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# Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study (review)

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**Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study*. Foreword by George A. Kennedy. Translated by Matthew T. Bliss, Annemiek Jansen, and David E. Orton. Edited by David E. Orton and R. Dean Anderson. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1998. Pp. xxix, 921. ISBN 90-04-10705-3. \$240.50.**

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Word count: 1673 words

We live in an era that is supremely fascinated by rhetoric, both within the academy (university presses have whole series devoted to it) and outside it (two words: Madison Avenue). It may therefore be difficult for us to appreciate the fact that rhetoric has somehow never really had an easy time of it over the centuries. If not exactly kicking and screaming from the womb, it had a troublesome childhood; Plato, whatever his real feelings on the subject, cannot have been an easy wet-nurse. Over the years its fortunes have waxed and waned, above all because of the cloud of suspicion that persistently surrounds it. 'Empty rhetoric,' we hear, meaning bombast; or 'pure rhetoric,' meaning sophism. Admittedly volatile in its power and effects, rhetoric has been scanted respect at least as often as accorded honor.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, then, its stock was rather low. One would have to be a redoubtable hunter (or a trained philologist, or both) to find a good general overview of the classical rhetorical tradition. One would also have to be comfortable reading academic German as well as Greek and Latin, since this was basically only to be found either in Richard Volkmann's Teubner handbook, or (later) in Wilhelm Kroll's lengthy Pauly-Wissowa article.<sup>1</sup> Volkmann's work, which was actually first published in Berlin in 1872, indeed presents a *systematische Übersicht*; after a discussion of the meaning of 'rhetoric,' he basically treats the parts of rhetoric in turn -- first invention (subdivided according to the *tria genera causarum*, and owing much to the tradition of stasis-theory), then arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Kroll's treatment, while also partly topical in arrangement, was among the first to reach toward a historical contextualization of the ideas contributed by various ancient authors.<sup>2</sup>

Lausberg's handbook was originally published (in two volumes) in 1960 as *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik: Eine Grundlegung der Literaturwissenschaft*, and released in a second edition in 1973. The appearance of this landmark book was part of the beginning of a remarkable resuscitation of classical rhetoric and its subsequent tradition. It was not, in fact, Lausberg's first publication in this field: he had some

years earlier brought out his *Elemente der literarischen Rhetorik: Eine Einführung für Studierende der romanischen Philologie* (München 1949; a second, much-revised edition appeared in 1963). But the *Handbuch* is a much more massive undertaking, and -- despite some opinions to the contrary<sup>3</sup> -- Arnold Arens, in his foreword to the 1990 reprint of the second German edition, hails it as 'today generally recognized as the standard work.'<sup>4</sup> There still remained this problem of language: *Deutsche Sprache, schwere Sprache*, runs the proverb (a bit gleefully, one cannot help but suspect), and Lausberg's *Handbuch*, for all its merits, was even in its first edition more than nine hundred pages -- of German. English-speaking readers, then, are likely to welcome Brill's new translation of the work (though they will still have to bring Greek and Latin to the table in order to profit from Lausberg's copious examples).

Lausberg's work has been extensively reviewed, in a variety of languages (seventeen reviews are catalogued in this edition, xxiii n. 2); its reputation is already about as secure as it could be. But since this is indeed its *début* in English, I may perhaps profitably offer some observations about its form and content.

First, of course, there is the fact that this is a single volume. The original work, until the Steiner Verlag's one-volume reprint, was presented in two; the Brill edition, which is printed (characteristically) on fine heavy stock, is bulky and imposing in size, but most will probably welcome the convenience of a single binding. The work itself, like Volkmann's, begins with some preliminary remarks: Lausberg's are on the nature of *ars* generally, of *artes liberales*, and of grammar in particular. Then begins the treatment of rhetoric, which spans pages 17-503. Because Lausberg's domain is described as *literarische Rhetorik*, he follows this with a briefer section on poetics (pp. 504-551). Pages 555-595 supply a very useful bibliography (to 1973) on rhetoric, poetics, dialectic, literary interpretation, humor, and tropes, particularly metaphor and allegory. There follow (pp. 597-921) three lists of words and phrases -- Latin, Greek, and French -- that serve as a combination of terminological dictionary and *index nominum* to the work.

