Definitions and depictions of rhetorical practice in medieval English Fürstenspiegel.

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DEFINITIONS AND DEPICTIONS OF RHETORICAL PRACTICE IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH FÜRSTENSPIEGEL

By

Joseph Ethan Blaine Sharp
B.S., Troy University, 2013
M.A., Auburn University, 2016

A Dissertation
Submitted to the Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences of the University of Louisville in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy in English/Rhetoric and Composition

Department of English
University of Louisville
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A Thesis or Dissertation Approved on

April 15, 2022

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Dr. Jordan Loveridge
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my family

Dr. Amy Spurlock,

Dr. Steven Michael Sharp,

Dr. Jeff Spurlock,

Ms. Ashley Goerke,

Mr. Bobby Sharp

and

Mr. Sam Sharp

who have all supported me on this journey.
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ABSTRACT

DEFINITIONS AND DEPICTIONS OF RHETORICAL PRACTICE IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH FÜRSTENSPIEGEL

Joseph Sharp

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This dissertation examines how medieval authors defined rhetoric and depicted rhetorical practice in medieval English Fürstenspiegel. It begins by analyzing how the field of medieval rhetorical historiography has overlooked the Fürstenspiegel as a rhetorical genre due to its overt reliance on meta-rhetorical handbook genres as the objects of its analysis. This dissertation challenges traditional narratives that positions medieval rhetoric as a primarily academic discipline divorced from political practice by engaging in horizontal reading practices that examine the broader culture of medieval rhetorical practice alongside the definitions of rhetoric found in medieval English Fürstenspiegel. In so doing, this dissertation argues that the rhetorical theory contained in the Fürstenspiegel tradition represent novel adaptations to classical rhetorical theory that are designed to accommodate the constraints of the shifting medieval political landscape as the Aristotelian tradition was recovered.

After establishing the relevance of the Fürstenspiegel as a rhetorical genre in Chapter One, the dissertation provides three cases studies on John of Salisbury, John Gower, and John Lydgate that demonstrate how the rhetorical theories communicated in their Fürstenspiegel were responsive to particular cultural moments and resonated with
Chapter Two analyzes how John of Salisbury positions rhetorical knowledge as necessary for the development of higher-order learning in the individual and compares the interpretive and inventive practices that John advocates in the *Metalogicon* and *Policraticus* with emerging methodologies for determining the truth of testimony and contingent situations in contemporary English jurisprudence. Chapter Three explores how John Gower’s elevation of rhetoric to an epistemological category establishes a political paradigm in which a sovereign’s rhetorical efficacy is measured against his habituation to virtue, a paradigm that is challenged by Richard II’s attempt to canonize Edward II. Finally, Chapter Four traces the development of rhetoric as a legitimated discipline within the king’s household and details how John Lydgate leverages the professionalization of rhetoric to create a political system in which rhetorical intervention is achieved through rhetorical stylistics. In Chapter Five, the dissertation concludes by explaining how these case studies affect the field of medieval rhetorical historiography.
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CHAPTER I

THE CASE FOR THE *FÜRSTENSPIEGEL* AS A RHETORICAL GENRE

Preterea quod interrogasti et scire desideras est arcanum tale quod humana pectora vix poterunt tollerare; quomodo ergo possunt in mortalibus pellibus depingi? Ad illud itaque quod te decet inquirere et mihi licitum est tractare, me oportet et teneor ex debito respondere, sicut tu teneris ex debito discrecionis non exigere a me amplius ex hoc secreto quod tibi tradidi in hoc libro. Quia si attente et studiose legeris et intelleexeris et ad plenum sciveris que ipso continentur, indubianter credo quod non erit inter te et illud quod scire desideras aliquod obstaculum: qui tantam graciam Deus contulit tibi in intellectu et velocitate ingenii et literature scienciarum. Insuper per meam doctrinam precedentem quam tibi tradidi, per teipsum poteris apprehender et figurative intelligere totum illud quod postulas edoceri. Quia desiderium ferventis voluntatis aperiet tibi viam ad tuum propositum optinendum, et perducet te ad finem optatum, Domino concedente. Causa quidem subest quare tibi figurative revelo secretum meum, loquens tecum exemplis enigmaticis atque signis, quia timeo nimium ne liber proscenium ad manus deveniat infidelum et ad potestatem arrogancium, et sic perveniat ad illos ultimum bonum et arcanum divinum, at quod summus Deus illos judicavit immeritos et indignos.¹

Roger Bacon’s Latin edition of the *Secretum Secretorum*, a text translated from the Arabic *Kitāb sir al-asrār*, opens with an Aristotelian pseudepigrapha in which Aristotle

