

Peter Mack:

*Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice*

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This admirably unified study aims to explore how rhetorical training, provided by grammar school and university education, promoted in pupils and students compositional and interpretive skills, which influenced the verbal activities of the Elizabethan élite. Mack seeks to demonstrate the impact of such “communicative expectations” (p. 3) in an array of textual material, from everyday writing, which has not previously received much scholarly attention, via more familiar popular genres to political and religious writing. His hope is that an understanding of this communicative context, established by an everyday experience of verbal analysis and composition, may contribute to the history of reading and writing, and be of use both to the historian and the student of literature. By demonstrating continuities between grammar school and university education, practical use of language, and artistic forms of writing, the study aims to provide both disciplines with tools for understanding texts and contexts, and to contribute to the abolishment of the perceived borders between literary and social/political history. Mack thereby places his study in a tradition of exploring the broader culture of verbal practices, as represented by scholars such as David Norbrook, Kevin Sharpe, and Quentin Skinner (p. 7).

The book is divided into eight chapters, the first two of which describe the rhetorical nature of grammar school and university education by extracting the rhetorical skills encouraged in these institutions, and which pupils and students were expected to acquire. Chapters three through eight demonstrate the impact of these rhetorical skills on the subsequent verbal activities of the beneficiaries of such education.

The introduction (pp. 1-10) explains how shared communicative expectations defined and unified the Elizabethan élite by establishing frameworks for expression in a variety of personal, social, and political situations, so-called “zones of exclusion” (p. 3), the mastery of which became the key to membership. The embryonic social mobility made possible by the humanist reform of education paradoxically entailed a pattern of social reproduction by promoting channels of recruitment which reinforced these zones of exclusion. The beneficiaries of grammar school and university education came to constitute the Elizabethan élite who subsequently produced the textual material on which Mack bases his evidence: everyday writing, English-language texts for informal moral instruction, political argument, parliamentary oratory, and religious controversy and sermons.

In the first chapter (pp. 11-47), Mack analyses the grammar school programme, its syllabus and methods of reading and composing, in order to describe the kind of literacy and cultural knowledge grammar school education encouraged. On the basis of this analysis, he deduces the rhetorical skills pupils were expected to accumulate, ranging from tools of analysis via forms of knowledge to techniques of composition (p. 32). According to Mack, grammar school education fused rhetorical and ethical training, and he argues for the interdependency between persuasion and moral beliefs in a wider social perspective.

Chapter two (pp. 48-75) describes the logical and rhetorical skills encouraged by university teaching in rhetoric, dialectic, disputation, and declamation. Due to the prestige of learning and the high age-participation rate, Oxford and Cambridge played an important part in Elizabethan England, and the future élite educated here produced the bulk of the material presented in subsequent chapters. In spite of being a more eclectic and less uniform system than the grammar school programme, official university teaching rested on a basis of Classical Latin literature, rhetoric, and dialectic. Again, Mack sees a conflation of rhetoric and dialectic, since teaching in rhetoric tended to include moral questioning and the humanist reform had focused dialectic on construction of persuasive arguments. He argues that English university teaching in dialectic represented a compromise between the syllogistic Aristotelian syllabus and the reformed, more rhetorical humanist dialectic. Mack regards university training in rhetoric and dialectic as serving primarily propaedeutic purposes of further study and reading (p. 75), and in the following three chapters he aims to demonstrate the application of this training.

Chapter three (pp. 76-102) argues that all sixteenth-century English-language manuals of style are in fact versions of one English style manual (an “archetext”, p. 84), that they correspond to grammar school and university textbooks, and that they derive from continental Latin originals. Mack regards the manuals as part of the humanist programme of rhetorical and dialectical reading and writing, because they serve the purposes of making the tools of these disciplines available in English, of expanding the usefulness of the vernacular, and of aiding the understanding of the Latin texts employed in education. The chapter then discusses the extent to which the manuals contributed to the anglicising of style. The presence, in English-language manuals, of figures that seem to find no use in the vernacular is taken to evidence the role of these manuals in confirming the reading of Latin manuals and assisting in the reading and writing of Latin texts. Other figures are seen as changing their value when transferred to an English context (figures concerning alteration of word order, for instance, would make a greater impact in English than in the highly inflected Latin). Others again are believed to influence composition in English. Mack locates the reciprocal tensions between English and Latin in the bilingual situation of the educated Elizabethan, who was educated in Latin but composed the bulk of his writing in English.

