

Cambridge University Press
0521845092 - The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture
Paul Goring
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

THE RHETORIC OF SENSIBILITY IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CULTURE

The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture explores the burgeoning eighteenth-century fascination with the human body as an eloquent, expressive object. This wide-ranging study examines the role of the body within a number of cultural arenas – particularly oratory, the theatre, and the novel – and charts the efforts of projectors and reformers who sought to exploit the textual potential of the body for the public assertion of modern politeness. Paul Goring shows how diverse writers and performers including David Garrick, James Fordyce, Samuel Richardson, Sarah Fielding, and Laurence Sterne were involved in the construction of new ideals of physical eloquence – bourgeois, sentimental ideals which stood in contrast to more patrician, classical bodily modes. Through innovative readings of fiction and contemporary manuals on acting and public speaking, Goring reveals the ways in which the human body was treated as an instrument for the display of sensibility and polite values.

Paul Goring is Senior Lecturer in British Literature and Culture at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology. He has published in journals including *Representations*, *The Shandean*, *Literature and Theology*, and *Word & Image*, and has edited Laurence Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* for Penguin Classics.

Cambridge University Press

0521845092 - The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture

Paul Goring

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE RHETORIC OF
SENSIBILITY IN
EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
CULTURE

PAUL GORING



Cambridge University Press
0521845092 - The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture
Paul Goring
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge, CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Paul Goring 2005

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2005

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typeset in 11/12.5 pt Adobe Garamond [PND]

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 521 84509 2 hardback

Cambridge University Press

0521845092 - The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture

Paul Goring

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

For Jan and Mike Goring

Cambridge University Press

0521845092 - The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture

Paul Goring

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Of bodies chang'd to various forms, I sing.

Ovid, *Metamorphoses*
trans. John Dryden (1693)

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
Introduction	I
1 Spectacular passions: eighteenth-century oratory and the reform of eloquence	31
2 Bodies on the borders of politeness: ‘Orator Henley’, Methodist enthusiasm, and polite literature	60
3 Thomas Sheridan: forging the British body	91
4 The art of acting: mid-century stagecraft and the broadcast of feeling	114
5 Polite reading: sentimental fiction and the performance of response	142
Epilogue	182
<i>Bibliography</i>	202
<i>Index</i>	214

Preface

This is a book about bodies – about the eloquence of bodies and their capacity to express symbolically the values of a particular culture. The ‘rhetoric of sensibility’ under scrutiny here, then, is a bodily rhetoric. It is the passionate, emotional language of the body which came to be esteemed in British society in the mid eighteenth century, and which has since been regarded as one of the key markers of that period’s culture (or often ‘cult’) of sensibility. I have aimed to illuminate the relations between this powerful bodily rhetoric and notions of politeness which were developing in Britain at the time. The body, I suggest, came to be invested with new representational functions as a medium for the emblematisation or performance of modern politeness.

The development of new protocols of bodily behaviour was a widespread and multifaceted eighteenth-century enterprise taking place within a range of different cultural arenas. To capture that breadth I have cast my net wide, and the book therefore presents a large number of characters – orators, elocutionists, rhetoricians, actors, acting theorists, novelists, and others – whose various contributions to eighteenth-century culture involved some form of shaping of, or commentary upon, bodily eloquence. These include the very familiar, such as David Garrick, Samuel Richardson, and Laurence Sterne, together with figures who are less well known today, such as Thomas Sheridan, Aaron Hill, and Richard Graves. I hope that by making the study wide-ranging I have not sacrificed too much in terms of depth.

I have published articles on the ‘body projects’ of several of these figures before, and some of that work appears in a revised form here. An early version of Chapter 3 appeared in *1700-tallet: artikler om språk, litteratur, musikk og estetikk* (Kristiansand: Høyskoleforlaget, 2000). Part of Chapter 4 began life as a paper for a National Early Music Association conference on ‘Mime and Gesture in the Eighteenth-Century Theatre’, and was subsequently published in the Association’s journal, *Leading Notes* 13 (1997). An

earlier form of much of Chapter 2 appeared in *Literature and Theology* 15:4 (2001) – I am grateful to Oxford University Press for allowing me to reproduce the material here.

Many other debts of gratitude have mounted up during the several years the book has been in the making, and I am pleased to be able to acknowledge the main ones here. Firstly, I must thank Linda Bree at Cambridge University Press for her initial interest in the project and for her guidance and enthusiasm throughout the writing process. Thanks are also due to the two anonymous readers assigned by the Press who have patiently endured drafts of the book and have given me invaluable advice on how to improve it. For making the production process agreeably smooth, I am grateful to the team at Cambridge University Press, as well as to Pauline Marsh, who copy-edited the typescript, and to Susan Forsyth, who produced the index.

Research for the book began at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, where I benefited from help and support of various kinds from, amongst others, Ian Bell, David Shuttleton, Andrew Hadfield, Francesca Rhydderch, Chris McNab, Claudine Conway, and particularly Shaun Regan and Brean Hammond, both of whom have given useful advice on sections of the book and have been more helpful over the years than I suspect they realise. Base-camp for the writing has been the English department at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim. I am grateful to my colleagues Jeremy Hawthorn, Domhnall Mitchell, Ruth Sherry, and Eli Løfaldli for showing a keen interest in the project, for tolerating my less than avid interest in departmental matters during phases of writing, and to Jeremy, for his constant willingness to read drafts, explore problems, and lend friendly advice. I must also thank those who hold the purse strings at the Humanities Faculty at Trondheim – a body which has been remarkably generous in funding trips to research libraries in Britain and America. Thanks too to the many helpful staff at the British Library, the National Library of Wales, the university libraries in Cambridge, Aberystwyth, and Trondheim, and particularly the Huntington Library – in the balmy environment of the Huntington, the final stage of writing proved to be a great pleasure. Among other friends and scholars who have provided help of various kinds, I must thank Tom Keymer, Peter de Voogd, Aileen Douglas, Angela Rosenthal, Peter Miles, Juan Pellicer, David Noy, Andrew Biswell, Susan Deacy, Deanne Williams, Robert Hamm, Paulina Kewes, Bjørg Hawthorn, and Robert Jones.

My research trips to London have been helped and always made enjoyable by my many good friends there, particularly Claire, Hugh, Julia, Liz,

Cambridge University Press

0521845092 - The Rhetoric of Sensibility in Eighteenth-Century Culture

Paul Goring

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

xi

Luisa, Malcolm, Mary, Matthew, Penny, Tim and Tom. Tone Midtgård has been delightfully supportive and distracting throughout the writing, and the two dedicatees have been splendid parents since long before I started this project. I am grateful for their encouragement throughout, and am very pleased that ‘Any news of the book?’ is now, finally, a redundant question.