

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have always found speeches somewhat embarrassing. From family gatherings (with all those awkward toasts) to presidential addresses, speeches force a person into spotlight and such close scrutiny is weird, unusual, potentially embarrassing and hard to bear out with grace. For all the same reasons, they can be difficult to listen to. And of course, the harder the challenge the sweeter are the rewards that one can reap from a successful performance. Speeches can make or break careers, communities and countries. I have long been fascinated by our continuous love for speeches and by the fact that we are willing to put up with so many embarrassing exemplars to experience one that will capture the moment, express our collective feelings and give perspective and direction to our everyday lives. How does that work? This book presents my first sustained efforts at approaching the ever-complicated field of rhetoric and persuasion. It seemed best to start my search with fourth-century BCE Athens, when ideas of rhetoric and its demarcation from philosophy and other discourse became topical in a way that may prove helpful to us, as we are constantly addressing and renegotiating these same dynamics. In fact, I am increasingly of the opinion that the still widely oral culture of the ancient world has many useful insights to offer us and our text-centered existence, especially as we are entering a new era of oral culture with its own technological advancements.

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