

E. Armstrong:

A Ciceronian Sunburn: A Tudor Dialogue on Humanistic Rhetoric and Civic Poetics
(Studies in Rhetoric/Communication)

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This book aims to explore the kinship between orator and poet and to study the place of rhetoric in late Tudor learning. This has three dimensions: the civic role of rhetoric; the scope and influence of Cicero's works; and the role of poetic discourse within learning (p. 2). Armstrong wants to assert the importance of a civic conception of rhetoric against those historians (he cites Kennedy, and Grafton and Jardine) who see late sixteenth-century rhetoric as having withered away into rote learning, formalism, and "pragmatic humanism" (p. 3). His strategy is to move poetics to the centre, following Sidney whom he interprets as arguing that poetry offers a kind of learning essential to and conducive to civil life (pp. 4-5). The title phrase is taken from Cicero's *De oratore* (2.14.60) where sunburn is an image for the superficial learning acquired from casual reading which is all that Antonius thinks the orator needs. Armstrong distinguishes this from Crassus's view – which he later identifies with humanism more broadly – that the orator requires extensive learning. The book is organised around three conversations: primarily a dialogue among Tudor poets and scholars (chiefly Bryskett, Spenser, Sidney, Temple, and Fraunce) but also the "divergent visions of learning or Ciceronianisms of Erasmus and Peter Ramus", and the historical and intellectual basis for these different views which Armstrong locates in Cicero's *De oratore* and *De officiis* (pp. 10-11).

The book is arranged in eight chapters. The first, "Troping Tully" (pp. 1-12), explains the aims of the project and the "disorderly order" of its structure. The second, "Making Morality" (pp. 13-39), presents the best available reading of Spenser's friend Lodowick Bryskett's *Discourse of Civill Life* (1606). Armstrong argues that Bryskett's methods of teaching the moral virtues are essentially the same as Spenser's (p. 17). Chapters three ("Glossing Spenser's Humanistic Poetics (Rhetorically)", pp. 40-62) and four ("Negotiating Metaphors: On *The Shepheardes Calender*", pp. 63-93) are concerned with Spenser's *Shepheardes Calender*, the third analysing the import of E. K.'s glosses, the fourth presenting the contrasting outlooks of Colin Clout and Immerito. Armstrong explains that Immerito puts Colin's story to work by situating it within its "ethic and politic considerations" (p. 78). Chapter five, "Whole/someness: On This Book as a Whole" (pp. 94-114), presents Erasmus's *Lingua* (1525) and Ramus's *Brutinae quaestiones* (1549) as expressing opposed views of rhetoric, which correspond respectively to the expansive view of Crassus and the restrictive view of Antonius in Cicero's *De oratore*. Chapter six ("Making Matter for a Conceit, Making Conceit Matter", pp. 115-138) contrasts Abraham Fraunce's Ramist *Lawiers Logike* (1588) and Temple's Ramist analysis of Sidney with Sidney's defence of Cicero as expressed in his *Defence of Poetry and Astrophil and Stella* I. Chapter seven ("Telling Tales out of School: On Spenser's *View*", pp. 139-162) presents an analysis of the context and purpose of Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (written in 1596). Chapter eight ("Inventing Civic Selves in Spenser's 'Legend of Courtesie'", pp. 163-182) looks at the fiction through which Spenser embodies his understanding of the human making of meaning in the Mount Acidale episode, *Faerie Queene* book

six, canto 10. Armstrong also wants to relate his Tudor dialogue to modern understandings of rhetoric. Jeffrey Walker and Thomas Sloane are guiding presences from the beginning, whilst Ernesto Grassi and Kenneth Burke make cameo appearances in the middle and towards the end.

The strengths of this book include the analysis of Bryskett, the identification of the play of different points of view in *The Shepheardes Calendar*, a new and more inclusive perspective on *A View*, understandably Spenser's most vilified work, and several excellent discussions of detailed sections from *De oratore*, placed in different chapters of the book (pp. 54-56, 85-87, 94-100, and 149-150). Armstrong also writes some excellent passages on Spenser's exemplification of the function of poetry: "Spenser's poetic practice represents poetry primarily as an artifice that enacts and exemplifies the action or *drama* of human making [...] Poetry teaches by engaging the reader in a discovery process that persuades one to invent, feel, discern and weigh probable and always situated or contextualised meanings" (p. 65); "The fact that Spenser embodies a knowledge of his self figuratively, within a fiction, within speech, points towards a more general principle concerning the nature of knowledge [...] [Colin Clout] embodies the quintessential human act of a body making sense of or coming to know the human world in language [...] [The gifts which separate humans from animals,] language and speech, are inherently productive, or generative, in that they are indicative of a distinctly human making as only humans can make and order their world [...] As a making the poet's figure of Colin Clout is a lie, a fiction 'invented' and appropriated in order to address the circumstances regarding Spenser's inquiry into courtesy. It is a lie, however, deliberately and 'honestly' grounded in an attempt to preserve what makes humans human" (p. 180). At his best Armstrong shows us vividly what makes Spenser so important to his thinking about literature and the world.

The book is weakened by a failure to contextualize its analysis of rhetoric either institutionally, within the school and university syllabus, or historically, within the largely Latin history of Renaissance rhetoric. The book would have been much richer if it had been able to relate its discussions of English sixteenth-century rhetoric to Erasmus's *De copia* and *Adagia*, to Agricola and Melancthon, or even to such widely used schoolbooks as Aphthonius's *Progymnasmata*, the letter-writing manual and the manual of figures and tropes. Many of Sidney's audience would have known that one of the paradigmatic comments Armstrong cites from Sidney about the effect of the simile (p. 4) was translated directly from Agricola's *De inventione dialectica*. Armstrong's view of Ramus is distorted by a widely shared misunderstanding. Ramus always insisted that rhetoric and dialectic had to be taught together. So when he removed invention and disposition from rhetoric and taught them within dialectic he was making a clear delineation between the two subjects (where previously there had been a large overlap) rather than impoverishing rhetoric and depriving students of access to invention. His purpose in simplifying both subjects was to ensure that students completed the theoretical part of the subject quickly so that more time could be given to studying the impact of both subjects on writing. His commentaries on Cicero and Virgil, which Armstrong ignores but which were a central element of Ramus's teaching, show students rhetoric and dialectic in practice. They also demonstrate that Ramus was neither anti-Ciceronian nor opposed to poetry as a kind of learning. Nor is it fair for Armstrong to equate Ramism with academic formalism and intra-disciplinary focus (e.g. pp. 133 and 183). Aristotelianism and scholasticism are equally open to that charge. Also, by the end of the sixteenth century there is plenty of evidence of rejection of Ramism in universities throughout Europe.

At times this book is rather hard to read, partly as a result of the awkwardness of its organisation, but it can also be genuinely eloquent and intellectually rewarding. Probably its greatest impact will be on Spenserians whom it may encourage to think more about rhetoric, but students of literature and rhetoric will also have something to learn from its serious interrogation of Spenser's moral fiction.

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