¹ R. Bacon, *Opera hacentus inedita Rogeri Baconi Fasc. V: Secretum Secretorum cum Glossis et Notulis*, ed. Robert Steele (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920), 40-1. In addition, that which you have asked of me and that which you most desire to know are the secrets that the human heat can scarcely sustain; how, therefore, can [these secrets] be painted upon human skin? Though it is proper for me to treat what you inquire as far as it is permissible, as I am bound by legal duty, you are likewise bound by the debt of discretion to not demand more from me than the secrets I have given in this book. If you read it diligently and understand it, you will know the whole of what this book contains. Undoubtedly, I believe that there will not be an obstacle between you and what you want to know, for so much grace has God given to you such understanding and quick disposition for the learning of sciences. Therefore, through my doctrine which I have given you before, you may on comprehend on your own and understand that in which you asked to be instructed. And so, the desire of your fervent will shall open the way for you to achieve your goal and lead to your desired end, if God so wills. And the cause why I have revealed my secrets to you figuratively, speaking to you in enigmatic examples and signs, because I fear greatly that this book should come into hands of the unfaithful and in the power of the arrogant, who may come to know the ultimate good and the divine secret, of which God has judged them underserving and unbecoming (my translation).
responds to Alexander’s request for knowledge on governance with an exhortation to secrecy. Composed in Arabic around 941 AD, the *Kitāb sir al-asrār* enjoyed a wide circulation in translation in the late medieval Latin West and is found in around five hundred manuscript copies dating from the twelfth century. Broadly understood not as an Aristotelian-influenced novel Arabic composition but rather as a preserved and genuine Aristotelian text, the *Secretum Secretorum* inserted itself into the established tradition of the mirror for princes, or *Fürstenspiegel* genre, handbooks of advice that educated sovereigns on both moral virtue and proper governance. As the introduction to the *Secretum Secretorum* indicates, the knowledge contained within these books was not deemed to be accessible to a wide audience but rather was reserved, through its figurative language, symbolic allegory, and obscure exempla, to those who possessed the grammatical, rhetorical, hermeneutical, and ethical frameworks to parse the truth concealed by the genre’s ambiguity. In this incipit to one of the most widely influential *Fürstenspiegel* of the late medieval period, the terms of the genre’s construction are laid bare. *Fürstenspiegel* may provide sovereigns with the regiminal and didactic frameworks needed to ensure their efficacy as a sovereign, but the construction of these frameworks is dependent upon the sovereign’s already existing rhetorical-grammatical training.

The *Fürstenspiegel*’s construction of a didactic, moral framework through which a sovereign can discipline himself was necessitated by the liminal space that the body of the sovereign occupied in medieval political theory. As Michael Wilks has persuasively

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3 Following the foundational text in the field, W. Kleineke, *Englische Fürstenspiegel vom Policraticus Johannis von Salisbury bis zum Basilikon Doron König Jakobs I* (Halle/Salle: Niemeyer, 1937). I prefer the term *Fürstenspiegel* to mirror for princes due to its grammatical flexibility.
argued, late medieval political theory grappled with two traditions that theorized the foundation of sovereignty in radically different ways. The hierocratic model of government, drawn from developments in Roman law principles in the twelfth century, viewed lay and temporal authority as a “derivative power” that descended from the special spiritual authority vested within the Pope as the head of the Ecclesia of all Christian believers in the form of the Petrine commission. In contrast, the recovery of Aristotle and its supplementation by Ibn Rushd [Averroes] in the thirteenth century introduced a “materialist stream” into medieval conceptions of sovereignty, which challenged widely accepted views that conceptualized the Ecclesia as a universal body rather than as a collection of real, existing individuals. Consequently, when the image of the universal Ecclesia is shattered and replaced with a multiplicious populus comprised of individuals who form a community around certain cultural norms, these norms themselves become a basis for an ascending governance based upon civil laws. These conceptions of ascending and descending government were supported by distinctions made between civil law—the positive law agreed to by the consent of the governed—and natural law—the divinely derived absolute and universal standards against which civil law must be measured. As it concerned the person of the sovereign, these competing

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5 Ibid., 85.
7 While, here, the dissertation draws a stark contrast between hierocratic and popular forms of government and natural and civil law, it is important to remember that these two traditions were in constant dynamic interplay. Much of the work of Thomas Aquinas focused on reconciling these two traditions through Thomistic realism to simultaneously understand the Ecclesia as a material construction that precipitated a universal mental abstraction that, on its own, possessed some spiritual sense of sovereignty. This naturally necessitated mixed forms of government in which questions concerning sovereignty in a particular case were determined by the ultimate end of the actions. See, for example, *Pol.* I.1.5; *Sent.* II d. 44 ex. ad. 4; and *ST* II-II q.12 a. 2 ad 1. Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation,
juristic conceptions of sovereignty positioned the sovereign’s body in a perpetual state of composition. In the common metaphor of the political state as the body politic, the sovereign occupied the position of the head, with the other components of the *populus* representing the other parts of the body that supported, but ultimately followed the rule of the head.⁸ According to Ernst H. Kantorowicz, medieval theorists drew upon Christian traditions that framed Christ as having a heavenly and mortal body to argue that secular king likewise possessed two bodies: a natural, mortal body subject to pleasures and pains of living, and a sovereign body that functioned in the *lex animae* tradition as the incorporation of civil law within the kingdom.⁹ The king himself, then, occupies a liminal space in which he exists both under the natural law but above the civil law of the community that he rules.¹⁰ To exist within this space requires a sovereign to allow himself to be educated under the regiminal framework posited by the *Fürstenspiegel* so that he may develop the disposition toward virtue that will curb any tyrannical tendencies.

