The History of Rhetoric for the 21st Century



Monday, November 16
1–3:30pm GMT (8–10:30am EST)

Hybrid event, online and in-person at
the Institute for Classical Studies,
Senate House, London (room 261).
Please register at classics@sas.ac.uk.

The arts of rhetoric co-evolved with the world's first democracy, and for good reason: the arguments of the many were what replaced the almighty word of the tyrant.

Over the centuries, history has proved that the more the citizenry knows about rhetoric, the less susceptible it is to the manipulative words of tyrants and demagogues; the less it knows, by contrast, the more susceptible.

In this hybrid roundtable discussion, a group of leading experts in the history of rhetoric recover some of rhetoric's lost arts from the ancient to the early modern era to demonstrate the continued importance of rhetoric for understanding and navigating political language and persuasion today, including the dangers of lies and manipulation.

Schedule overview

Time	Program
13h	Welcome and opening remarks by Robin Reames
13:10–14:20	Persuasion and Its Discontents in Ancient Greek Rhetoric
14:20–15:30	Persuasive Moves from Rome to the Renaissance

Session 1

13:10–14:20 – Persuasion and Its Discontents in Ancient Greek Rhetoric

- **Why Aristotle's *Rhetoric* Matters Now,** Robin Reames, Indiana University

  Aristotle designed rhetoric as the art for arguing about human affairs, which can never be absolute or certain, only contingent and probable. Why are we so certain today, our opinions so absolute? And what rhetorical skills can help us reign in our overgrown certainty?

- **How to Resist (Unwanted) Persuasion,** Allannah Karas, University of Miami

  Ancient Greek rhetoric offers a trove of tools that were designed so we could forewarn and forearm ourselves against insidious political persuasion and manipulation. How can they help us navigate political rhetoric today?

- **On Using (and Misusing) the Past,** Giulia Maltagliati, Cambridge University

  Politicians often use historical examples and analogies in their rhetoric. Whether we know it or not, it's a practice that dates all the way back to the ancient Greek rhetorical tradition. Why is this technique so persuasive? What can the ancient practice teach us about the modern one?

- **Open forum Q&A**

Session 2

14:20–15:30 – Persuasive Moves from Rome to the Renaissance

- **Speaking Truth to Power in Ancient Rome,** Kathryn Tempest, University of Leicester

  How do you answer a powerful man who wants your money, your resources and your military support? How do you speak truth to power when power expects obedience, and when refusal carries real risks? Perhaps we can learn a thing or two from Caesar's assassin.

- **Speaking of Emotions…** Rita Copeland, University of Pennsylvania

  Since the beginning of the rhetorical tradition, emotions have been known to carry enormous persuasive power. They've also been seen as one of the easiest ways to manipulate an audience. What can the history of rhetoric teach us about emotions, both in the past and today?

- **Why We Need Women in the History of Rhetoric,** Jennifer Richards, Cambridge University

  Rhetoric began as the art that instructed male citizens how to speak persuasively in the assembly and the law courts. While this may have been the first reason women were excluded from the rhetorical tradition, it wasn't the last. Why were so few women given a role in the history of rhetoric? How can we recover more of them?

- **Open forum Q&A**

Speaker biographies

Rita Copeland is the Sheli Z. and Burton X. Rosenberg Professor Emerita in Classical Studies and English at the University of Pennsylvania. She is the author of *Emotion and the History of Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge) and the co-editor of the forthcoming *Cambridge History of Rhetoric* five-volume series.

Allannah Karas is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Classics at the University of Miami. She is the author of *Coercion, Ambiguity, and Rhetoric in Ancient Greece: The Dangers of Peithō* (Cambridge).

Giulia Maltagliati is a fellow and college associate professor in Classics at Cambridge University (Downing College). She is currently writing a book titled *Exemplarity in Attic Oratory: Time, Knowledge, and the Ethics of Persuasion* and co-editing a volume about not knowing and ignorance in the ancient world.

Robin Reames is the Culbertson Chair of Writing in the Department of English at Indiana University. She is the author of *The Ancient Art of Thinking for Yourself: The Power of Rhetoric in Polarized Times* (Basic Books) and the translator and editor of a forthcoming selection of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Princeton).

Jennifer Richards is the Chair of the Faculty of English at Cambridge University (Peterhouse College). She is the author of *Voices and Books in the English Renaissance: A New History of Reading* (Oxford) and the co-editor of the forthcoming volume *Cambridge History of Rhetoric: The Renaissance*.

Kathryn Tempest is a Lecturer in Roman History at the University of Leicester. She is the author of *Brutus: The Noble Conspirator* (Yale), *Cicero: Politics and Persuasion in Ancient Rome* (Bloomsbury), and co-editor of *Hellenistic Oratory: Continuity and Change* (Oxford).

Online forum moderated by **Anya Leonard**, co-founder and director of *Classical Wisdom,* an online platform that connects modern audiences with the literature, philosophy, and history of the ancient world. Her work focuses on making classical ideas accessible and relevant to contemporary life.