So much for form. The content, as I have signalled, testifies to Lausberg's abiding interest in the literary: hence, for example, his inclusion of sections investigating the relationship of the *artes liberales* to philosophy (Section 14), and of rhetoric to poetics and philosophy (Sections 34-36). His section on rhetoric, which occupies the lion's share of the text, is considered under the heads 'De arte' (Sections 44-1150), 'De artifice' (Sections 1151-1154), and 'De opere' (Section 1155). The first of these, as will readily be seen, is overwhelmingly the longest, and is minutely subdivided by topic. The presiding genius here is that of Quintilian, who most thoroughly dovetailed the Aristotelian and sophistic traditions of rhetorical precept. Hence we find chapters on the 'Materia artis,' what Lausberg calls the 'Partes artis,' and 'Exercitatio.' By *materia artis* he means the *genera causarum* and stasis-theory. Indeed, as in Volkmann, it is stasis-theory, and not the Aristotelian system of *êthos*, *pathos*, and *logos*, that structures Lausberg's approach to invention. In the second chapter, rather than discussing the *partes orationis* -- which for Lausberg means *exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio*, and *peroratio* -- on their own terms as the material of *dispositio*, he treats each of them as part of invention ([sect ][sect ]260-442), since (as he sees it) 'the temporal relationship between the phases ... is not such that they are clearly separated sequentially. Rather, *inventio* and *dispositio* are inseparably intertwined ... *Dispositio*

is especially present within *inventio*, since from the outset *inventio* follows the *partes orationis* (cf. Section 261), which in turn are a phenomenon of the *dispositio*' (Section 444). The section devoted to what Lausberg himself calls *dispositio* (Sections 443-452) occupies only pages 209-214; he does provide a handy chart (pp. 122-123) comparing numerous different authors' treatments of the *partes orationis*.

Given his confessedly literary bent, it is not surprising that Lausberg spends over 250 pages (Sections 453-1082) on *elocutio*; his treatment remains to this day the most exhaustive *catalogue raisonné* of stylistic terminology available in any language.<sup>5</sup> If you want to know where an ancient rhetorical theorist discusses *epenthesis*, *systole*, *antonomasia*, *distinctio*, *subiectio*, *sermocinatio*, or the like, this is the place to go.<sup>6</sup> This is also the place to find detailed explanations of the period and prose-rhythm.

Chapter three, 'Exercitatio,' offers an interesting array of topics, including the *progymnasmata* (Sections 1106-1139). Here too we find the section on poetics (Sections 1156-1242), which begins in good Aristotelian style with a treatment of mimesis. Lausberg, anticipating (of all people) the French narratologists, next treats what he calls 'Degrees of Directness,' comparing narrative with drama. The subsections on these two latter topics are further subdivided in more or less Aristotelian fashion, according to Plot, Character, Ideas, and Language.

The primary objection to Lausberg's work is likely to come from severe historicists. These will find fault with his smooth purée of rhetorical theory, which tends in its manner of presentation to elide differences of detail (and even, sometimes, of overall approach) in the ancient sources. A less likely, but still possible, objection might be to his characterization of rhetoric here as a fundamentally literary -- and thus written -- phenomenon, rather than *in primis* a living, oral, even dialogic one. To the second objection I would reply that Lausberg's career was above all as a professor of romance philology, teaching mediaeval and modern French literature (this edition, xx); it should thus come as no surprise that the uses, scholarly and pedagogical, that he wants to make of rhetoric are primarily literary. In response to the first, I would speculate that Lausberg, writing in another place and time, felt he could do his reader the courtesy of assuming that she had already mastered the rudimentary history of rhetoric in classical antiquity. Certainly his documentation is sufficiently exhaustive to permit the discerning reader to sort out differences in the various authors and works. In any case, from our vantage-point in the history of scholarship, the dilemma is a faulty one: we are lucky not to have to choose between historical assessments and systematic handbooks. For the latter, one could hardly do better (if one had the price of the book, which is breathtaking) than to purchase Lausberg.

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#### Notes:

1. Volkmann 1885; Kroll 1940.
2. There was also Baldwin 1924, but for a full historical treatment one had to wait for George Kennedy's Princeton volumes (1963, 1972, and 1983, summarized and revised in Kennedy 1994). Less ample, but more historically extensive, are Kennedy 1980, Vickers 1988, Barilli 1989, and Conley 1990. Insufficiently known, in my opinion, is Barthes 1988. By far the largest and most ambitious project in this genre -- organized, of course, alphabetically -- is the ongoing *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik* (Ueding 1992- ).
3. See, for example, A. E. Douglas's stern review of the first edition (Douglas 1962).
4. Translated in this edition, xxiv. Arens's tone is nothing short of panegyric: 'this [a projected third edition] intends and is able only to supplement and expand, but in no way to question, "the Lausberg". What Lausberg has written can never be revised; it can only be updated' (xxvi n. 2).
5. Though one should not, as I am fond of saying, forget the fourth book of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. One will also consult with profit Volkmann 1885:393-562, Smyth 1956:671-683, Martin 1974:245-345, and now Rowe 1997. Those equipped with a CD-ROM will enjoy making use of Lanham 1996.
6. It is amusing to note that metaphor, today by far the most elaborately studied of tropes, here receives just over six pages (Sections 558-564).

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