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THE MEDIEVAL ART OF

LETTER WRITING

RHETORIC AS

INSTITUTIONAL EXPRESSION

LES PERELMAN

Classical rhetoric, from the early Greek Sophists to Cicero and Quintilian, was solely concerned with oral rather than written discourse. In particular, most rhetorical treatises were almost completely limited to three specific types of speeches, each linked to three respective institutions: deliberative to the public assembly, epideictic to the public ceremony, and forensic to the law courts. Although these three forms accurately reflected the social responsibilities incumbent upon a free male of a Greek *polis*, they continued to dominate rhetorical theory long after the institutions that created them had either ceased to exist or had undergone fundamental changes. Thus deliberative rhetoric was taught both in schools and by tutors all during the period of the Roman Empire, even though the function of both the Roman Senate and local assemblies became severely limited, possessing relatively little actual power except in some specific local matters (Kennedy, *Art of Persuasion*, 22). Similarly, forensic rhetoric continued to be taught in Carolingian schools, despite the fact that the imperial law courts for which it was designed had vanished hundreds of years before.¹

Although the writing of letters was common during the classical period, it never became a formal subject of discussion until its inclusion as a brief appendix in the fourth century A.D. rhetoric of C. Julius Victor. During the Middle Ages, however, the written letter became a central concern of rhetorical theory. Medieval society, in general, and medieval political structure, in particular, were not primarily urban. Consequently, unlike

the classical *polis*, communication could not usually be conducted through oral, face-to-face encounters. Furthermore, as medieval ecclesiastical and secular bureaucracy grew, the earlier medieval collections of official and legal formulae proved insufficient to meet the administrative needs of institutions that functioned primarily through letters.

As a consequence, beginning in the eleventh century, there arose a whole genre of theoretical works concerned with the form and composition of the official letter, the *ars dictaminis*, or "art of letter writing." Although these works drew from classical rhetorical texts, they modified the earlier theory to meet both the ideological requirements of medieval institutions and the practical requirements of the epistolary form. They became, in a sense, an early prototype of the modern handbook on effective business writing. Moreover, the teaching and application of these manuals became almost universal in literate medieval culture, and the form and style they dictated became present in almost all types of letters, from the official pronouncements of popes to the letters of students.

The development of letter writing as a distinct and formal branch of rhetorical and political study was itself the product of historical circumstance. First, from A.D. 476 most of the area that had comprised the Western Roman Empire found itself ruled by monarchs who were nearly all illiterate. Educated Romans and churchmen had to be able, in the words of Cassiodorus, to speak and write the king's own words in the king's own presence (Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 197). Furthermore, the depopulation of urban centers that accompanied the breakup of the Roman Empire and the lack of any central capital for the Frankish monarchy made written communication one of the only mechanisms of control available to the Merovingian kings. Sending a letter, however, was an extremely expensive and unreliable undertaking. Since there was no regular postal service, each letter cost the services of the messenger hired to carry it, and complaints on the unreliability of professional couriers antedate contemporary complaints about the postal system by at least a millennia. One result of the expense and uncertainty connected with letter writing is that letters, especially letters in the early Middle Ages, became almost solely the domain of political and ecclesiastical discourse, giving them a more permanent and public character than they had either in antiquity or in more modern times (Constable, *Letters* 2: 2-24).

Consequently, the institution of the Chancellor or Arch-Chancellor, chief of the *cancellarii* or scribes, evolved during the reign of the early Merovingian kings. The chancellor, rather than attached to a specific place, was a part of the king's household and moved with the king in his constant peregrinations between royal estates. From the reign of Louis the Pious, the post was held by a bishop, who, by virtue of the office, became the chief judicial and administrative secretary of the emperor. Soon

almost all great officers and corporate bodies in Western Europe, both secular and ecclesiastical, employed a chancellor to supervise the production of official correspondence.

In the early Middle Ages, many of the letters were simply derived from prototypes that covered the majority of situations in which a written letter was needed. These collections of *formulae*, standardized statements capable of being duplicated in different circumstances, appear to have been quite common during the Merovingian period (Murphy, *Rhetoric*, 199), and a number of collections have survived (Giry; Zeumer). Essentially, these letters were similar to the blank forms of legal documents that attorneys still use today. A form from about A.D. 650 donating land to a monastery and then allowing the donors to use the gift during their lives without having to pay taxes on it—a practice that until recently was still a common method of tax avoidance in the United States—demonstrates the contractual and legal nature of such “letters”:

I, (name), and my wife, (name), in the name of the Lord, give by this letter of gift and transfer from our ownership to the ownership and authority of the monastery of (name), over which the venerable abbot (name) presides, and which was founded in the honor of (name) by (name) in the county of (name), the following villas (name), situated in the county of (name), with all the lands, houses, buildings, tenants, slaves, vineyards, woods. . . . We do this on the condition that as long as either of us shall live we may possess the aforesaid villas, without prejudice to the ownership of the monastery and without diminution of the value of them. . . . After the death of both of us, the aforesaid villas with any additions or improvements which may have been made, shall return immediately to the possession of said monastery and the said abbot and his successors, without undertaking any judicial process or obtaining the consent of the heirs. (Thatcher and McNeal, 345-46)

However, as the complexity of medieval political and administrative life grew, the form book was unable to provide documents that could cover all situations. As Murphy notes, “Even five hundred or a thousand *formulae* would probably not be enough to provide for the diverse demands of even a minor principality” (*Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 202).

