

James J. Murphy:

*Latin Rhetoric and Education in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*

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James J. Murphy's pioneering research has staked medieval rhetoric's claim to a place in the history (and the histories) of western rhetoric, and most of the studies gathered in this volume have been part of the scholarly conversation for a long time. The twenty journal articles and book chapters reprinted here originally were published over a span of nearly forty years, the earliest appearing in 1962 and the latest in 1999. Along with Murphy's landmark book *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (1974), they continue to be essential reading for those studying rhetoric's thousand-year history from the fall of Rome to ca. 1500. As is the practice in the Variorum Collected Studies Series, Murphy's widely scattered and sometimes hard-to-find shorter publications are, with one exception, reprinted as virtual facsimiles of the originals. While the changing typefaces and discontinuous pagination may be disconcerting at first, the advantage is that one can treat the book as a set of bound offprints that can be cited interchangeably with the originals, easily cross-referenced within the collection, and searched with the help of the useful index that concludes the volume. The publication of this collection introduces no new scholarship, but it makes a substantial body of existing scholarship more readily accessible and more easily usable.

The book is subdivided into three parts: "The Middle Ages" (items I-IX), "Applications of Latin Rhetoric in Medieval Literature" (items X-XII), and "The Renaissance" (items XIII-XX). For the benefit of those who might be encountering this body of work for the first time, brief descriptions of the contents will give some indication of the range of topics and approaches represented.

The collection opens with a piece that distills the main arguments of *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* into a concise 26 pages and thus provides excellent context for the other eight essays in the first section. (I) "Western Rhetoric in the Middle Ages", which originally appeared in the *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (1982-1989), is the only item that has been reformatted for this volume. (II) "The Rhetorical Lore of the *Boceras* in Byhrferth's *Manual*" (1970) shows that the treatment of 'rhetorical' figures in Byhrferth's early twelfth-century work derives from the grammatical tradition, as represented by its chief source Bede, but probably in a copy augmented by rhetorical glosses. In (III) "The Teaching of Latin as a Second Language in the Twelfth Century" (1980), Murphy argues that the twelfth century inherited an effective, systematic pedagogy that combined an emphasis on sound, sense, and syntax with the use of "Christianized *progymnasmata*" (p. 172) to impart practical, immediately usable oral and written skills. (IV) "Two Medieval Textbooks in Debate" (1964) explains the nature and importance of the medieval *disputatio* and describes the central role of Aristotle's *Topics* and *Sophistical Refutations* in training its practitioners. According to (V) "The Scholastic Condemnation of Rhetoric in the Commentary of Giles of Rome on the *Rhetoric* of Aristotle"

(1969), the well-known commentary by Giles helps explain why rhetoric was largely omitted from medieval university curricula and why Aristotle's *Rhetoric* was almost always copied with works on politics and ethics rather than logic and rhetoric. (VI) "*Dictamen* as a Developed Genre: The Fourteenth-Century '*Brevis doctrina dictaminis*' of Ventura da Bergamo" (with David Thomson; 1982) is an edition of a 'typical' brief art of letter writing preserved in a single manuscript in the Bodleian Library. (VII) "Quintilian's Influence on the Teaching of Speaking and Writing in the Middle Ages and Renaissance" (1990) traces how the highly successful teaching methods described in the *Institutio oratoria* were systematized in the Roman schools, adapted in the medieval schools, and 'reformed' in light of the rediscovered complete text of Quintilian during the Renaissance. (VIII) "Poetry without Genre: The Metapoetics of the Middle Ages" (1979) argues that the conception of poetry as fundamentally rhetorical discourse – a 'metapoetics' formulated and transmitted by school teachers – persisted from the Middle Ages up to the Romantic revolution of the late eighteenth century. After surveying the origins and development of medieval rhetoric, (IX) "Rhetoric in Fourteenth-Century Oxford" (1965) discusses the long absence of rhetoric from the Oxford university curriculum and briefly describes treatises on preaching and letter writing produced at Oxford in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.