Chapter four (pp. 103-134) illustrates the impact of the skills developed in grammar school (and perpetuated in the manuals described in chapter three) on everyday vernacular writing. Close study of particular notebooks, letters, and narratives aims to show how rhetorical training in school enabled Elizabethans to perform everyday verbal tasks with practical goals. Mack claims that notebooks of various kinds reveal a preoccupation on the part of their owners with collecting material for reuse. Impressive or useful phrases and expressions were extracted from texts they read, the structure of the texts was analysed to serve as patterns for later compositions, and letters were copied down, sometimes to serve as models for imitation. Notebooks contain personal memoranda, lists of actions or arguments, and drafts of various compositions, indicating that they were also used in the planning of compositions. The writing of letters and narratives (composed as part of judicial investigations or official business) served equally practical purposes. Both are concerned with the self-presentation of the writer and the reactions of the readers, and they tend to adhere to standards prescribed by manuals employed in teaching. Mack concludes that the practical purposes of this written material reflect the rhetorical concerns of grammar school education (p. 105). The techniques of note-taking, letter-writing, and narrative-composition learned in grammar school provided Elizabethans with an arsenal of ready learning, arguments, and expressions, which could be manipulated and put to use in very practical verbal forms.

In chapter five (pp. 135-175), Mack argues that vehicles of informal moral teaching are linked through certain common features that exploit the resources and procedures of sixteenth-century rhetorical education. He selects histories such as Hall's *Chronicle* (1548) and *The*

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*Mirror for Magistrates* (1559), conduct manuals such as Elyot's *The Book Named the Governour* (1531) and Baldwin's *A Treatise of Morall Philosophie* (1547), and the romances of John Lyly (*Euphues* (1578) and *Euphues in his England* (1580)) and Philip Sidney (*Arcadia*, 1590), in which to demonstrate these common features and their close affinity with rhetorical education. Moral stories and sentences, as well as commonplace themes, provided all three genres with material for reuse. Techniques of amplification, skills relating to the writing of speeches and letters, and mastery of techniques of debate, offered methods and occasions for such re-articulation of material. In Mack's view, rhetorical teaching enabled authors of all three genres to extract, rearticulate, and present for further reuse the body of inherited subject-matter provided by grammar school and university education.

The final three chapters demonstrate the application of rhetorical and moral competency acquired through humanist education to the practical problems of political and religious life. In chapter six (pp. 176-214), Mack analyses argumentative and rhetorical procedures in various kinds of writing that record political argument. Diplomatic letters of political advice involved both analysis of situations and persuasion of courses of action, and so, too, do William Cecil's memoranda, considered next. Mack argues that both of these categories seem to rely heavily on the practices of academic disputations, as they contain lists of arguments, objections to them, and replies to these objections. He also demonstrates that such practices of academic disputations, as well as education in logic and dialectic, influenced arguments within the Privy Council, where rhetorical and dialectical skills could be employed for the furtherance of opposing positions. Mack summarises the insights presented in this chapter by qualifying the importance of logical argument in Elizabethan political debate with an emphasis on rhetorical skills of persuasion, primarily by emotional appeal: "In the prudential ethos of the administrative élite dialectical argument about practicalities played the largest but not always the decisive role" (p. 214).

Chapter seven (pp. 215-252) shares the goal of chapter six of examining "the impact of the humanist rhetorical training in practical life" (p. 215). In addition, Mack here aims to explore how rhetorical theory may further our understanding of the dynamics and functions of parliamentary discourse. Based on analyses of one first-hand text of parliamentary oratory (Sir Nicholas Bacon's speech for the opening of parliament, 1571) and journal writers' summaries of debates from 1572 (on the punishment of Mary, Queen of Scots) and 1593 (about the size and timing of Queen Elizabeth's subsidy), Mack examines the dialectical and rhetorical structure of parliamentary interventions and contributions and their stylistic features, placing special emphasis on the ceremonial and ritualistic effects towards which style may contribute. As in chapter six, he highlights the possibility of opposing views created by the practice of debate, here illustrated by parliamentary debates about free speech and honest counsel. Finally, he discusses the communicative purposes of Queen Elizabeth's addresses to parliament. Contrary to some, Mack insists that by force of the rhetorical training they received in grammar school and university education, the parliamentary élite could make parliament a place in which their verbal compositions could affect both legislation and action, establish individual positions of opposition and disagreement, and reinforce the shared identity of the political community.