The Development of the *Ars Dictaminis*

The solution, a rhetorical art specifically devoted to official correspondence, the *ars dictaminis*, developed in the eleventh century at the ancient Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino, partially at the

embryonic universities of Bologna, Salerno, and Pavia, and at the newly created Papal Chancery. Accompanying this new theory of composition was the appearance of a new genre of rhetorical manual, also called *ars dictaminis*, or, collectively, *dictamen*. Some scholars have attempted to attribute the creation of this new rhetorical genre to a specific individual and to a specific place. In the nineteenth century Ludwig Rockinger argued that the *ars dictaminis* was invented by Alberic of Monte Cassino (d. 1105) at the abbey, which was the first center where the genre was studied. In the 1950s Franz-Josef Schmale maintained that the genre originated with Adalbertus Samaritanus in Bologna between 1111 and 1118. However, in the late 1970s, William Patt offered convincing evidence to demonstrate that the *ars dictaminis* arose out of a widespread tradition which had been developing over centuries. Instead of asking "Who invented the *ars dictaminis*, and where?" he asserts, we should ask, "From what sources did this develop and by what process?" (135-36).²

One institution that directly influenced the development, formalization, and popularization of these conventional rhetorics of letter writing was the Papal Chancery. During the pontificate of John XVIII in the early eleventh century, the supervision of the production of letters passed from the office of the Librarian to a new official with the Frankish title of Chancellor, who, like his imperial counterpart, was personally attached to the ruler and traveled with him. The influence of the usages of the Frankish court on papal administration is also illustrated by the adoption in this period of the practice of writing papal documents in the imperial court hand, Caroline Minuscule, rather than in the older Roman Curial hand (Poole, 57-60).

The pontificate of Leo IX (1049-1054) firmly established the titles, forms, officials, and handwriting of the Imperial Chancery within the Papal Court (Poole, 67). By greatly increasing the output of papal correspondence, Leo IX, a cousin of the Emperor Conrad II, instituted a fundamental and lasting change in the nature of papal administration. The rise of centralized monarchies and the beginnings of the modern nation states of Western Europe in the eleventh century are paralleled in the reorganization of ecclesiastical government during the same period. Just as secular monarchs were developing administrative tools to lessen the power of feudal lords and impose royal authority upon them, so the revolution begun by Leo IX aimed to subordinate the power of local bishops to the absolute authority of the pope (Southern, 170). Leo's revival of papal authority was largely effected through three instruments: the system of papal legates (ambassadors endowed with papal authority), frequent church councils, and a virtual explosion of letters from the papal chancery. As Southern notes, "the two main characteristics of medieval government, whether secular or ecclesiastical, were these: the ruler was a dispenser of benefits,

and he was a dispenser of justice" (111). Through legates, councils, and especially through an efficient chancery generating various types of papal correspondence, the papacy was able to dispense both benefits and justice more efficiently.

Papal letters became divided into two distinct categories: *Privileges* and *Letters*. Privileges were the instruments of a grant or confirmation of rights, property, and jurisdiction to churches and religious houses. Privileges were, in actuality, title deeds, and as such were carefully saved by their recipients as something of great value. Like modern deeds, such forms were highly conservative and tended to maintain the forms of Curial *formulae*. Privileges were indicated by two specific pictorial devices: the Rota, an amplified Cross in a circle with some writing in each quarter and a biblical quotation around the circumference, and the Monogram, which, adapted from the imperial monogram, appeared on the right hand of the document as a compression of the greeting *Bene Valete* (Poole, 105).

The pontifical letter was the instrument of the pope's administrative and judicial acts and was classified as *Tituli*, or Letters of Grace, and *Mandamenta*, or Letters of Justice (Poole, 115). *Tituli* were documents by which the pope granted or confirmed rights, licenses, or indulgences, conferred benefices, promulgated statutes, or decided points of canon law. Frequently, they fulfilled the same purpose which had in earlier times been effected by the Privilege.

Mandamenta, on the other hand, conveyed the pope's administrative orders concerning some specific issue, such as injunctions, prohibitions, appointment of commissioners, as well as the mass of official correspondence on both political and administrative matters (Poole, 117). At the beginning of the twelfth century, the number of *Mandamenta* issued by the chancery increased dramatically. To allow the bulk of these documents to be written and sealed by relatively low level chancery clerks, a standardized form, *in forma communi*, was developed from preexisting theories of letter writing and rhetoric in general. These standardized forms of papal letters, in turn, provided crucial models for the development and standardization of the *ars dictaminis*.

There is, however, even firmer evidence from which to infer a close connection between the rise of the Papal Chancery and the development of the formal teaching and practice of the art of letter writing. As mentioned previously, Alberic of Monte Cassino is credited with the first extant treatise on *ars dictaminis*. Alberic's pupil, John of Gaeta, served as papal chancellor for thirty years (1089-1118), before becoming Pope Gelasius II in 1118. Moreover, it was during this period that papal correspondence began to exhibit the *cursus*, an elaborate system of prose rhythm, that was often included as part of the *ars dictaminis*. A century later, Albert of Morra, the author of a dictaminal work that emphasized the *cursus*,

the *Froman Dictandi*, was also chancellor to three successive popes and then became pope himself as Gregory VIII in 1187 (Poole, 79).³

Although the chancery was originally a secular invention, it was the papacy that refined that office and the techniques for the performance of its function: the efficient production of administrative letters, including the development of a standardized style of letter writing. In addition, the standardization of the forms of the official letter implicitly validated both the institutions and the institutional assumptions in which the discourse took place. In particular, as we shall see, the standardized form reinforced notions of social hierarchy, causing a writer not to ask first, "What am I going to say?" but instead, "What is the rank of the person to whom I am writing this letter?"