While the broad medieval concern over the nature of a moral education descended from similar anxieties in antiquity, the elevation of the king as both the moral exemplum and reflection of the entire kingdom and his liminal positioning in relation to law with its focus upon rhetorical theory and practice, to extensively demarcate the lines between particular manifestations of government and their relation to medieval theories of governance, these competing conceptions that emerged with the recovery of Aristotle broadly informed political praxis in late medieval England and were in turn influenced by conceptions of language and its use.⁸ While the medieval metaphor of the body represented a unified whole, the individual parts of the body were understood as having distinct functions based upon their role within the body. Rather than a holistic understanding of the body, the medieval metaphor instead depicted the body politic as a union of opposites that required the strong control of the head to be kept in order. See, M. Camille, “The image and the self: unwriting late medieval bodies,” in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, eds. S. Kay & M. Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 62-99.


¹⁰ Ibid., 149.
necessitated a robust education in virtue. Through the influence of Cicero’s political writings, Aristotelian virtue ethics were reconciled with traditions of Christian morality to develop a moral framework under which an ideal Christian sovereign could function, with an emphasis upon the four cardinal virtues of actio, or the practical action of rulership: prudence, justice, courage, and temperance. However, as Aristotle elucidates in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, as virtues of character rather than intellectual virtues, these virtues could only be developed through experience, not through a didactic education.\(^{11}\)

For young sovereigns assuming the throne, this distinction between experience and education posed significant dilemma, as their youth precluded them from the prudential knowledge based upon experience that the Aristotelian reception recognized as necessary for practical rulership. While moral virtue, according to Aristotle and his followers like Aquinas, may not be didactically taught, considerations of moral virtue did comprise a significant component of late medieval grammatical-rhetorical training. Given the close relationship in classical rhetorical theory between rhetorical practice and the development of moral virtue, it is not surprising that the texts used to train grammatical interpretation and rhetorical composition would touch on matters of morality. Specifically, in the late medieval period, young nobility were educated in the realm of “lettrure,” which “had the basic meaning of literacy” but also extended to a wider range of self-improvement that included moral development.\(^{12}\) As the young English nobility learned to read and write, first in Latin and then in the vernacular English and French, the objects of their interpretations and translations were often moral axioms or moral exempla that

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\(^{12}\) R. F. Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 75.
constituted a broad range of wisdom literature.\textsuperscript{13} The grammatical-rhetorical skills developed in one’s youth formed a generalized orientation toward interpretation and composition that informed the practical actions of rulership throughout one’s life. At the same time, through the process of interpreting and translating axioms and exempla, their moral teachings became internalized by those who encountered them. This is further evidenced by the broad circulation of genres such as the \textit{Fürstenspiegel} that “often illustrated their advice with literary references, allusions to historical events and moral stories, reminding their readers of the triumphs of virtuous rulers and the downfall of foolish and wicked ones,” which necessitated the grammatical-rhetorical skills learned in childhood and further developed through continuing education and the interpretation of particular circumstances that arise during rulership.\textsuperscript{14} In short, while late medieval pedagogical theorists may have disputed the possibility of didactically imparting an education in moral virtue, questions of morality were central to literacy training during the period.

With the recovery of the Pseudo-Aristotelian \textit{Secretum Secretorum}, the genre of the \textit{Fürstenspiegel}, which had always had a presence in the Latin West,\textsuperscript{15} exploded in popularity, especially as it sought to address the gap between experience and education

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\textsuperscript{13} C. Cannon, \textit{From Literacy to Literature: England, 1300-1400} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 199-201. See also, M. C. Woods, \textit{Classroom Commentaries: Teaching the Poetria nova across Medieval and Renaissance Europe} (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2010). In tracing the circulation of the \textit{Poetria nova} throughout Europe, Woods notes that rhetorical texts, such as the \textit{Poetria nova} and its commentaries, were often collected with moralizing texts, alongside other dictaminal works, pp. 166-9.
\textsuperscript{14} N. Orme, \textit{From Childhood to Chivalry: The Education of the English Kings and Aristocracy, 1066-1530} (London: Methuen, 1984), 89.
\textsuperscript{15} For an example of an early Latin \textit{Fürstenspiegel} that predates the influence of the \textit{Secretum Secretorum}, see Alcuin, \textit{The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne}, trans. W. S. Howell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941). In contrast to the \textit{Fürstenspiegel} influenced by the Letter to Alexander tradition, the \textit{Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne} adopts a dialogic approach in which Charlemagne questions and is directly instructed by his advisor Alcuin.
\end{flushleft}
faced by young sovereigns. To generalize broadly, *Fürstenspiegel* thematized and reconciled two distinct but related questions in the medieval Latin West that both centered upon the person of the king and descended from similar issues: first, how does the sovereign’s authority stand in relationship to the civil law of which he is the guarantor; and, second, to what extent does an individual’s moral and virtuous character depend upon a didactic education and, relatedly, what form should this virtuous education take? In answering these questions, *Fürstenspiegel* authors turned toward classical and Biblical sources, making specific adaptations to the narrative action found in these stories within their translations to align them more closely with contemporary concerns and, in some cases, to fit them within a Christian moral framework. Rita Copeland has demonstrated that this act of displacing a source text through translation allowed medieval authors to develop their own sense of *auctoritas* and to demonstrate the effectiveness of the vernacular as a literary language.  

