
Constant J. Mews, Cary J. Nederman, and Rodney M. Thomson (editors):

Rhetoric and Renewal in the Latin West 1100-1540: Essays in Honour of John O. Ward
(Disputatio 2)

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The influence of the individual in whose honour the editors have compiled this collection permeates the volume; in different ways most of the essays were stimulated or provoked by John O. Ward's work in areas of medieval rhetoric and learning, and broad issues of medieval history. The volume is carefully organized into an Exordium and three sections each of which consists of four papers. The major divisions have the titles: "Abelard and Rhetoric", "Voices of Reform", and "Rhetoric in Transition".

The Exordium (pp. 3-34) focuses on Ward's career and contributions to the understanding of the importance of rhetoric in medieval culture. It is made up of three parts: a 'personal memoir' of Ward by Rodney M. Thomson (pp. 3-7), a bibliography of Ward's writings compiled by Rodney M. Thomson and Constant J. Mews (pp. 9-20), and an essay by Martin Camargo, "Defining Medieval Rhetoric" (pp. 21-34). This latter contribution addresses the charge that seems to haunt modern scholars of the subject, that medieval rhetoric is mainly concerned with features of style, not meaning, that it is ornamental and not substantial in its purpose. Camargo argues – on the basis of a tradition of modern scholarship by those, like John Ward, dedicated to the subject – that rhetoric needs to be broadly defined, and that its influence on medieval culture is pervasive and extends beyond how it is frequently regarded, as training in the arts of persuasion. Although the essay shows a good range of reference and critical commentary, it makes a curious omission in not mentioning Ernst Robert Curtius's *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* (first published in German in 1948 and first published in English in 1953, in Willard Trask's translation). For many, Curtius's book was the stimulus for the study of rhetoric. Also, Camargo's essay would have benefited from some fleshing out of the argument with specific demonstrations of the broad influence of rhetoric on medieval culture. The answer to this objection is that the essays that follow fulfil the task, but some acknowledgement of this strategy would have been helpful.

The first section (pp. 35-97) is focused on Peter Abelard and begins with Constant J. Mews's discussion ("Peter Abelard on Dialectic, Rhetoric, and the Principles of Argument", pp. 37-53) of how Abelard's developing insights into the nature of rhetoric itself influenced his understanding of theology, principally as regards the way in which statements in the Bible and by the church fathers were to be understood in relation to Christian truth. He argues that each statement, whether biblical or patristic, needs to be understood as the product of a context and therefore can claim only a partial grasp of the truth. Here Mews makes much of Abelard's discussion of rhetoric in his *Super topica*, and the second essay in the collection, by Karin Margareta Fredborg ("Abelard on Rhetoric", pp. 55-80), presents a new edition of this part of the text, which is a digression in an early part of Abelard's commentary on Boethius's *De differentiis topicis*. It would have been helpful if Fredborg had done more to contextualize the digression; nevertheless, the text is the only surviving instance of Abelard writing on the theory and practice of rhetoric, and for this reason alone it is useful to

have it edited separately. Peter von Moos's essay, "Literary Aesthetic in the Latin Middle Ages: the rhetorical theology of Peter Abelard" (pp. 81-97) is a translation by Peter Godman of von Moos's article published in 1993, "Was galt im lateinischen Mittelalter als das Literarische an der Literatur? Eine theologisch-rhetorische Antwort des 12. Jahrhunderts".¹ Carmargo refers to the original paper a number of times in "Defining Medieval Rhetoric", and the editors of the collection clearly felt strongly that it deserves wider circulation. Von Moos's essay is a contribution to the understanding of medieval literary theory, and argues that Abelard has a special place in this subject and that he formulated an important perspective on the value and purpose of literature. Von Moos's claim that Abelard was "one of the most significant medieval Latin poets" (p. 82) is extravagant and provocative. The statement has meaning insofar as it refers to what emerges from Abelard's theological works such as the *Sic et Non* and the *Commentary on Romans* about his understanding and use of figurative language and how this relates to interpretation and aesthetics: because the Bible uses figurative language, for Abelard the study of rhetoric is a more useful preparation for uncovering the meaning of scripture than the disciplines of grammar and dialectic. This line of argument is a familiar one to students of medieval literary theory, but it is useful to have it restated here in the context of the work of Abelard. The final essay in this section is by Juanita Feros Ruys and deals with the interplay of rhetoric in the letters of Heloise and Abelard. Ruys identifies in Heloise's "Letter 49" of the *Epistolae duorum amantium* a reflection of a general crisis in twelfth-century culture over the value of eloquence in relation to the plain style that was emerging through scholasticism. Whereas Heloise embraced the traditional view that eloquence was a tool for the expression of ethics, Abelard and scholasticism regarded the two as incompatible. Heloise's "Letter 49" shows her attempting to adopt Abelard's approach, and failing in the process. Nevertheless, it is Heloise who finally emerges victorious, for Abelard, later in his career, comes to acknowledge the value of eloquence.