Since the primary function of Elizabethan universities was to educate the priesthood, Mack includes, in the eighth and final chapter of his book (pp. 253-292), an exploration of religious discourse as an arena for the use of language and the application of humanist rhetorical education. In spite of the fact that the pagan content of classical learning sometimes conflicted with Christian ideals, and that the idea of education itself conflicted with the protestant concern with predestination, Mack argues that both preaching and contributions to religious controversy display clear influences from rhetoric, dialectic, and classical moral philosophy (p. 254). On the basis of a selection of material consisting mainly of controversies and sermons, he examines arguments about the place of preaching in reformed religion, the role of logical techniques,

logical organisation of material, and stylistic embellishment for the interpretation of the Bible, and finally the use of classical and biblical commonplaces in various religious writings. Even more important than such techniques, however, is the connection between the humanist concern with textual scholarship and reformed religion's emphasis on Bible-reading (p. 290). Mack concludes that Elizabethan religious writing was influenced by university training in dialectic to an even greater extent than was political debate, and that a connection between the two forms of writing is obvious in the sense that political writing also relied extensively on religion for moral assumptions.

In a separate "Conclusion" (pp. 293-304) Mack reorganises the nineteen skills described in chapters one and two into three categories corresponding to the rhetorical skills of invention, disposition, and style, and ends with a brief discussion of the social implications of the impact of these skills. Rhetorical methods, he argues, exerted a civilising influence on the Elizabethan élite and provided a cultural defence against absolutist tendencies. Though the moral content of grammar school and university education was sometimes in conflict, the rhetorical and dialectical training provided by that education could serve both sides of such conflicts. Mack admits that though his selection of texts seems to him to reflect these skills, his study is not conclusive: "The more important test will be whether other readers find these categories derived from Elizabethan educational practice helpful in guiding their own understanding of early modern texts" (p. 297).

*Elizabethan Rhetoric* demonstrates the impact of rhetorical education on the material selected for examination, and although most of the results of these examinations are not surprising, they are certainly convincing. I find Mack's discussion of the contradictory uses to which dialectical argumentation may be put, and the role of rhetorical cunning as decisive in such argumentation (chapters six and seven), particularly intriguing. His demonstration of the impact of rhetorical training in areas in which rhetorical cunning would be regarded as inappropriate and suspicious (chapters seven and, especially, eight) is also of great interest. Furthermore, his exploration, in chapter seven, of the ceremonial uses of style in parliamentary oratory and the political function of such epideictic, is refreshingly original. An excellent analysis of Sir Nicholas Bacon's speech as Lord Keeper at the opening of parliament in 1571 (pp. 217-224) demonstrates how a logically organised speech is connected to its celebratory occasion by balancing the practical persuasive intent of raising revenue with the ceremonial need to display the Queen's parsimony.

Mack's strongest claim to originality lies, however, in the selection of material previously neglected in the perspective of this study, such as everyday writing, histories, and romances, and in his education-based treatment of more scholarly investigated material such as political and religious writing. I also believe that the sheer mass of his evidence lends novelty, as well as authority, to the study. Paradoxically, the extensive inclusion of evidence, which is perhaps the greatest strength of the *study*, is also the greatest weakness of the *book* in terms of readability. Although some variety is ensured by the insight into social and political situations provided by the contextual analyses of most examples, Mack's amplification of evidence is prone to a certain measure of repetitiveness. On the other hand, the fact that Mack seems to write under the spell of his area of expertise, secures a clear rhetorical structure both of individual chapters and of the whole book, and does much to balance the extensive use of examples. Cross-referencing of topics, texts, and writers within the book itself is facilitated by the "General Index" (pp. 321-326), whereas any reader attracted to further investigation of Mack's primary material may rely on his comprehensive "Bibliography of printed primary sources" (pp. 305-311). Readers of a more theoretical rhetorical inclination can consult the generous "Index of rhetorical and dialectical terms" (pp. 318-320).

Appearing in the Ideas in Context series, the book is devoted to the study of rhetorical ideas in concrete contexts. As such, it contributes to the field of the history of rhetoric by consolidat-

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ing the relevance of the discipline for the fields of politics and literature. Mack's research also contributes insight into the dynamic relationship between rhetoric and dialectic, demonstrating how achievement of effects in practical Elizabethan life relied, ultimately, on rhetorical persuasion.

The self-avowed appeal of the book is broad, aiming to cater for "all those interested in Elizabethan culture, literature and political history" (dust jacket presentation) and addressing students of history and literature alike. I would have appreciated a clearer explication of this appeal, especially a more specific explication of the relevance of the study for students of literature, but Mack chooses to leave the discovery of such relevance to the reader: "I do think that Elizabethan habits of reading and ethical concerns help our understanding of Shakespeare but I shall feel more strongly confirmed in this belief if readers of this book make these connections for themselves" (p. 7). In sum, this reader feels confident in recommending this book as a safe harbour from which to embark on journeys in search of such connections.

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