While the nature of vernacular translation as a rhetorical act has been widely explored in modern scholarship, less attention has been paid toward how the adaptations made by vernacular authors to classical theory and classical narratives within texts like the *Fürstenspiegel* reveal a robust depiction of deliberative rhetorical theory and contemporary rhetorical practices. Despite claims that the undemocratic nature of the medieval period foreclosed the possibility of deliberative rhetoric in practice, *Fürstenspiegel* as a genre provide

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18 This claim remains one of the most widely repeated myths about the medieval period and descends from two distinct traditions operating within rhetorical historiography. In the first, classical theories of rhetoric that developed in the classical democracy of Athens are held up as “pure” forms of rhetoric that are fragmented and refracted in the medieval period; see, for example, G. A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*
extensive rhetorical frameworks for sovereigns as they engage in the act of practical rulership. As I will demonstrate throughout this dissertation, understanding *Fürstenspiegel* only as moral or constitutional handbooks limits the range of social actions that the genre aimed to achieve as it circulated throughout the Latin West. Situated at the intersection of morality and governance, the education provided by the *Fürstenspiegel* naturally had much to say about rhetorical theory and practice.

While the claim that *Fürstenspiegel* functioned as rhetorical handbooks alongside their moral and political dimensions challenges accepted knowledge about the genre, the close relationship between rhetoric, morality, and education has been well attested in both the classical and medieval periods. Indeed, beginning with the work of Isocrates, the development of moral virtue was closely associated with the rhetorical education required by citizens to engage in civic affairs. This traditional association persisted in the Latin rhetorical treatises most influential during the later medieval period, with Cicero noting:

> Quare meo quidem animo nihilo minus eloquentiae studendum est, etsi ea quidam et privatim et publice abutuntur; sed eo quidem vehementius, ne mali magno cum detrimento bonorum et communi omnium pernicie plurimum possint, cum praesertim hoc sit unum, quod ad omnes res et privatas et publicas maxime pertineat, hoc tuta, hoc honesta, hoc inlustris, hoc eodem vita iucunda fiat. Nam hinc ad rem publicam plurima commoda veniunt, si moderatrix omnium rerum praesto est sapientia.

*and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). In the second, contemporary historiography follows the example of Renaissance theorists to paint the medieval period as a “dark age” of absolutism that hindered the development of rhetorical theory and practice. In this version of historiography, the Renaissance rhetorical theorists recover what has been “lost” during the medieval period; see for example, B. Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).


20 Cicero, *De Inventione*, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), at 1.5: “Wherefore, in my opinion at least, men ought not the less to devote themselves to eloquence, although some men both in private and public affairs misuse it in a perverse manner; but I think rather that they should apply themselves to it with the more eagerness, in order to prevent wicked men from getting the greatest power to the exceeding injury of the good, and the common calamity of all men; especially as
As classical theories of language became inflected with Christian exegetical traditions by theorists such as Jerome, Augustine, and Aquinas, they incorporated Christian views of post-lapsarian language as a force ambiguity that produces discord and limits human communication to the expression of external, material signs, whose sensory apprehension makes possible misinterpretation. Due to the ambiguous nature of the linguistic and textual signs used for communication, those who produce and interpret ambiguous signs are compelled to use language morally aligned with language’s intended purpose of revealing the truth of God’s creation. When these foundational ideas became modified within late medieval theories of education, they produced a cultural disposition toward symbolic interpretation that continually sought to represent and reflect the natural world, moral truths, and intentions of the soul concealed by discordant language. Operating within this broad culture of symbolic interpretation and production, the Fürstenspiegel’s focus upon matters of governance and morality found their foundation in the concerns of rhetoric, perception and language, especially in knowledge of particulars. Naturally, then, in addition to providing a simulation of the experiences necessary for gaining prudential knowledge, Fürstenspiegel also provided young sovereigns with definitions and depictions of rhetoric that they would need to both interpret the symbolic hidden secrets mentioned in the incipit to the Secretum Secretorum and to engage in the day-to-day realities of rulership.

this is the only thing which is of the greatest influence on all affairs both public and private; and as it is by this same quality that life is rendered safe, and honourable, and illustrious, and pleasant. For it is from this source that the most numerous advantages accrue to the republic, if only it be accompanied by wisdom, that governor of all human affairs.”

The Fürstenspiegel as a Case Study in Medieval Rhetoric

Within the field of rhetorical historiography, although the rhetorical principles of individual Fürstenspiegel authors have been examined, the genre’s definitions and depictions of rhetorical practice have never received an extended scholarly treatment. When the Fürstenspiegel has received scholarly attention, the primary focus has been on the genre as a type of constitutional or ethical document, with the rhetorical aspects of the genre being subsumed under these larger categories, even as Fürstenspiegel authors placed ethics and politics under the governance of rhetoric.\(^{23}\) The traditional subsummation of rhetoric as a field of knowledge in modern rhetorical historiography produced an understanding of medieval rhetorical practices that positioned medieval theories of rhetoric and, especially, the possibility of deliberative rhetoric, as fragmented due to the loss of Greek-Latin bilingualism in the Latin West—resulting in the disappearance of Greek rhetorical sources in the early medieval period—and the fall of Republican Rome and the subsequent rise of tyrannical monarchy.\(^{24}\) Under these cultural conditions, which early scholarship assumed made political intervention impossible, the epideictic mode was seen as the only strand of classical rhetorical theory to operate during the medieval period. However, as recent scholarship has shown, while the medieval period did not emphasize public civic oratory in the manner of classical Greece and Rome, the feudal relationships the constituted medieval political society offered multiple avenues for engaging in deliberative rhetorical practice, particularly through the