This standardized form for official correspondence grew to become a necessary component of the expansion of both the ecclesiastical and secular bureaucracies. As Denholm-Young notes (27), from the time of Innocent III, the system spread to almost all the chanceries of Western Europe, becoming the rule not only in the Imperial Chancery, but also in the chanceries of the bishops and princes of Germany, and the kingdoms of France, Sicily, Aragon, Castile, and, eventually, England.

Although the *ars dictaminis* was originally taught in monasteries and by independent teachers of rhetoric (*dictatores*), by the mid-eleventh century there was a sustained interest in the *ars dictaminis* in the schools of Pavia, Orleans, and Tours, and in such southern German monastic and cathedral schools as Bamberg, Speyer, Tegernsee, and Regensburg (Patt, 145). Because the teaching and practice of letter writing offered one of the few opportunities for access to the seats of power, the ecclesiastical and secular chanceries and courts, it soon became a regular part of the curriculum in cathedral and monastic schools, and later was taught in universities all over Europe. Although rival schools existed – very early on in the tradition, one Bolognese teacher not in religious orders urges his readers to "spurn the harsh, thorny, insoluble *dictamina*" of a monkish rival (Adalbertus, 51) – the basic content of teaching remained fairly constant. Quite possibly the stability of the form of the *ars dictaminis* was partially due to its being a practical art with real and ongoing connections to fairly conservative institutions such as the Papal Chancery. Because these institutions would tend to resist change in the way they conducted their business, we would expect that the rhetorical art which was primarily concerned with teaching individuals how to write within these institutions would exhibit comparatively little variation from teacher to teacher.

As stated earlier, however, the theory and practice of the art of letter writing did not arise *ex nihilo*, nor did it come into existence like Athena, fully grown and armored. Similar to the other institutions of the Middle

Ages, it did not appear as a new phenomenon at all, but as a continuation of classical culture. Although the *ars dictaminis* was responding to changing institutions and changing discourse situations—the growth of secular and ecclesiastical bureaucracies and the concomitant rise of bureaucratic forms of discourse—it did so by adapting one of the Middle Ages' most revered legacies from antiquity, classical rhetoric, particularly parts of Cicero's *De Inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, a work incorrectly attributed to Cicero throughout the Middle Ages.

The transition between the received forms and conventions of classical rhetoric and the emergence of the new rhetorical forms particular to the *ars dictaminis* is best illustrated by an examination of one of the works of Alberic of Monte Cassino, the eleventh-century monk generally credited as a founder of the genre. A teacher and scholar of the classical rhetorical texts at the oldest monastery in Western Europe, Alberic was perfectly situated to begin the teaching of a rhetoric of the official letter. From references in the monk's works to his discussions with his students, Murphy concludes "that Alberic's school at Monte Cassino was actively engaged in discussing the nature of letters" (*Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 207). Furthermore, the late eleventh century was the period of Monte Cassino's greatest political and ecclesiastical influence. Its abbot was the overlord of an extensive territory and bishop of several dioceses, and the most powerful of its abbots, Desiderius (1059–1086), was himself a man of letters and in 1086 became pope as Victor III.

At about the same time as the accession of Victor III to the papacy, Alberic wrote the *Flowers of Rhetoric* (*Flores Rhetorici*) also known as the *Glory of Composition* (*Dictaminum Radium*).⁴ Although much of the work emphasizes traditional rhetorical elements that are ignored by later dictaminal authors, it also provides a clear indication of what parts of classical rhetoric the new genre retained and expanded and what parts it discarded. It shows how rhetorical theory moved from the Ciceronian emphasis on the logical and legalistic dimension of a specific topic, the *logos*, to the elements concerned with the specific relationship between the writer and reader, *ethos* and *pathos*.

After an ornate introduction, Alberic presents Isadore of Seville's four-part division of a speech: *exordium*, *narratio*, *argumentatio*, and *conclusio*. This classification, of course, is a reduction of the seven-part division found in *De Inventione* and the six-part division of the *Ad Herennium*. Alberic then briefly explains the purpose of the *exordium*, the introduction, by quoting Cicero's famous dictum that it is to make the audience "well-disposed, attentive, and receptive" (36).⁵ His treatment of the narration is equally brief and also equally derivative from Ciceronian rhetoric, largely consisting of a division of narrative into "high," "middle," and "low" forms. As we shall see, the use of this specific Ciceronian division is almost

omnipresent in dictaminal works, although the exact form of their application varies widely. Alberic's treatment of argumentation is once more, abbreviated:

Next comes the argument, which has a place in the course we would follow if we intend to strengthen our own position and weaken the position of our adversary. Yet it is important to note that this approach is not always and everywhere called for, but only when the subject in hand is one to which serious objections might be raised. . . . (*Flowers*, 139)

What is remarkable about Alberic's discussion of argument is not what he says, but what he doesn't say. Although he adapts parts of the *Ad Herennium* and *De Inventione* throughout the work, especially in his treatment of rhetorical figures, he ignores most of their discussion of techniques of argumentation, particularly the extremely lengthy discussion in both works of the theory of *status*, the complex discovery procedure designed to identify the specific issue or issues underlying any argument.

