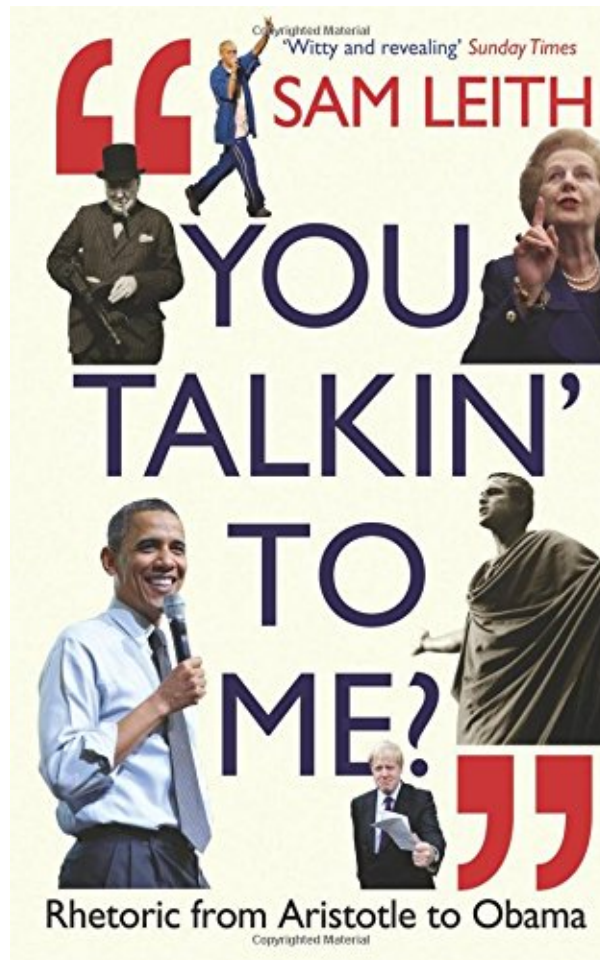
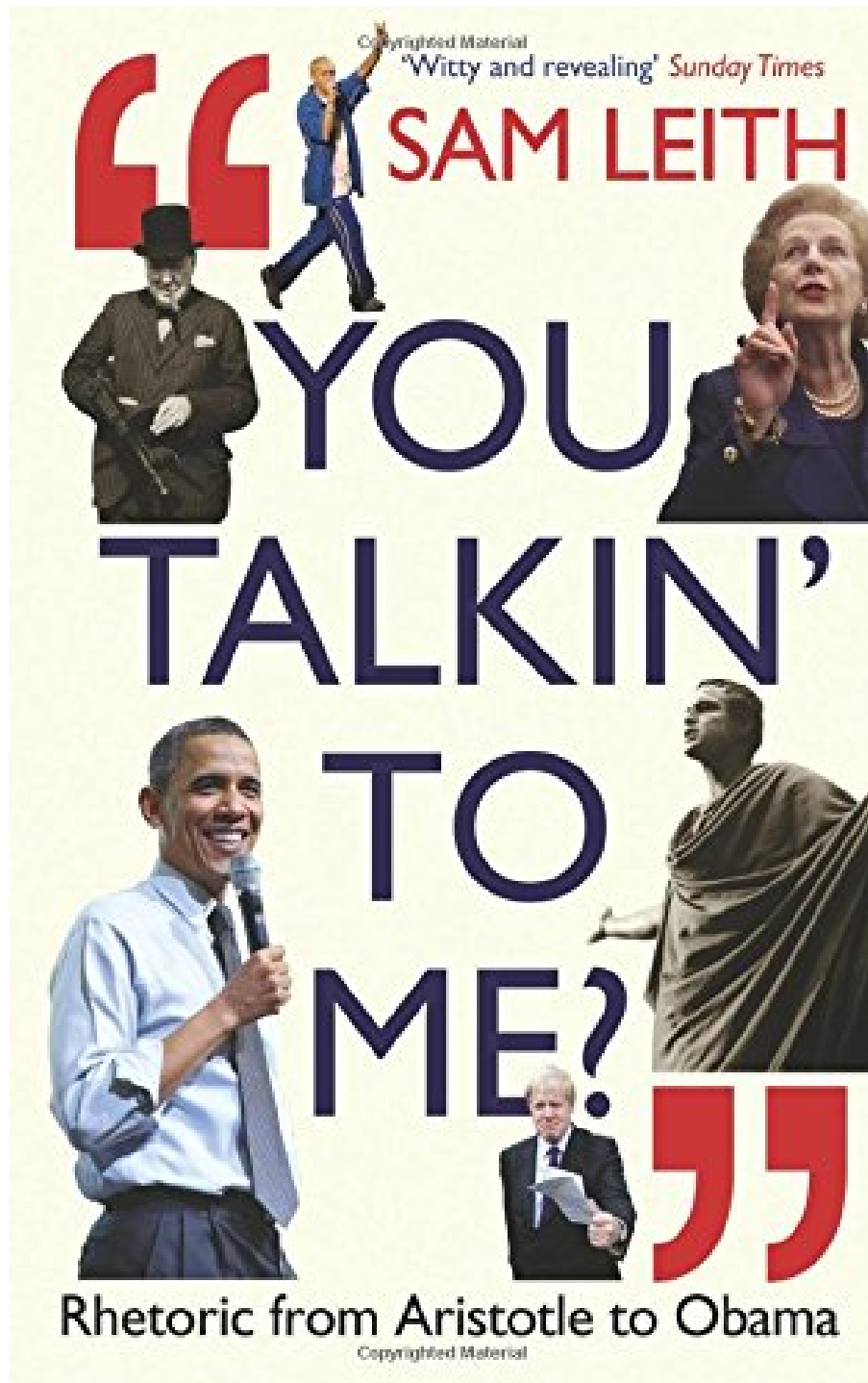


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7 of 7 people found the following review helpful.