\(^{24}\) Vickers, Defence, xx.
act of counsel, either in parliamentary spaces, through letters, or even direct speech.\textsuperscript{25} Though we now understand deliberative rhetoric to operate within the medieval period, modern scholarship has been slow to examine its constituent rhetorical theories and practices, primarily because there exist no primary textual sources that figure rhetoric as a unified theory of knowledge. As Martin Camargo has argued, any attempt “to identify a timeless essence of rhetoric” will always position medieval rhetoric “as something between decadence and hiatus” because of the period’s lack of “comprehensive theoretical treatises on rhetoric.”\textsuperscript{26}

In an attempt to disrupt rhetorical historiography’s traditional claims on the nonrhetorical nature of the medieval period, modern scholarship focused upon recovering those texts that did articulate a theoretical perspective on rhetoric as a body of knowledge. Most prominently, James. J. Murphy divided medieval rhetorical theory into three fundamental genres, the \textit{ars dictaminis}, the \textit{ars praedicandi}, and the \textit{ars poetriae}, based upon meta-rhetorical handbooks that achieved wide circulation in the Latin West.\textsuperscript{27} Following Murphy, most modern rhetorical historiography has focused upon these three rhetorical genres despite the fact that medieval rhetoric as a practice “permeated a broader range of social practices than those enumerated in the treatises devoted

\textsuperscript{25} See, for example, M. Giancarlo, \textit{Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). S. Ramsey, “\textit{Consilium}: A System to Address Deliberative Uncertainty in the Rhetoric of the Middle Ages,” \textit{Advances in the History of Rhetoric}, 15, no. 2 (2012): 204-21. Further, claims that classical Greece and Rome represented a pinnacle of democratic access are undercut by the large segments of society, such as women, foreigners, and slaves, who had no political representation within these cultures.


\textsuperscript{27} J. J. Murphy, \textit{Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from Saint Augustine to the Renaissance} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974). See also, J. J. Murphy, \textit{Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts} (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974).
specifically to the discourse itself.” 28 The field’s myopic focus upon these three handbook genres has resulted in the defining of medieval rhetoric as an academic and ecclesiastical discipline dissociated from political praxis. Consequently, the methodologies adopted by such scholarship naturally focuses upon the sources and reception of the theoretical rhetorical treatises composed by medieval authors and the adaptations that they may or may not have made to their source texts. 29 By engaging in source and reception studies, this scholarship treats medieval rhetoric as an art of relationality rather than invention; medieval rhetoricians are only granted rhetorical agency and skill to the extent that they employ or adapt techniques that would have been known to them through their grammatical-rhetorical training. In contrast to this trend, a second group of scholarship takes a broader definition of rhetoric and centers its objects of analysis, primarily vernacular poetry, as “the central element in a whole rhetorical situation” constructed by the medieval author. 30 This subtle shift in positioning—from understanding a text as a point upon a rhetorical continuum to recognizing a text as a rhetorical intervention in its own right—situates the rhetorical theory and practices expressed within their more immediate cultural contexts and demonstrates how authors “did indeed make pragmatic adaptations of ancient materials to shape special genres for their own purposes” by mixing “grammatical and rhetorical materials to accomplish their

ends.” However, even as this scholarship recognizes that medieval rhetorical invention could extend beyond the precepts laid down in classical rhetorical theory, it still privileges the text itself, and its associated discursive communities, namely, the grammar school, university, and church, as the sole site of rhetorical praxis.

By locating the work of medieval rhetoric narrowly within these spaces, even as contemporary scholarship has reclaimed and expanded the productive potential of medieval rhetoric as an analytic category, it has broadly ignored that rhetoric itself was figured, both by medieval rhetoricians and the classical sources that they drew upon, as always-already a social practice, not merely a textual practice. As Paul Strohm has argued, medieval texts did not exist within an isolated textual discursive community but rather articulated “social relations in a larger field of such depictions” that drew upon the wider material culture of the medieval period in their portrayal and discussion of particular aspects of life. Through the study of the Fürstenspiegel as a rhetorical treatise, we can extend medieval rhetorical practice to include a wider constellation of both texts and social and political actions. With their emphasis upon practical rulership, Fürstenspiegel bridge the gap between literary text and practical action, as the literary components that comprise the Fürstenspiegel have the ultimate aim of producing action


32 P. Strohm, *The Social Chaucer* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), ix. In medieval rhetorical historiography, the most widely cited example of this phenomenon is Chaucer’s parodying of grammatical school composition exercises in the “Nun’s Priest’s Tale.” For an extended discussion of this tale and its sources, see, P. W. Travis, *Disseminal Chaucer: Rereading the Nun’s Priest’s Tale* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).
within the audience, namely the self-creation and self-authorization of a royal persona capable to guiding the realm toward the end of felicity. The body of knowledge represented by rhetoric functions within these texts as a tool for drawing connections between universal categories, most often moral and constitutional frameworks, and particular circumstances, the contingent matters that require deliberation to understand. Within the genre, rhetorical theory is simultaneously developed and put into practical action; in the same manner that an *ars poetriae* such as the *Poetria nova* teaches strategies of composition through the enactment of those strategies, 33 *Fürstenspiegel* provide a theoretical foundation for deliberative rhetorical practice and then demonstrate the efficacy of that foundation through the depiction of rhetorical practice by drawing upon a large corpus of accepted cultural signifiers. Through the analysis of these depictions of rhetorical practice, we can trace moments of resonance between literary text and political action so as to uncover a more widespread rhetorical culture operant during the late medieval period.