At this point, however, Alberic's work exhibits a feature particular to the emerging genre of the art of letter writing. Without having yet discussed the *conclusio*, he begins again to consider in order, the various parts of the letter, but he starts not with the exordium, but with a new element distinct from it, the *salutatio*. Although salutations usually consisting of the sender's name and the name of the addressee were a fairly common and fixed element in the classical letter, they had never before been included as an item of discussion in a rhetorical treatise. Alberic fits his discussion of the salutation into the received mold of the Aristotelian triad of speaker, subject, and audience, of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos*:

First we must consider the identity of the sender and of the person to whom the letter is sent; we must consider whether he is noble or common in rank, a friend or an enemy, then what kind of person he is and of what background. The next consideration is the thing dealt with: is it a just or unjust matter, and is it serious or minor? Next the writer should ask himself what attitude he wishes to project: proud or humble, harsh or forgiving, threatening, flattering, stern, or that of a trusted friend. (*Flowers*, 138)

While this passage seeks to develop a rhetoric particular to the form of the letter, it still looks back to the traditional formulations of classical rhetorical theory designed for the law court and public assembly, of a rhetorical practice presupposing the need for persuasive discourse among equals. As we shall see, the treatment of the salutation expands to become the single largest topic in dictaminal teaching, recreating and rede-

fining rhetorical theory to reflect both the social reality and the social ideology of the institutions in which it existed.

The rest of the *Flowers* has little to do with the specifics of letter writing, consisting instead of a discussion of some of the rhetorical figures of thought and diction listed in book 4 of the *Ad Herennium*, the major source of rhetorical tropes throughout the Middle Ages. There is, however, another extant work of Alberic's which bears on our subject: "The Outline of Composition" (*Breviarium de dictamine*). Unfortunately, of the three parts of the work, only two have been edited.⁶ Furthermore, the preface clearly indicates that the work is not to be taken as a treatise in itself, but is meant as a supplement to oral discussion and other texts (Rockinger, 30). While the second and third parts are only tangentially related to letter writing, the first part of the text is clearly a discussion of the *ars dictaminis*. Although the treatment still lacks several of the structural elements that characterized later manuals, it does possess some of the major features of the genre. Alberic states that the beginnings of letters, that is, the salutation and the exordium, can be constructed in a variety of ways (33), and he gives a fairly long series of example salutations, a practice that becomes one of the most predominant features of subsequent treatises on letter writing. The next section, a discussion of the construction of papal Privileges and how they differ from other documents, provides further evidence for the connection between the development of the *ars dictaminis* and the continuing expansion of the Papal Chancery under Alberic's student, John of Gaeta.

Although Alberic does much to make letter writing a separate rhetorical discipline, his treatises are relatively unsystematic compilations of various elements of classical rhetoric haphazardly applied to the specific task of composing official epistles. The *Lessons in Letter Writing* (*Precepta dictaminum*) of Adalbertus Samaritanus, on the other hand, is a work that, in both theoretical and practical terms, is entirely devoted to the writing of letters. Completed by 1115 (Constable, "Structure," 254), this work delineates the rules for salutations in great detail. Adalbertus, for example, seems to be the first to establish the rule that in a salutation the name of the more exalted person precede that of the inferior.

Adalbertus explicitly divides letters along the traditional Ciceronian threefold scheme, calling the high style, the "exalted" (*sublimis*), the middle style, the "medium" (*mediocris*), and the low, the "meager" (*exilis*). As Constable points out ("Structure," 254), his division is not based on the styles themselves, as with Cicero or Alberic in the *Breviarium*, nor is it based on the subject matter, like Alberic's division of narratives. Instead, Adalbertus uses the relative social position of the writer and reader as his central criterion:

Exalted letters are written from a lesser person to a greater one and are called exalted for two reasons. It ascends from an inferior to a superior and it is comprised of three characteristics: 1) flattery in the beginning, 2) the cause of the flattery in the middle, and 3) a request at the end. (33)

Similarly, the meager style is written from a superior to an inferior and is called meager, according to Adalbertus, because it descends from the superior person to the inferior one and only contains the single feature of a request or a command. Finally, the medium style is called such because it neither ascends or descends and thus belongs between the other two types. In addition, it contains two features: one instance of flattery and a request.

Although the rest of Adalbertus' work consists primarily of sample salutations and sample letters, his taxonomy continues to develop the dictaminal obsession with social rank. Whereas classical rhetoric always appeared, at least, to give precedence to logical argument as a means of persuasion, the rhetorical theory of the *ars dictaminis* seems to recognize hierarchical social relationships as the principle element of communication, reflecting a fundamental change in both rhetorical practice and the social organization which underlies it. In contrast to Ciceronian rhetoric's presupposition of communication among equals and its consequent reliance on persuasion, the medieval arts of letter writing presuppose a world of hierarchical social relationships and thus reflect the bureaucracies which created them. The chanceries, both imperial and papal, owed their very existence to the respective secular and ecclesiastical hierarchies in which they existed. Their function was not to convince, but to command, to dispense benefits, and to execute judgment.

