

Biography of Quintilian

Name: Quintilian

Birth Date: c. 35

Death Date: c. 99

Place of Birth: Calagurris, Spain

Nationality: Roman

Gender: Male

Occupations: rhetorician

Quintilian

Quintilian (ca. 35-ca. 99) was a Roman rhetorician and literary critic. His influence on rhetoric, literary criticism, and educational theory was profound.

Quintilian, or Marcus Fabius Quintilianus, was born at Calagurris in Spain, the son of a rhetorician. He studied mainly in Rome, under the orator Domitius Afer and perhaps the great grammarian Remmius Palaemon, among others. He then went back to Spain, probably as a teacher in his hometown, and returned to Rome in 68, the only certain date in his life. As a teacher of rhetoric, he became wealthy and famous from his lectures and was also an advocate in the law courts. Under the emperor Vespasian he was made a professor of rhetoric with a salary from the state. Among his pupils was Pliny the Younger.

At some time, probably in the early 80s, Quintilian married a very young woman. She died at the age of 18, after giving birth to two sons, who soon died as well. After 20 years of teaching, perhaps in 90, Quintilian retired and devoted himself to writing. Sometime after this, but before Domitian's death in 96, Quintilian was appointed by him as tutor to his two grandnephews; and through the influence of their father, Flavius Clemens, he received the insignia and privileges of a consul. The date of Quintilian's death is uncertain: Pliny the Younger, writing about 100, speaks of him in terms which suggest that he was already dead.

His Work

Only one work of Quintilian's has been preserved, the *Institutio oratoria* (On the Education of an Orator) in 12 books, composed about 92-96, the distillation of his long and successful career as a teacher. It treats of the education of an orator, beginning with the most elementary education. Book 1 sets the tone of the whole collection: it is moderate and practical, based on long experience with the actual behavior and psychology of children and careful attention to the smallest details of pedagogical practice. Book two treats of the more advanced education of the orator, and books three through 11 are more technical, dealing with the structure, argumentation, style, and delivery of orations.

Book 10 contains a discussion of the relative merits of the great Greek and Latin authors which has exercised a profound influence on subsequent literary criticism. Book 12 is based on a deeply moral conception of the importance of character as well as learning to the orator and of the necessity for the style to be appropriate to the subject; it rounds out the work on an impressive note of grave dignity.

A complete text of Quintilian was rediscovered in the early 15th century. His educational aims, based on Cato the Elder's definition of an orator as "a good man, skilled in speaking," and looking toward the education of literate, humane, well-rounded, and useful citizens, were congenial to the ideals of the Renaissance.

Two further works, collections of declamations, survive under the name of Quintilian, but the fantastic nature of many of their subjects, an abuse specifically attacked by Quintilian, has led most scholars to dismiss them as spurious.