While the long history of the *Fürstenspiegel* saw the generic conventions of the genre change over time, in general, the form of the genre was comprised of two related textual traditions: Aristotelian virtue ethics and Biblical and classical exempla. To begin, *Fürstenspiegel* are characterized by their grounding in antiquity, often in the form of an antiquarian authority such as Aristotle, as a recovery of lost knowledge, which serves the dual purpose of lending authority to the teaching of the *Fürstenspiegel* and distancing the actual author of the *Fürstenspiegel* from its contents. While not uniform, the textual construction of a *Fürstenspiegel* often articulated a theoretical construct based upon

philosophical principles, most often drawn from Aristotle and later Aquinas, and then provided examples of these constructs in practice through their depiction in exempla. As Richard F. Green has described it, this pedagogical construction operated as an education through history, with dense and abstract theoretical constructs being paired with well-known and accessible literary texts. In the rhetorical situation posited by such a textual form, sovereigns come to internalize the theoretical construct communicated through exempla as they employ their grammatical-rhetorical training to interpret the meaning concealed by the “enigmatic examples and signs” that characterized the exempla.34 Additionally, the Fürstenspiegel aimed to be comprehensive in its educational program. Often drawing upon the Aristotelian division of the sciences, the Fürstenspiegel provided a complete overview beginning with natural philosophy, continuing through the moral education of the sovereign, and concluding with matters of practical rulership, first the household and then the kingdom.35 The movement from knowledge of the world, to knowledge of the self, to knowledge of governance depended upon the idea foundational in the medieval period that the body of the individual functioned as a microcosm of larger social structures.36 The Fürstenspiegel, in short, aimed to produce good governance within the kingdom by first improving the moral character of the sovereign. To make connections between the theoretical concepts articulated at the beginning of the Fürstenspiegel and the exempla that demonstrated these examples, authors turned to the art of rhetoric.

34 R. F. Green, Poets, p. 78.
35 A similar tradition can be found in medieval Greek texts, with the division including study of the self (hexis), the household (oikos), and the city-state (polis).
The *Fürstenspiegel*, then, serves as an ideal case study in medieval rhetorical historiography because its very composition provides a double layer of rhetorical intervention. First, both Latin and vernacular *Fürstenspiegel* provide extended discussions of rhetoric and situate a knowledge of rhetoric within the broader moral and political education of the young sovereign. In this manner, *Fürstenspiegel* serve as an extension of the grammatical-rhetorical training of the sovereign’s youth. By drawing upon the literacy skills developed in a sovereign’s youth, the genre invites the sovereign to engage in the rhetorical and discursive construction of his own royal identity. While the rhetorical theory presented in these *Fürstenspiegel* do not prepare the sovereign for a life of oral deliberation in the forum, the adaptations made to rhetorical theory by *Fürstenspiegel* authors center the authority of the sovereign and reimage deliberative rhetoric not as a collection of strategies for composition but rather as a reasoned capacity that allows the sovereign to determine the end of felicity. The deliberative rhetorical theory championed by these texts requires rhetorical historiography to shift its understanding of how deliberative rhetoric functions—a movement from exterior to interior persuasion. Second, the rhetorical composition of the genre itself provides an example of rhetoric intervening across power differentials to enact social change, in this case through the didactic disciplining of the sovereign under moral and legal frameworks. While, in the Latin West, there always existed a culture of advising the sovereign, the rhetorical composition of the *Fürstenspiegel* allowed authors to couch criticism of the sovereign, his behavior, and his court behind the veil of literary language and symbolism.\(^{37}\) In the same manner that Aristotelian inductive reasoning allows the

\(^{37}\) J. Ferster, *Fictions*, p. 16.
individual to persuade without coercion by centering the audience’s interpretation, the
literary nature of the Fürstenspiegel allowed the author to educate without seeming to
educate and, in that way, preserve both his own reputation and that of the sovereign. The
rhetorical nature of the Fürstenspiegel’s composition allows for the analysis of the
efficacy of rhetorical strategies to persuade in situations where there is a power imbalance between writer and audience.

Situated at the intersection of moral, political, and rhetorical education, the
Fürstenspiegel, due to its widespread and continued circulation throughout the late
medieval period, also allows for the tracing of how theories of rhetoric and depictions of
rhetorical practice shifted over time as Aristotelian texts were recovered and
disseminated and as the language of composition shifted from Latin to vernacular. In
particular, the composition of Fürstenspiegel was greatly influenced by the recovery of
Aristotelian moral and political treatises, and later Fürstenspiegel often couch their
definitions of rhetoric in Aristotelian rather than the Ciceronian concepts that dominate
medieval rhetorical treatises. Further, in English, the first vernacular discussions of
rhetoric as a body knowledge are found in Fürstenspiegel. By comparing the definitions
and depictions of rhetorical practice as they appear in Fürstenspiegel across a relatively
short time period, it is possible to speculate how dramatic shifts in access to ancient texts
and literary composition impacted understandings of rhetoric as a social practice. As I
will argue throughout this dissertation, across the late medieval period, examining
Fürstenspiegel reveals how conceptions of rhetoric shifted from being primarily
grounded in logic and dialectic, to being grounded in hermeneutics and interpretation,
and finally being grounded in composition and performance. This shift in the foundations
of rhetorical theory was accompanied by a corresponding change in the educational curriculum that comprised grammatical-rhetorical training and the disciplinary status of rhetoric as a body of knowledge.

