



Words Like Loaded Pistols: Rhetoric from Aristotle to Obama

By Sam Leith

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Words Like Loaded Pistols: Rhetoric from Aristotle to Obama By Sam Leith

Rhetoric is all around us. It's what inspires armies, convicts criminals, and makes or breaks presidential candidates. And it isn't just the preserve of politicians. It's in the presentation to a key client, the half-time talk in the locker room, and the plea to your children to eat their vegetables. Rhetoric gives words power: it persuades and cajoles, inspires and bamboozles, thrills and misdirects. You have been using rhetoric yourself, all your life. After all, you know what a rhetorical question is, don't you?

In *Words Like Loaded Pistols*, Sam Leith traces the art of persuasion, beginning in ancient Syracuse and taking us on detours as varied and fascinating as Elizabethan England, Milton's Satanic realm, the Springfield of Abraham Lincoln and the Springfield of Homer Simpson. He explains how language has been used by the great heroes of rhetoric (such as Cicero and Martin Luther King Jr.), as well as some villains (like Adolf Hitler and Richard Nixon.)

Leith provides a primer to rhetoric's key techniques. In *Words Like Loaded Pistols*, you'll find out how to build your own memory-palace; you'll be introduced to the Three Musketeers: Ethos, Pathos and Logos; and you'll learn how to use chiasmus with confidence and occultation without thinking about it. Most importantly of all, you will discover that rhetoric is useful, relevant – and absolutely nothing to be afraid of.

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Editorial Review

Review

Salon

“Delightful and illuminating.... *Words Like Loaded Pistols* sports a fabulous assortment of examples of time-tested rhetorical gambits in action.... The marvel is not that the old techniques still work, but that we ever persuaded ourselves that we could do without them.”

Publishers Weekly

“Timed for a presidential election year, this sassy, smart book outlines and illustrates nearly every rhetorical trope and flourish related to the art of persuasion....Leith can be fiendishly entertaining.”

Kirkus Reviews

“Leith brings to life a forgotten but eternally essential subject.... Leith uses every tool in the rhetorician's arsenal to argue for rhetoric's continuing relevance.... Readers will gain a great deal of insight into how humans use communication to get what they want....the book fulfills Cicero's three objectives of rhetoric: ‘to move, educate, and delight.’”

The Guardian (UK)

“A highly entertaining and erudite whisk through the subject [of rhetoric].... It's not hard to agree that a little rhetorical knowledge is a wonderful thing, and Leith's work will indeed prove instructive as well as entertaining to those called on to speak in public.”

Telegraph (UK)

“This requires more than a cursory glance to appreciate its genius properly, but Leith's great gift is the ability to plunder the everyday to illustrate the rarefied...He describes the development of rhetoric beautifully, and even after the most cursory dip into this, you begin to hear the world in a completely different, illuminated way.”

Metro (UK)

“Riveting.... Leith makes the classical techniques of rhetoric irresistibly accessible.”

Professionally Speaking (blog)

“A magnificently entertaining romp through the intricacies of classic rhetorical technique from Aristotle to Obama.... The genius of the book...is the irreverent and humorous range of examples he calls on to illustrate rhetoric in action.”

The Week (UK edition)

“Leith is good on tropes and registers and equally good at picking apart speeches — as his subtitle says, *From Aristotle to Obama* — to show us how they work.... [he] is good, too, on the structure of political speeches.”

Spectator (UK)

“Elegant, concise and frequently very funny.”

Independent (UK)

“Engrossing.... When it comes to Obama, Leith's scrutiny is painstaking and he is especially illuminating on Obama's debts to Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King.”

The London Evening Standard (UK)

“In this entertaining work of scholarship, Sam Leith revives the powerful discipline of classical rhetoric.... Leith is a gifted listener, and will not only tell you that ‘Friends, Romans, countrymen’ is a swelling tricolon but also which power ballad's opening bars it most resembles (AC/DC's Back in Black: ‘DUM! DUH-dum! DUH-dum-dum!’)”

The Observer (UK)

“Leith attempts to reclaim rhetoric with a breezy book that sprays around examples from history, politics and popular culture to outline the building blocks of public speech, flitting happily from Cicero to J-Lo, from Hitler to Homer Simpson.... Leith's often engaging examples lighten any sense of learning.”

The Financial Times (UK)

“It is through a welter of colloquial examples and eccentric line readings that the book really comes alive.... While the formal study of rhetoric might have collapsed under its own weight, Leith offers a slimmed-down version that is sure to enlighten.”

About the Author

Sam Leith is a former literary editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, and contributes regularly to the *Wall Street Journal*, *Prospect*, *Guardian*, *Evening Standard* and *Spectator*. He is the author of a novel, *The Coincidence Engine* as well as two works of non-fiction. He lives in London.

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