
Reviewed by Bé Breij, Radboud University Nijmegen (b.breij@let.ru.nl)

Word count: 1249 words

Table of Contents

Few scholars will nowadays underestimate the importance of Quintilian's Institutio Oratoria. This monumental work has given rise to innumerable monographs and articles, it serves as an inexhaustible source of authoritative quotes and -- thanks to D.A. Russell's excellent annotated Loeb translation (2001) -- has finally become accessible for a broader public. It is all the more astounding, therefore, that only a few of its twelve books have been provided with commentaries. The most recent and easily the most thorough of these is the commentary on Book 2 by Michael Winterbottom and Tobias Reinhardt (hereafter W and R).

Book 2 occupies a special position within the Institutio. Its first half is a continuation of Book 1. Treating of secondary and higher education, it covers the following subjects: the different territories of grammaticus and rhetor (2.1); the importance of choosing a teacher who can boast both moral and intellectual excellence (2.2 and 2.3); progymnasmata, their purpose and the best way to teach them (2.4); collective reading of exemplary prose texts (2.5); how to prevent and correct pupils' mistakes (2.6); pupils should memorize select passages of oratory and history rather than their own compositions (2.7); how to cope with differences in aptitude (2.8); the importance of a harmonious relationship between teacher and pupil (2.9); declamation, the final stage in the rhetorical curriculum, is very useful if not too corrupted by epideictic elements (2.10); rhetorical precepts cannot be dispensed with (2.11); those who neglect them rely on their vices to create an impression of force (2.12). In 2.13, finally, Quintilian announces that he is about to provide a survey of the entire system of precepts, though with the characteristically pragmatic caveat that one should take into account what is fitting and what is expedient in every individual case. But before he proceeds to do so, he takes another eight chapters to define the concept of rhetoric and his own intellectual and moral stance, all with abundant reference to his Greek and Roman predecessors. After a brief chapter on the necessity of using the Greek term rhetorice (2.14), Quintilian defines rhetoric as 'the science of speaking well', endowing it with a strong moral component and rather playing down the element of persuasion (2.15). Grappling with manifold objections, mostly from philosophers, he contends that rhetoric is useful (2.16) and that it is an ars (2.17); it is practical, but has some theoretical and poetical aspects (2.18); its teaching is an indispensable complement of nature (2.19); rhetoric is a virtue (2.20). 2.21, the final chapter, treats of the material of rhetoric ('everything that is subjected to it for speaking') and thereby builds a transition to Book 3, which deals with invention.

The commentary originates in W's unpublished doctoral thesis (1970). It has been thoroughly revised, R concentrating on chapters 2.14-21 and W on chapters 2.1-13 and the non-technical aspects of 2.14-21. Thanks to what the authors describe as a 'happy and fruitful collaboration'
(v), the book reads as a harmonious joint product right down to the last page. After a brief preface (v), we find a bibliography (ix-xxii) that is rich but not overloaded (works that are cited only occasionally in the commentary are given references ad loc.). The introduction (xxiii-xxiv) is extensive and, doing justice to the character of Book 2, divided into two parts. The first, dealing with 2.1-13, is by W. After a rather short piece on Quintilian and his Institutio (xxiii-xxiv), W's main concern is with the actual teaching of rhetoric (xxiv-xxx), as it can be subdivided in listening, writing and reading. The last part of his introduction, Quintilian and Theon (xxx-xxxiv), investigates differences and similarities between the two rhetors' programmes of progymnasmata, involving for the first time the Armenian translation of Theon's work,2 which provides much additional information.

R's introduction to the second part of Book 2 gives its programmatic character a historical context. With contemporary criticism of rhetoric on the one hand and the detrimental activities of the delatores on the other, Quintilian makes a stand for rhetoric by giving it a moral foundation that is essentially stoic. Cato's famous definition of the orator as a vir bonus dicendi peritus, originally denoting old-fashioned Roman aristocratic values, is given a new meaning to this effect, as R. convincingly argues.

The Latin text (1-34) is preceded by a list (li-lii) of 32 changes from W's OCT (1970). Very few of these seem unnecessary (e.g. 2.16.5 in iis > his qui philosophorum nomine male utuntur); most are great improvements, some are treasures (e.g. 2.6.5 brevia > praevia quaedam demonstranda vestigia). All changes are clearly accounted for in the commentary, where we find yet more textual problems for which adequate solutions have not yet been found. In these cases, the authors sensibly confine themselves to explaining the difficulty, offering a number of (existing) conjectures and leaving the matter open.

The commentary proper (35-394) is huge and well-organized. Each chapter of the Latin text is provided with a summary and an introduction. These introductions always resume a point made in the general introduction; they are very helpful for dealing with the commentary, which further develops and substantiates them. Of special interest are the introductions to 2.4 (progymnasmata in Theon, Hermogenes, Aphthonius and Nicolaus); 2.12 (who are the naturalists Quintilian is railing at in this chaotic chapter?); 2.15 (the finis of rhetoric: definition and goal); 2.17 (Quintilian's position in the traditional debate on whether rhetoric is an ars; his sources); 2.20 (Stoic conceptions of virtue). In the notes that follow, one finds every subject one could wish for. Textual problems, diction, grammar, style, literary texture and allusion are given ample attention. Relevant social, historical, and cultural phenomena are explained at length. But the greatest strength of the book lies in the positioning of Quintilian's Book 2 in the rhetorical and philosophical traditions, recreating time and again, with an exceptional eye for detail, the debates in which Quintilian must have engaged -- for real, with his contemporaries, and mentally, with his predecessors.

The commentary is followed by an appendix (395-401) of parallel passages in Sextus Empiricus' Adversus Rhetores, Philodemus' Rhetoric and the Prolegomenon Sylloge. This appendix reinforces the point made repeatedly in the commentary that Sextus, Quintilian and Philodemus used a common doxographical source similar to the Prolegomena. Three indexes (403-435) of Latin words and phrases, Greek words and phrases, and General, conclude the book.

Some quibbles have to occur in any review for it to be taken seriously. So let me voice my single objection, which is one I make with colleagues from departments other than classics,
and with my students in mind: on several counts, the book is not easily accessible. First, there is its prohibitive price -- we must hope that a paperback edition will become available soon. Secondly, there is no translation attached to the Latin text, 3 nor to the numerous Greek and Latin quotations in the commentary. Finally, the notes are usually quite terse and presuppose a considerable degree of familiarity with the material at hand. Some raise questions rather than answering them. Thus, e.g. at 2.17.22 'praestari' we find a reference to Inst. 12.9.6 and, in parenthesis, 'mistranslated by Austin ad loc.' This leaves one wondering what Austin wrote, why he was wrong, and what he ought to have written. Yet these are minor considerations in the light of W and R's monumental achievement, which we can only hope will prod others, or these polymaths themselves, into tackling the remaining books of the Institutio in the near future.

Notes:

3. Instead, the reader is referred to the Loeb translation.