**Moving beyond Murphy**

As a project firmly grounded in revisionist rhetorical historiography, this dissertation defines medieval rhetoric as not merely a textual tradition divorced from political praxis but instead as a cultural disposition toward the use and interpretation of language according to certain accepted norms that emerge out of and in response to particular material exigencies. As Carole Blair has argued, traditional historiographic methods often elide culture and the social meaning-making practices that comprise culture and thereby represent rhetoric as a dead object of study rather than as a living moment of intervention. Rather than focusing upon the narrow set of handbook traditions defined by Murphy, this dissertation will make the case that *Fürstenspiegel* themselves, while not meta-rhetorical in the sense of providing sovereigns with specific strategies of invention, function as rhetorical treatises in their capacity for training

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38 As any broad survey of the field would indicate, the concept of “rhetorical historiography” is highly contested both in its definition and in its accompanying methods. Within the field, the terms of the debate surrounding rhetorical historiography were established in a series of discussions published in *Rhetoric Review*, known as the Octalogs. In the first Octalog (1988), respondents debated the relative truth value of historiography and the extent to which historiographies themselves were constructed rhetorically to achieve specific social actions. This debate extended to the second Octalog (1997), where scholars called upon the field to develop more theoretically informed and critically-conscious methods that would allow scholars to challenge long held assumptions about the texts that comprised the rhetorical canon. Finally, in the third Octalog (2011), a diverse group of scholars asked the field to reconsider notions of Western rhetoric as a universal principle divorced from cultural contingencies so as to extend the rhetorical canon to non-Western traditions. In general, the field has moved toward adopting revisionist historiographic methods, though this process has been uneven in some areas, including medieval rhetorical historiography which still privileges the text over the culture in which it has been produced. See, Octalog I, “The Politics of Historiography,” *Rhetoric Review* 7, no. 1 (1988): 5-49. Octalog II, “Octalog II: The (Continuing) Politics of Historiography, *Rhetoric Review* 16, no. 1 (1997): 22-44. Octalog III, “Octalog III: The Politics of Historiography in 2010, *Rhetoric Review* 30, no. 2 (2011): 109-34. 39 C. Blair, “Contested Histories of Rhetoric: The Politics of Preservation, Progress, and Change,” *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992): 403-28, at 410.
sovereigns to engage in rhetorical practice through the process of moral education.

Making this argument requires expanding the traditional medieval rhetorical canon to include texts that have not been considered “rhetorical” in the sense of articulating specific theories of rhetorical practice by modern scholarship. While any analysis of medieval rhetoric must necessarily engage in source study and manuscript reception, I supplement these traditional historiographic methods by placing rhetorical texts, here the *Fürstenspiegel*, into conversation with a wider archive of contemporary political texts, most importantly, personal correspondences, parliamentary rolls, chronicle histories, and literary propaganda. Through this surviving archive of political texts, it is possible to trace the enactment of particular political actions and measure the extent to which the implementation of these actions shares resonances with the rhetorical practices depicted in the *Fürstenspiegel*. While I do not want to suggest a causal relationship between the rhetorical precepts laid down in *Fürstenspiegel* and the political actions of particular English monarchs in either direction, analyzing the extent to which the rhetorical theory articulated in *Fürstenspiegel* found a manifestation in contemporary politics can reveal a broader culture of medieval rhetorical practice.

Drawing upon this tradition of revisionist historiography, this dissertation recognizes that the co-constitutive nature of rhetoric and culture necessitates research methodologies that are capable of carefully contextualizing rhetorical texts within the larger constellation of cultural practices that engender these texts with the possibility for rhetorical intervention. In contrast to much of the recent scholarship in medieval rhetorical historiography, this dissertation’s discussion of deliberative rhetoric is less concerned with “abstract[ing] from the situated case some central or essential qualities”
and more concerned with exploring “the cultural exigencies that enable or encourage multiple modes of rhetorical response.” That is to say, the discussion of deliberative rhetoric as it is defined and depicted in medieval Fürstenspiegel does not only attempt to trace how medieval authors adapted classical rhetorical theory to suit their own purposes but also to suggest that these adaptations were, in turn, precipitated by the material cultural exigencies operant during the late medieval period, notably the wider cultural disposition toward grammatical-rhetorical training and symbolic interpretation. In referring to culture as a consideration in rhetorical practice, this dissertation follows Powell et al. in defining culture broadly as “meaning-making as it is situated in specific cultural communities…any place/space where groups organize under a set of shared beliefs and practices.” Such a definition of culture implies that an extended time period situated within a specific location, in this case, the late medieval Latin West, can be comprised of many competing rhetorical cultures that, while they may draw upon certain shared foundational beliefs and dispositions toward language use, adopt specific rhetorical practices that are generated and foreclosed by particular cultural exigencies.