Although the emphasis on developing a coherent scheme for analyzing and classifying both salutations and letters as a whole remains a constant feature of these works, the exact models and the terminology vary greatly. Some subsequent reworkings of Adalbertus, for example, reverse his distinctions, as does this taxonomy of letters from an unedited mid-twelfth-century compilation cited by Constable:

As there are three orders of persons, so there are three principal types of letters: humble, middling and exalted. A humble letter is one sent by a humble person, such as oxherds, cobblers and tanners and others who have no lower order beneath them. An exalted letter is one sent by an exalted person, as by a pope or emperor. An exalted person is one than who there is no higher dignity, as is the pope in ecclesiastical affairs [and] the emperor in secular affairs. A middling person is one who is between exalted and humble, such as tetrarchs, kings, marquises, counts, dukes,

archbishops, captains, vavasors, vidames, and others who are between exalted and humble. ("Structure," 255)

Thus the determinant for classification of letters is no longer the relative social position of the writer and reader, but only the social position of the writer. With the further evolution of the genre, the exact distinctions within these taxonomic systems remained fairly fluid, although the three-part division was always maintained, with the noted exception of Peter of Blois ("Structure," 260).

As the twelfth century progressed, the number of dictaminal works increased. Two in particular – *The Principles of Prose Letter Writing (Rationes dictandi prosaice)* of Hugh of Bologna (c. 1119–1124) and the anonymous *The Principles of Letter Writing (Rationes dictandi)* (c. 1135) – helped to establish in Bologna a basic doctrine, what Murphy calls the "Bolognese 'Approved Format'" (*Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 224–25). A modified version of Murphy's table comparing the format presented in *The Principles of Letter Writing* with the Ciceronian six-part oration provides a vivid illustration of the movement of the *ars dictaminis* away from a rhetoric of persuasion toward a rhetoric of personal relationship:⁷

Table 4.1. Comparative Structure of Ciceronian and Dictaminal Rhetoric

Ciceronian Parts of an Oration	Bolognese "Approved Format"
1. Exordium	1. Salutation
2. Narrative	2. <i>Captatio benevolentiae</i> , securing of good will.
3. Division	3. Narrative
4. Proof	(Omitted)
(Omitted)	(Omitted)
5. Refutation	4. Petition, presentation of requests
6. Conclusion	(Omitted)
	5. Conclusion

Ciceronian Referential Rhetoric versus Dictaminal Phatic Rhetoric

Closely connected with the Ciceronian division of the oration is the Aristotelian communication model of speaker, subject, and audience. Each part of the Ciceronian oration is normally directed at one or at most two of the Aristotelian elements. Thus, the *Exordium* is primarily aimed at the audience, while the division is associated primarily with the subject. The Aristotelian model, however, while extremely use-

ful, is limited and static. Each point of the triad is presented as sufficient in itself. Thus, in the Aristotelian model *pathos*, appeal to the interests and emotions of the audience, is presented as a mode of development completely distinct from *ethos*, appeal to the authority and character of the speaker, even though the two actions are often completely intertwined. For example, a defendant in a court of law can sometimes produce pity in the jury simply by convincing them of his or her naïveté.

In the twentieth century, Roman Jakobson expands Aristotle's paradigm into a more dynamic model by transforming the concepts of speaker, audience, and subject, into addresser, addressee, and context, and adding the additional elements of message, contact, and code. This expanded model provides a richer theoretical framework on which to establish the essential difference between Ciceronian and dictaminal rhetoric. To Jakobson, each of his communicative elements has the corresponding language function given in table 4.2:

Table 4.2. Jakobson's Communication Model

Element	Function
Addresser	Emotive
Addressee	Conative
Context	Referential
Message	Poetic
Contact	Phatic
Code	Metalingual

Although we could simply state in Aristotelian terms that the rhetorical stance implied in the Bolognese format is more oriented toward the audience than it is toward the subject, Jakobson's scheme provides us with a much more precise terminology by which to define the essential differences of the two rhetorical practices. In particular, we can characterize Ciceronian rhetoric as transmitted through *De Inventione* and the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium* as primarily referential, concerned with contexts and subjects external to the specific relationship and specific linguistic interaction between addresser and addressee. While classical theories of persuasion and their subsidiary constructs of the enthymeme and example are often concerned with both the emotional state and unstated assumptions held by an audience, classical rhetoric, especially in the abridged form by which it was transmitted in the Middle Ages, had as its central goal persuading an audience to take a specific position about some matter external to the immediate relationship of addresser to addressee.

The rhetorical practice outlined in the standardized Bolognese format of the dictaminal manuals, on the other hand, can be characterized as primarily Phatic, concerned with establishing and maintaining the communication channel, "to attract the attention of the interlocutor or to confirm his continued attention."
(Jakobson, 92)

In fact, the elements of the classical oration omitted in the "Approved Format" are precisely those that are most concerned with the referential function of communication, the concentration on the external subject encoded in the message. Cicero in *De Inventione* (1.22.31) defines *Partitio*, Division, as taking:

. . . two forms, both of which greatly contribute to clarifying the case and determining the nature of the controversy. One form shows in what we agree with our opponents and what is left in dispute; as a result of this some definite problem is set for the auditor on which he ought to have his attention fixed. In the second form the matters which we intend to discuss are briefly set forth in a methodical way. This leads the auditor to hold definite points in his mind, and to understand that when these have been discussed the oration will be over. (63)

Although Cicero's definition includes the auditor, it is only in terms of enhancing the auditor's comprehension of the subject matter at hand, and thus the central function of the division is clearly referential. Similarly, his proof and refutation coincide with what Jakobson defines as referential language functions. Cicero defines proof in *De Inventione* (1.24.34) as, "the part of an oration which by the marshalling of arguments lends credit, authority, and support to our case" (69), and refutation (1.42.78) as, "that part of an oration in which arguments are used to impair, disprove, or weaken the confirmation or proof of our opponent's speech" (123). Reflecting the primarily forensic tradition from which they derive, both *De Inventione* and the *Ad Hærennium* devote the largest part of their discussion to the various forms and types of effective arguments for any given case, that is, to the theory of *status*.