Valuable guide to a fascinating field

By Bill Fleming

This book brings into focus an area of human endeavour you might otherwise not notice, surrounded as you are from birth to death by examples good and bad.

The vague notions we have about rhetoric are marshalled and brought into focus, never to be forgotten.

The glossary is particularly valuable, the examples amusing and apt.

Just two smallish blemishes I noticed:

"Logos" has a place of honour in the opening of John's Gospel, not the first words of Genesis.

It was Glendower, not Hotspur, who said he could summon spirits from the vasty deep. Hotspur pooh-pooed the claim.

13 of 16 people found the following review helpful.

GREEKS, ROMANS AND BLOKES

By DAVID BRYSON

This is a very engaging and readable book, really quite scholarly too, on a subject that does not deserve to be considered dry and academic, or not dry anyway. Rhetoric is all about verbal communication, and although not all such communication amounts to rhetoric Sam Leith is right in saying that we all talk more rhetoric than maybe we think we do. I just regret that he helped himself to a familiar but specious analogy with prose right at the start. With all respect to Moliere, we do not go around speaking prose, unless we happen to be Henry James or de Gaulle. Germaine Greer made the point admirably when she said that lecturers speak prose, but only when lecturing. Otherwise they talk ordinary talk like the rest of us. And while I am in niggling mode I suggest that what Sam has to say about poetry on pp125/6 is not about poetry at all, even if he gets the thought from Auden. It is about verse. Poetry is on another page altogether, beautifully and simply described by Housman (in prose of course, this being a lecture on Swinburne) as 'a tone of voice, a way of saying things'. Indeed, although the great Attic orators were obsessive about avoiding runs of three

short syllables they did not seem to mind, perhaps even not to notice, that they were sometimes turning out half or even whole hexameter lines in the course of socking it to the great unwashed in the agora. Rhetoric can be found in prose or in verse, verse can be found in prose, and poetry is a different sort of entity altogether, cropping up wherever the inspiration alights.

The point about the metrical lines in prose comes from *History and the Homeric Iliad* by the late Regius Professor of Greek at Cambridge, Denys Page. It comes surrounded with terrifying erudition, but the discovery has a schoolboy enthusiasm about it, and that is something that this book shares with it in a minor way. The structure of the book derives from Cicero, Quintilian and a volume once thought to be by Cicero and known as *Ad Herennium*. These works are handbooks, but Sam is not (or I think not) concerned to write another of those. He is convinced of the importance of his subject, for what it amounts to so am I, and he is turning out his own book of rhetoric to persuade us of this. His Latin authors form one axis that his book is built around, but Aristotle is another, and one of Sam's prejudices shines through strongly when he touches on this great philosopher. Sam can't help contrasting him with Plato, and if he had said that Plato could shove his everlasting verities I would not have been surprised. Sam is not with Bertrand Russell in thinking Aristotle pedestrian; he loves him for being down-to-earth.

This attitude of mind will likely decide how well you like this book. It is the reverse of the coin, the author's lively and infectious enthusiasm being the obverse. Simply, you may or may not like the blokishness of the style, whatever its foundation in ancient rhetorical theory. Myself, I shall give it a pass without going so far as to come down in its favour. I'll put up with it for the sake of the freshness and enthusiasm that it betokens. There is also a point to be made about memory somewhere in a review, because Sam Leith places not a little stress on it. He takes the ancients' concept of memory uncritically, but to me this does not even make sense. The ancients viewed memory as some kind of separate entity from what is remembered, rather like 'the mind' in Ryle's *Concept of Mind* - a sort of ghost in the machine. As I say, I can make no sense of this. The best definition of memory that I know is Richard Robinson's 'remembering is knowing and not forgetting'. The 'memory' can be 'trained' in much the way we can train ourselves to notice things, but in either case this is just a matter of forming a habit. On this view 'memory' is hardly more than a convenient abstraction and manner of speaking, like 'the mind' or 'the soul'. Memory as a genuine entity belongs in the world of ROM and RAM.

Any inaccuracies that I noticed are too minor to mention in a short review, even the strange word 'sublunary', which I suppose might be a compositor's divine afflatus anyway, if they still have compositors these days. The list of contents is admirably and unusually clear, there are footnotes (I should hope so too), and there is a glossary with as much clarification as is required in any given instance of the Greek and Latin terms. I am not attempting to assess this book as if I were reviewing in some academic publication. I would not be competent to do so, but more to the point the book is clearly - indeed aggressively - non-academic in its approach. Sam Leith is practising what he preaches and trying to interest a wider public in something they damn well ought to be better informed about. Speaking as a member of the said public I found the book instructive, entertaining, independent-minded and valuable. Does that amount to a recommendation? Not half; all the way; you said it, et cetera, as they say in the Classics.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

At last the tools and tricks are all back in one place!

By John Steward

When you hear a sound bite and you know something is very fishy, this book will help you identify where the stink comes from and what manner of fish it is.

This is an important book in that illuminates the techniques of the art of persuasion. Rhetoric sounds like an

ancient topic and it is. Leith uses Aristotle and Cicero to make some of his points while Homer Simpson gets his chance as well. Persuading people is certainly ancient but we have forgotten that there are specific named tools and techniques that previous generations recognized and used with great skill.

Leith identifies these techniques and tools so it won't be pure luck when we get our point across. I'm giving this to my nephew who is a trial lawyer although I'm debating sending a copy to my daughter. She doesn't need any additional help on this front. (-;

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