Review of:


Text published in: *Mnemosyne* 60, 2007, 495-496

Many students of the theory of ancient rhetoric focus on the works of the greatest authors, such as Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian. However, there also exist some less well known writings, which are often less easily accessible, particularly for those who do not read Greek or Latin.

George A. Kennedy, an acknowledged expert in the field, has assembled and translated four Greek treatises on rhetoric, dating from the Roman period and used in schools for many centuries, as well as some fragments from Byzantine works. The four ancient writings are: the *Exercises* by Aelius Theon (1st cent. A.D.), the *Preliminary exercises* attributed to Hermogenes (possibly late 2nd cent.), the *Preliminary exercises* by Aphthonius the Sophist (4th cent.) and the *Preliminary exercises* of Nicolaus the Sophist (late 5th cent.). Also included are selections from the *Commentary on the Progymnasmata of Aphthonius* attributed to John of Sardis (possibly 9th cent.)

As the titles and names show, this is not ancient literature meant for the general reader but for a specialized readership. The texts show us in what manner ancient pupils were trained in oral and written expression. Boys were given basic exercises with standard elements such as fable and narrative, anecdote (*chreia*) and maxim (*gnome*), refutation and confirmation, commonplace (*topos*), praise and invective, comparison, personification, description (*ecphrasis*), thesis and discussion of law. These elements, here given in a roughly ascending order of difficulty, are treated by all four Greek authors. Obviously, there are minor differences between them in terminology and nuances, but they present the theory in a roughly comparable fashion, generally from the point of view of the teacher, or in such a manner as a teacher could present matters to his pupils. All translations in this book are clear and readable, and additional information is provided in some 550 footnotes. The volume also includes a short introduction, a bibliography and a brief index.

Technical as they are, these texts allow one to imagine what it must have been like to be a student of Greek rhetoric during the Roman or Byzantine periods. Modern didactic principles such as furthering creativity or the development of personal views were not encouraged, teaching being strongly orientated towards tradition. Studying these texts on *progymnasmata* may also help to understand more of what seems typical of Greek and Roman prose and poetry in general, either non-Christian or Christian, since these early exercises influenced later writing in many genres. In this respect, Kennedy's helpful book would seem to merit an audience of more than just specialists of rhetoric. The new paperback edition of the work (a draft version of which was published in 1999) will no doubt stimulate its distribution and use.