Of the three remaining elements of the Ciceronian oration, both the narrative and the conclusion contain referential and nonreferential elements. The narrative, according to *De Inventione* (1.19.27), "is an exposition of events that have occurred or are supposed to have occurred" (55), and thus clearly refers to an external context. Cicero goes on, however, to give three species of narration: (1) narratives directly related to the principal subject of the oration; (2) narratives tangentially related to the subject and told to attack an opponent, make a comparison, or amuse the audience in a way connected with the subject; and (3) narratives un-

connected with the subject but told for amusement. In terms of Jakobson's model, then, the first type of narrative is purely referential; the second type can be viewed as referential, conative, in that it seeks to produce a specific effect on the addressee, and poetic, in that the message is functioning for its own sake; the third type is purely poetic. Similarly, the three parts of the Ciceronian conclusion, the summing up of the important points of the argument, the development of hostility in the audience toward an opponent, and the arousing of pity and sympathy in the audience, contain both referential and conative functions.

The only element of the Ciceronian oration that is primarily phatic, that is, whose main focus is on the actual contact between the addresser and the addressee, is the *exordium*. Cicero's famous definition of its function to make the audience "well-disposed, attentive, and receptive" (*Inventione*, 41) clearly indicates the *exordium's* phatic function. Although making the audience "well-disposed" may also involve the conative function, "attentive" and "receptive" confirm that the primary function of this element is to establish and maintain the communication channel between the addresser and addressee.

The phatic and conative functions of language dominate almost all the elements of the "Approved Format" of the anonymous Bolognese *Principles of Letter Writing*. As mentioned previously, the function of the classical *exordium* is divided into two separate parts, the salutation and the securing of good will. "The Salutation," states *The Principles*, "is an expression of greeting conveying a friendly sentiment not inconsistent with the social rank of the person involved" (7). Thus the function of the salutation is primarily phatic; it is only referential in that it conveys specific information about the relative and absolute social ranks of the writer and addressee.

As with most dictaminal works, the discussion of the salutation occupies the largest part of the *Principles of Letter Writing*, in this particular case almost half of the entire work and slightly more than half if we include the accompanying section on "The Securing of Good Will," with which it overlaps. Among its many prescriptions are fairly rigid rules for referring to the writer and the recipient:

. . . we must consider carefully how to place somewhere in the Salutation some additions to the names of the recipient, above all, these additions should be selected so that they point to some aspect of the recipient's renown and good character.

Now, if we want to add something to the names of the senders, let it at least be made suitable, since it should be chosen to indicate humility and certainly not pride. . . . for example, if it is a clerk or someone of ecclesiastical status, he should always be titled thus: "Johannes, clerk" or "deacon" or "bishop" or "abbot,"

"although unworthy" or "undeserving" or "sinful." In secular positions or offices, of course, it is not necessary for it to be done in this way, if we say for instance "N——, friend of the Tuscans," or "N——, Duke of Venice," or "Marshall of Tusca," and the like. (*Practice*, 8).

The treatise then goes on to state some other considerations necessary to formulating a proper salutation. A letter writer, for example, must consider whether the letter is for one person or several. Additional considerations include, of course, the relative social position of the author and recipient. As in other manuals, if the recipient is of higher rank, his name should precede that of the sender. Another important factor mentioned is knowledge of the exact titles and terms associated with each rank. The author also includes a one-sentence statement that the subject matter should be examined, "so that the writer may fashion the salutation with words suitable and prescribed according to it" (10). The consideration of subject matter is briefly alluded to again at the end of the long discussion of salutations in reference to how a salutation would be modified in a letter of reprimand. Between these two references to subject matter, however, are hundreds of lines of edited text giving examples of salutations from an emperor to a pope, their respective universal salutations, salutations of lay clergy and monks among themselves, salutations of ecclesiastical prelates to their subordinates, salutations among nobles and princes, salutations of the lower nobility among themselves, salutations of the lower nobility to their subordinates, salutations from a teacher to his student and from a student to his teacher, and salutations from parents to their children and children to their parents.

The next part of the "Approved Format," the *captatio benevolentiae*, the Securing of Good Will, is defined as a "certain fit ordering of words effectively influencing the mind of the recipient" (16). Five ways of securing good will are then briefly mentioned: (1) the author of the letter humbly stating his achievements, duties, or motives in writing the letter; (2) further praise of the recipient; (3) the author both stating his achievements and praising the recipient; (4) reference to the relationship between the author and recipient; or (5) reference to the subject (18-19). For *exordia* to hostile audiences, a short and oblique reference is made to the "indirect approach," *ephodos*, a technique explained in great length in both the *Ad Herennium* and *De Inventione*. The author concludes the discussion of the securing of good will by stating that much of this function is actually performed in the salutation and presents even more sample salutations.

The discussion of the narrative is extremely brief, stating that it should be short, that some narratives only narrate one incident and others re-

count several different events, and that narratives can be divided into those that narrate the past, those that narrate the present, and those that narrate the future.