Probably the best known of the three studies in the second grouping, (X) "A New Look at Chaucer and the Rhetoricians" (1964) challenges the widely held belief that Chaucer's style was deeply and directly indebted to medieval 'rhetoricians' such as Geoffrey of Vinsauf. (XI) "John Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and the First Discussion of Rhetoric in the English Language" (1962) claims that the treatment of rhetoric in Book 7 of Gower's Middle English poem is based entirely on Brunetto Latini's *Tresor* and is not evidence of a broader English tradition of rhetoric in the fourteenth century. A third essay on rhetoric and literature, (XII) "Rhetoric and Dialectic in *The Owl and the Nightingale*" (1978), situates the early Middle English debate poem in the twelfth-century 'environment of discourse', in which grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic freely intermingled before the thirteenth-century university curriculum banned rhetoric altogether and relegated the teaching of grammar to the lower schools.

As he did in the opening section, Murphy begins the final section with a broad overview that helps contextualize the more narrowly focused studies that follow it. (XIII) "One Thousand Neglected Authors: The Scope and Importance of Renaissance Rhetoric" (1983) enumerates the obstacles to a comprehensive history of rhetoric in the Renaissance and then proposes some interim solutions, such as studies of individual authors or restricted periods of time. Taking his own suggestion, in (XIV) "Rhetoric in the Earliest Years of Printing, 1465-1500" (1984) Murphy surveys the editions of ancient rhetorical treatises, medieval rhetorical texts, and works on rhetoric printed during the incunabular period. In (XV) "Caxton's Two Choices: 'Modern' and 'Medieval' Rhetoric in Traversagni's *Nova Rhetorica* and the Anonymous *Court of Sapience*" (1972), he examines the context within which two contrasting treatments of rhetoric were composed and printed in fifteenth-century England, concluding that both were essentially medieval in content and purpose. According to (XVI) "Ciceronian Influences in Latin Rhetorical Compendia of the Fifteenth Century" (1988), the chief source on which early printed compendia drew was a body of works that included Cicero's but could more accurately be called 'Roman' rhetoric, and the work most frequently cited was the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. (XVII) "Raffaele Regio's 1492 *Quaestio* Doubting Cicero's Authorship of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*: Introduction and Text" (with Michael Winterbottom; 1999) discusses and reprints the Latin text of the first challenge to Cicero's authorship of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* to have appeared in print. (XVIII) "The Double Revolution of the First Rhetorical Textbook Published in England: The *Margarita Eloquentiae* of Gulielmus Traversagnus (1479)" (1989) observes that the Italian Franciscan Traversagnus

was not only the first to teach rhetoric at the university level in England, as a member of the theology faculty at Cambridge, but also the first to have a true textbook printed for the individual use of each student. According to (XIX) “Antonio Nebrija in the European Rhetorical Tradition” (1994), the rhetorical treatise that Nebrija, a grammarian, published in 1515 is unusual only in omitting the tropes and figures (because they belong to grammar) and not using Aristotle despite naming him, along with Cicero and Quintilian, in its title. Finally, in (XX) “The Relation Between Omer Talon’s *Institutiones Oratoriae* (1545) and the *Rhetorica* (1548) Attributed to Him” (1997), Murphy challenges the prevailing view that the *Rhetorica* is Talon’s ‘rewriting’ of his earlier work on rhetoric and argues that Peter Ramus is the sole author of the later work.

A number of Murphy’s characteristic concerns are evident even from the titles and cursory descriptions of these twenty studies. At its most basic level, all of this work contributes to a history of the pedagogical methods for imparting literacy skills bequeathed by antiquity to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance; but several of the essays focus explicitly on the rationale behind this teaching system, the reasons for its practical success, and the continuities and innovations that mark its long tradition (III, IV, VII, VIII, XII, XVIII). A second major goal is to trace the relations among the texts that were used in such instruction, including the ways in which classical texts such as Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, *Topics*, and *Sophistical Refutations*; the rhetorical works of Cicero; and the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium* were adapted to new uses by medieval and early modern teachers (II, IV, V, VII, XVI, XVII). The shifting disciplinary context for rhetorical instruction, especially the complex relations among grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, is a third major emphasis in the studies collected here (II, IV, V, IX, XII, XIX, XX). Although the regional focus of individual essays ranges from Italy (VI, XVII) to Spain (XIX) and France (XX), special attention is devoted to the patterns of rhetorical study and practice in England from the twelfth century through the incunabular period (II, IX, X, XI, XII, XV, XVIII). In all of this scholarship, Murphy frankly acknowledges the limits of current knowledge and eagerly invites others to follow his lead by shedding more light on the darkness he has only begun to push back. Those of us who have met Jerry Murphy will recognize the enthusiasm and the generosity behind that invitation and hope that a new generation will answer the call as ours did.

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