

An Epideictic Revival: Prose style for Modern Times.

This paper argues for the practice of epideictic rhetoric as a useful pedagogical tool in the modern classroom, drawing on my experiment in teaching a Greek prose composition and conversation course at a summer program in Greece. Students of advanced level (including several undergraduates) and were assigned compositions of select *progymnasmata* (which were considered a subspecies of epideictic in ancient classrooms) in Greek which they then had to perform before the class. I discuss some examples of the positive results and elucidate the pedagogical philosophy behind such a practice. Greek prose style, by the time of Demosthenes and Aristotle, had become a highly evolved art form guided by rules and trends which among other things tended to draw a hard line between what is (not) allowable in prose vs what is allowable in poetry (cf. Denniston 1952). These norms applied in particular to forensic and judicial oratory; epideictic rhetoric however was an exception where rules were looser or the consequences for breaking them were less severe. For the modern student of classical literature, the epideictic rhetorical tradition (both in handbooks and classical examples) offers a vast source of material which can be used as inspiration for creative composition exercises in a classical idiom. Epideictic has the advantages, over judicial and deliberative oratory, of a) requiring less training in ancient institutions and history, and b) providing a venue for the elaboration of mythic themes, literary allusions, poetic language, and humor, which might be foreign to the other genres. I suggest that the methods elaborated in this classroom experiment could easily be transferred to courses conducted in translation/English; however, I conclude with some reflections particularly intended to provoke discussion about the purpose of prose composition in light of recent trends and developments in classical language pedagogy, especially concerning comprehensible input (CI).

Bibliography

Greek Prose Style. Denniston, J.D. Oxford: 1952.