Like the discussion of narrative, the discussion of the petition is fairly limited and perfunctory in its division of petitions into several species. Underlying this classification, however, is a scheme that once again reinforces the primacy of social hierarchy and personal relationships over any notion of reasoned argument. *The Principles of Letter Writing* gives nine classes of petition: supplicating (*deprecatiua*), explicating (*preceptiua*), threatening (*conminatiua*), inciting (*exhortatoria*), encouraging (*hortatoria*), admonishing (*ammonitoria*), advising (*consultoria*), censuring (*correptoria*), and the absolute *absoluta*, which is defined as "when we ask that something be done in none of these ways, but only by indicating it directly" (19). In the terminology of speech act theory, the petition is clearly what both Searle (13) and Bach and Harnish (47-49) term directives, and what Searle defines as "attempts . . . by the speaker to get the hearer to do something." Some of the types of petition are clearly distinct. Supplicating, for example, presupposes that the writer has no control over the act being requested and that its performance is completely at the whim of the reader of the letter. Threatening, on the other hand, is explicitly connected in *The Principles of Letter Writing* with the writer's social power:

It is menacing, when we do it with threats; after all, someone's official office is in a sense a threat, as for instance when a bishop sends a message to admonish one of his subordinates under the force of his office, or when some lord addresses a slave under threat of cutting out his eyes or head or his right hand, and the like. (*Principles*, 19)

With explicating, we come the closest to the classical logical argument. Authority is again invoked, but in this case it is the authority of precepts, of the teaching of *authors*, that is used by the writer of a letter to have his audience perform or not perform a certain act. The ninth and last type of petition, the absolute, seems to indicate a directive where no social position or moral precepts are employed to influence the reader. The writer of the letter is merely expressing an attitude toward some prospective action by the recipient.

The distinctions informing the other classes are certainly less straightforward. The semantic differentiation I have made between *exhortatoria* as "inciting" and *hortatoria* as "encouraging" is largely arbitrary. Both terms, however, indicate a strong attachment on the part of the writer toward the action to be performed by the recipient as well as some specific social right to offer the counsel, and in this way they reaffirm the

constant presence of both personal and hierarchical relationships between writer and recipient. Somewhat similarly, both *ammonitoria* and *correptoria* imply the privilege of the writer of a letter to judge negatively the actions of the addressee, whatever the exact distinction may be between them.

Thus in addition to signifying a hierarchical dimension, also implicit in these latter categories is the clear indication of a personal bond between the writer and reader. Advising, admonishing, and censuring all display a personal concern on the part of the writer for the actions of the reader that goes far beyond today's official IRS form letter. Similarly, although the discussion of the conclusion in *The Principles of Letter Writing* first points to a referential function – “[the conclusion] is offered to point out the usefulness or disadvantages possessed by the subjects treated in the letter” (*Principles*, 19) – the examples offered soon make it clear that the advantages and disadvantages being discussed will usually refer to the personal attitude of the writer toward the recipient. “If you do this,” states one example, “you will have the entirety of our fullest affection,” and the other offers, “If you fail to do this you will without doubt lose our friendship” (*Principles*, 19).

The almost exclusive focus of the dictaminal manuals on the relationship between writer and reader and their devaluation of the classical tradition of rhetorical argumentation is in part, of course, due to the medieval feudal notions of hierarchy and personal service. But such an explanation, although certainly relevant, is by itself overly simplistic. The other two major rhetorical genres of the Middle Ages, the *Ars poetriae* (the Art of Poetry), and the *Ars praedicandi* (the Art of Preaching), did not so completely ignore such large parts of Cicero and of classical rhetoric in general.⁸ The art of poetry, for example, made ample use of the figures of both diction and thought found in book 4 of the *Ad Herennium*, and the art of preaching adapted many of the invention techniques found in both the *Ad Herennium* and *De Inventione*. One possible explanation is simply the institutional context from which the *ars dictaminis* derived. Unlike the medieval pulpits, the function of both imperial and papal chanceries was not to convince, but to command. Similarly, the communications which these bureaucracies received were more dependent upon the reader's good will than they were upon any expertise in argumentation.

The formulaic rhetoric of personal relations taught by the *ars dictaminis* thrived throughout the Middle Ages and pursued several distinct avenues of development. Around 1300, Lawrence of Aquilegia, a successful traveling teacher of the *ars dictaminis*, wrote a treatise, *The Practice and Exercise of Letter Writing* (*Practica sive usus dictaminis*), which brought to its logical conclusion the tendency in the genre of making the act of writing a letter an automatic procedure. At the same time, however, it was

still reminiscent of the *formulae* from which the *ars dictaminis* had evolved. Rather than being a formal treatise at all, the *Practica* is a series of seven charts, allowing one to compose a letter simply by making a set of choices from various menus. Thus in composing a letter to a pope, one would select the appropriate salutation, copy the connective phrases and then select an appropriate narration and petition from those offered, copy another connective phrase, and then select an appropriate conclusion from another list.

