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Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry

Professor Brian Vickers

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Back in print after 17 years, this is a concise history of rhetoric as it relates to structure, genre, and style, with special reference to English literature and literary criticism from Ancient Greece to the end of the 18th century.

The core of the book is a quite original argument that the figures of rhetoric were not mere mechanical devices, were not, as many believed, a "nuisance, a quite sterile appendage to rhetoric to which (unaccountably) teachers, pupils, and writers all over the world devoted much labor for over 2,000 years." Rather, Vickers demonstrates, rhetoric was a stylized representation of language and human feelings.

Vickers supplements his argument through analyses of the rhetorical and emotional structure of four Renaissance poems. He also defines 16 of the most common figures of rhetoric, citing examples from the classics, the Bible, and major English poets from Chaucer to Pope.

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