains in you a drop of curiosity, one drop of that quest for knowledge which makes great men stand out from their fellows, if there remains in you even the slightest glimmer of interest in learning how to speak and persuade others, I suggest that the solution is evident." :-) Jazzed it up a little, didn't I?

There being few customer comments on this book so far, perhaps my thoughts can help other potential buyers (and readers). I read a review of this book in the Wall Street Journal. I couldn't sample it online, and so bought it on faith, with a hope that it would be educational and enjoyable. I was not disappointed. I've read several books on rhetoric, and I was familiar with some of the devices described in this book. Where it excels is in having many examples of rhetoric in action. The author's commentary is concise and quite helpful. I actually fell in love with this book from reading the introduction - a fine piece of writing on its own. I read this book with colored pencils in hand, and I'm sure I'll refer to it in the future.

Farnsworth's Classical English Rhetoric is a 'must' for any college-level linguistics library and for students interested in literary traditions and the English language. The basic elements of effective speaking and writing, patterns that lend to power, and tips for writers who would use the English language more effectively make for a fine tutorial illustrating invaluable rhetorical usage. History and modern perspectives blend in this outstanding guide!

By far the best description of rhetorical figures in English. The book is distinguished from other works by the vast repertoire of examples used to support each figure and especially by the detailed analysis of the nuances of use of particular figures. For example, the chapter on praeteritio (saying things by not saying them), rather than giving a few examples, as is typical, has about fifty. These examples are subdivided into classes depending on exactly how the figure is used, "I will not speak of...", "Never mind that", "short-lived promise", "withheld details" and so on; and there is another classification of the various purposes of the figure - e.g. to gain credit for discretion, to enhance the force of, to limit debate, or for amusement. The author carefully describes how different variants of each figure support some particular point. The examples are drawn mainly from nineteenth century sources, especially Dickens and Melville, although Churchill is frequently cited. My only minor complaint about the book is that the title is slightly more general than the contents. The book is really about Classical English Rhetorical Figures, not Rhetoric generally. There is not much on

structuring an argument generally, for instance, which is classically considered part of rhetoric. Because of the multitude of interesting examples and the fine gradations in the use of each figure, the book is fun to read or leaf through. It is produced with great care and craftsmanship overall as well.

This book is a mostly charming oddity. As other reviewers note, it is eighteen chapters, each devoted to a particular rhetorical device given both its classical name and a definition (e.g., ‘Repetition at the Start: Anaphora’). Each chapter begins with a brief description of the technique and then gives variations on examples. This then is a tremendous resource for students in a number of fields: law, communications, politics, philosophy, etc. Anyone who either writes or merely wants to appreciate, good prose would likely enjoy reading this, even if it is in effect like reading a dictionary. The oddity and charm largely comes from Farnsworth’s writing style. He takes brevity to an absolute extreme. This allows him to say much more than you might expect given the amount of text. This can lead to moments when the writing feels clipped, but that is more than offset by a surprising benefit: this severe economy lends itself to a sly, droll sense of humor as very deadpan observations are slipped in with a straight face. (I marked several places, with an eye toward quoting them here, with bookmarks that my toddler very helpfully threw away.) My one serious complaint is that as the book progresses the examples get harder and harder to follow. Farnsworth has a commitment to _classical_ rhetoric -- who, really, in the twenty-first century is named Farnsworth? -- and relies on unduly obscure examples in the later chapters that are not self-explanatory, let alone pack the punch of the earlier ones.

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