The techniques of letter writing underwent changes less radical but still as interesting as Lawrence of Aquilegia's mechanistic dead end. Like many other communicative conventions, the medieval letter became a fairly conservative form, maintaining dictaminal characteristics in contexts far removed from the chanceries that had created it. As Wieruszowski notes, the basic structure of the manuals was prominent in Northern Italy in the age of Dante, even though the examples became somewhat modified to reflect the social reality of the Italian city-state. An amusing example of how the forms of the *ars dictaminis* migrated into other areas of medieval life is found in the collections of letters to and from medieval students. Haskins has edited and translated some interesting examples that demonstrate how the Bolognese "Approved Format" even structured communication between parents and children. Since the *ars dictaminis* was part of the curriculum at most schools, students applied what they learned to their own pragmatic concerns. A twelfth-century letter from two brothers at school in Orleans to their parents on the theme, still common today, of asking for additional funds provides an excellent illustration of the use of the basic structure:

To their very dear and respected parents M. Martre, knight, and M. his wife, M. and N., their sons, send greetings and filial obedience. This is to inform you that, by divine mercy, we are living in good health in the city of Orleans and are devoting ourselves wholly to study, mindful of the words of Cato, "To know anything is praiseworthy," etc. We occupy a good and comely dwelling, next door but one to the schools and market-place, so that we can go to school every day without wetting our feet. We have also good companions in the house with us, well advanced in their studies and of excellent habits—an advantage which we as well appreciate, for as the Psalmist says, "With an upright man thou wilt show thyself upright," etc. Wherefore lest production cease from lack of material, we beg your paternity to send us by the bearer, B., money for buying parchment, ink, a desk, and the other things which we need, in sufficient amount that we may suffer no want on your account (God forbid!) but finish our studies and return home with honor. The bearer will also take

charge of the shoes and stockings which you have to send us, and any news as well. (17-18)

Even though the narration is slightly longer than most and the letter lacks a formal conclusion, the general requirements of the formulaic letter are met. The salutation and securing of good will reaffirm the prescribed relationship between children and their parents. The narration and the use of precepts are also used to put the recipients in a more receptive frame of mind for the petition, the request for additional funds.

Another letter collected by Haskins, this time from a father rebuking his son, provides an example of even more faithful adherence to the structure of the "Approved Format":

To his son G. residing at Orleans, P. of Besançon sends greetings with paternal zeal. It is written, "He also that is slothful in his work is brother to him that is a great waster." I have recently discovered that you live dissolutely and slothfully, preferring license to restraint and play to work and strumming a guitar while the others are at their studies, whence it happens that you have read but one volume of law while your more industrious companions have read several. Wherefore I have decided to exhort you herewith to repent utterly of your dissolute and careless ways, that you may no longer be called a waster and that your shame may be turned to good repute. (15-16)

Some of the later treatments of the *ars dictaminis* sought to reestablish a connection between the art of letter writing and argumentative tradition of classical rhetoric. This tradition was strongest in France, where, Murphy surmises, "it helped to keep rhetorical interest alive during a period when Cicero's politically oriented rhetoric was simply not acceptable" (*Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 267). What appears to be the most comprehensive reinclusion of Ciceronian doctrine is the unedited *Compendium rhetorice*, summarized by Murphy. The *Compendium* seems to add a fairly extensive treatment of invention techniques to the traditional approach of the Bolognese "Approved Format" (*Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 236). In fifteenth-century England, though, a more traditional reliance on the legacy of the dictamen provided part of the basis of the rise of business writing in English (Richardson, "Business Writing and the Spread of Literacy in Late Medieval England," and "First Century of English Business Writing").

The *ars dictaminis*, then, stands as an early example of the development of an applied, as opposed to a theoretical, rhetoric. Yet Murphy's claim, in the conclusion to his excellent chapter on the genre in *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, that it is a rare example of an applied rhetoric (268)

ignores the reality that forensic rhetoric in the classical period was itself very much a practical rhetoric, and that much of the hostility and ambivalence over rhetoric found in Greek philosophy from Socrates onwards stem from the hostility over the Sophistic tradition of rhetoric as largely a practical technique for delivering effective speeches in law courts. Still, as a pragmatic rhetorical form, the *ars dictaminis* stands both as the first discernible ancestor of the modern manual of business communication and as a unique rhetorical tradition that transformed the complex rhetorical traditions of the classical period with their emphasis on persuasion into a phatic rhetoric of personal and official relations.

NOTES

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1. For a lengthy example of how the rules of the Roman law court still provided much of the basis of rhetorical training even though these rules were largely irrelevant to actual legal procedures under the Frankish kings, see Alcuin of York's *Disputatio de rhetorica et de virtutibus* in Howell, 66-155.

2. Although I disagree with Murphy's emphasis on how individuals rather than institutions influenced the development of the *ars dictaminis*, throughout this paper, I draw heavily on his chapter on the genre in *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*.

3. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 250, notes that the *Forman Dictandi* has never been edited.

4. Murphy in "Alberic of Monte Cassino," 139, argues that the latter title is more correct.

5. Compare Alberic's "eius dico quibus capitur benevolentia, docilitas, attentio," with Cicero, *De Inventione*, 40, "quod eveniet si eum benivolum, attentum, docilem confecerit."

6. Rockinger (29-46) edits the first of the three sections under the incorrect title of *De dictamine* (see Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 207n). The third section has been edited by Davis.

7. Rather than give the terms in Latin, I have, except for *captatio benevolentiae*, translated them into English. In addition, I have reversed Murphy's order of *Divisio* and *Narratio*, since Narrative precedes Division in both *De Inventione* and in the *Ad Herennium*. For reasons I will give below, I do not equate the Ciceronian *Confirmatio* with the dictaminal *Petitio*.

8. For a much fuller discussion of this topic, especially in terms of the *ars poetriae*, see Gallo.

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