The four essays that follow form the section "Voices of Reform" (pp. 113-182). These essays are less self-consciously concerned with rhetoric, but in different ways they deal with aspects of expression and the formulation of ideas and arguments. Rodney M. Thomson's "Satire, Irony, and Humour in William of Malmesbury" (pp. 115-127) shows that while William was not principally a satirist, his historical writing has a variety of textures and tones. Thomson explains this as the product of William of Malmesbury's reading, his view of human nature, and his understanding of the role of the historian. The essay is wide-ranging and engaging, well informed, and well judged throughout. Equally engaging is Michael Winterbottom's "The Language of William of Malmesbury" (pp. 129-147). This is a lively study of William's Latin usage and Latin style. Winterbottom sets the linguistic and cultural contexts of William of Malmesbury's work; his parents were of two different peoples: his father French and his mother Anglo-Saxon. Winterbottom's analysis shows that William's cultivation of the Latin language was not a compromise but a way of asserting the identity and prestige of post-conquest England on the world stage. Little has been done to investigate the language and style of the Latin prose writers of twelfth-century England. This essay is full of insights into William of Malmesbury's Latin, and makes a strong case for this as a fruitful area for research. Cary J. Nederman's essay, "The Origins of 'Policy': Fiscal Administration and Economic Principles in Later Twelfth-Century England" (pp. 149-168), is a search for an intellectual contribution from England to the renaissance of the twelfth century. It takes as its starting point the argument put forward by R. W. Southern that theorizing about the role of secular government in this period is a uniquely English phenomenon.

¹ Published in Joachim Heinzle (ed.), *Literarische Interessenbildung im Mittelalter. DFG-Symposium 1991, Germanistische Symposien Berichtsbände 14* (Stuttgart, Weimer: Metzler, 1993), pp. 431-451.

Nederman extends this hypothesis to encompass the formulation of policies for the management of economic problems and a recognition that this is a responsibility of government. The programme for exploring such a topic would be very broad indeed, and Nederman confines his study to two quite different works, John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* and Richard Fitz Nigel's *Dialogus de Scaccario*. The essay argues that what we are witnessing in the work of these writers is the emergence of the science of political economy. The final essay in the second section is "William of Ockham and the Lawyers Revisited" by John Scott (pp. 169-182), which focuses on the first book of Ockham's *Dialogus*. This is one of Ockham's most popular works and deals on a theoretical level with the issue of heresy and with the specific problem of whether it is possible for a pope to be a heretic. Scott's concern in the essay is with the first book of the *Dialogus* which addresses the authority of canonists or canon lawyers as opposed to theologians on issues of heresy, and he raises the question of why Ockham gave such prominence to this issue. Scott's argument is that Ockham was seeking to discredit the canonists as authorities on heresy and to demonstrate that this rested with theologians: he sought to replace the casuistry of the canonists with the rhetoric of truth of theologians.

The third and final section of the volume is entitled "Rhetoric in Transition" (pp. 183-258). This begins with Rita Copeland's "Wycliffite Ciceronianism? The General Prologue to the Wycliffite Bible and Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana*" (pp. 185-200). The question in the title is provoked by one special feature of the general prologue to the Wycliffite Bible: the compiler incorporated significant portions of Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* that had been taken over from Cicero's rhetoric. Wycliffite thought was hostile to rhetoric, considering it "a distorting force in language" (p. 186), but Copeland demonstrates that in effect Ciceronian rhetoric enters this Wycliffite text in disguise. The question then is whether the general prologue of the Wycliffite Bible can be considered in any way 'Ciceronian', and Copeland mounts an argument in the affirmative (pp. 199-200). The transmission to the vernacular of Ciceronian rhetorical theory in the Middle Ages is also the subject of Virginia Cox's essay, "Ciceronian Rhetorical Theory in the *Volgare*: A Fourteenth-Century Text and its Fifteenth-Century Readers" (pp. 201-225). If the number of texts and manuscripts is a measure of the extent of reception, then the evidence of vernacular translation means that Italian culture ranks first in Europe for the use of Ciceronian rhetorical material. Cox focuses on an anonymous translation of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* that derives from Tuscany, and the ways in which the text was adapted to its contemporary culture. The analysis is fascinating and the arguments persuasive; the manuscripts and texts serve as mirrors of the health of civic culture and civic government in Italy before the rise of monarchical or despotic government. James Murphy's "Rhetoric in the Fifteenth Century: From Manuscript to Print" (pp. 227-241) is principally a catalogue of the material associated with rhetoric that was printed between 1465 and 1500, that is, the incunabular period. The questions that Murphy seeks to explore are which texts and what types of texts from the manuscript tradition were chosen for publication in printed form. Murphy does not take a chronological approach but discusses the books in terms of types and genres, and provides seven major groupings: ancient rhetoric, compendia, preaching, epistolography, memory, style, and other works. At the end of the paper Murphy allows himself the luxury of what he calls "an inference" (p. 241). This contains some tantalizing observations such as what he sees as the apparent displacement of Ciceronian rhetoric by Horatian criticism in the early sixteenth century. The essay also leaves the impression that Murphy is inviting research students to take up the challenge of analysing the material from this transitional period in the history of rhetoric. The final essay is by Nancy S. Struener, "Political Rhetoric and Rhetorical Politics in Juan Luis Vives (1492-1540)" (pp. 243-258). This takes us back to the argument of the first essay in the collection, Camargo's "Defining Medieval Rhetoric": rhetoric needs to be conceived broadly and recognized as responsible for substantial contributions to the intellectual life of European culture. In both essays Ward's

ideas and arguments figure prominently and no doubt served as sparks to further exploration. For Struever it is the impulse to debate that is rhetoric's great contribution to culture in the broad sense, encompassing psychology, ethics, and politics, as well as the arts.

All of the essays are strenuously argued, and the collection is stimulating and provocative. It will be of immense interest to established scholars and research students who appreciate the centrality of rhetoric in medieval culture. The volume is also a fitting tribute to the individual whom it was compiled to honour.

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