The aim of this dissertation is to analyze how the meaning-making practices articulated in Fürstenspiegel came to be culturally authorized and how these practices manifest in the wider rhetorical-political culture of the period. Naturally, this orientation to rhetoric as a cultural act also requires revising historiographic assumptions that portray rhetorical actors and authors as neutral arbiters of a received rhetorical tradition rather than “historical and sociopolitical beings…people in specific relationships to power, privilege,

Consequently, this dissertation is careful to situate medieval authors and political figures within their immediate cultural contexts and acknowledges that their conception of deliberative rhetorical practice is intimately connected to their own relatively privileged relationship to power. The deliberative theories of rhetoric contained within *Fürstenspiegel* make no attempt at democratic representation or implementation; instead, by limiting effective rhetorical practice to only those who possess nobility of character and extensive education, these theories work to consolidate the power of a powerful and privileged segment of society.

Since this dissertation takes as its aim locally situated moments of rhetorical intervention rather than transcendent rhetorical principles, the objects of analysis considered in this study function as case studies in rereading the rhetorical tradition. For each analytic chapter, a *Fürstenspiegel* serves as the main object of analysis, but the exegesis of each *Fürstenspiegel* is supplemented by a wide archive of contemporary philosophical and pedagogical texts that function to situate the *Fürstenspiegel* within the intellectual culture of its production. Rather than examining the genre’s depictions of rhetorical theory and practice as a reception of the rhetorical tradition, my theoretical orientation toward *Fürstenspiegel* as rhetorical artifacts understands authors as making genuine rhetorical interventions within their cultural, social, and political spheres. The case studies, then, function to understand how the adaptations made by *Fürstenspiegel* authors were informed by cultural dispositions toward language use and were aimed at

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addressing particular social problems. In so doing, the case studies follow Copeland’s admonition for medieval rhetorical historiography to depart from totalizing narratives and instead study the full complexity of textual relations as they exist in hyper-local contexts. While the rhetorical theories of the *Fürstenspiegel* form the foundation of each analytical chapter, these precepts are then measured against the political actions that characterize contemporary political crises that correspond to the social problems examined by the genre. By collecting a wide range of primary sources, each chapter creates a conversation between the moment of rhetorical intervention represented by the *Fürstenspiegel* and the wider political culture in which the genre circulated. If *Fürstenspiegel* aim to answer a social problem, examining moments of actual political crisis allows us to measure the efficacy of these theories in practice. The case studies examined do not attempt to provide a comprehensive theory of rhetorical practice or to suggest a causal relationship between text and action; rather, they endeavor to document how specific authors employed rhetoric to address social issues created by particular cultural exigencies.

The *Fürstenspiegel* under consideration in this dissertation are bound chronologically from a period corresponding to 1150-1450 and geographically within the political culture of England. In total, the three analytical chapters of this dissertation will focus upon John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus*, John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, and John Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*. This late medieval period is productive toward analysis as it included two pivotal moments in rhetorical historiography: the mid-twelfth century neo-Aristotelian renaissance that followed the translation of Aristotle’s work into Latin and

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the transition to the vernacular composition of philosophical and rhetorical texts that flourished in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth century. Examining *Fürstenspiegel* composed across a long time period allows for the investigation of how the recovery of Aristotelian texts and shifting pedagogical practices influenced the institutional status of rhetoric and precipitated new possibilities for rhetorical intervention. Further, by comparing Latin to vernacular *Fürstenspiegel*, it is possible to trace how vernacular languages that lacked the authoritative power of Latin justified rhetoric as a vernacular body of knowledge. As texts that circulated within a similar English political milieu, the *Fürstenspiegel* under consideration all react to changing cultural exigencies and provide examples that demonstrate how rhetorical practice shifts as political figures operating under particular constraints employ rhetoric in response to new social problems to meet the expectations of differing audiences.

Represented as a series of research questions, the general methodology of each analytical chapter follows the following pattern: 1. Within a particular *Fürstenspiegel*, how does the author figure rhetoric as a body of knowledge? 2. To arrive at this definition, what sources did an author implicitly and explicitly draw upon to arrive at this definition, and to what extent did the author make adaptations to this rhetorical tradition? 3. What do these adaptations suggest about the broader culture’s disposition toward rhetoric? How do the philosophical and pedagogical texts circulating at the time of the *Fürstenspiegel*’s composition generate and foreclose the possibilities of rhetorical intervention? 4. How does the *Fürstenspiegel* employ rhetorical practice to address a particular social problem? 5. In the contemporary political culture, where does this social problem appear and to what extent do political actors employ rhetorical practices that
share resonances with the rhetorical precepts articulated in the *Fürstenspiegel*? Finally, reading the *Fürstenspiegel* alongside the political archive, what conclusions can we draw about the rhetorical culture of late medieval England? By answering these questions, I provide a series of case studies that demonstrate the persistence of deliberative rhetoric and a broader rhetorical culture during the late medieval period.

**Overview of Chapters**

This dissertation examines the definitions and depictions of rhetoric found in medieval English *Fürstenspiegel* and proceeds through a chronological reading of the tradition from John of Salisbury, to John Gower, to John Lydgate. In the second chapter of this dissertation, I read John of Salisbury’s defense of the trivium, the *Metalogicon*, as a sister-text to his *Fürstenspiegel*, the *Policraticus*. In his defense of grammar, rhetoric, and logic, John of Salisbury constructs a grammatical-rhetorical system in which grammatical interpretation provides the raw material upon which rhetorical-dialectical methodology is enacted. Through this interaction between grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, the individual develops their capacities for reason and prudence. John’s rendering of grammatical and rhetorical knowledge as necessary for the development of prudence reflects his incomplete understanding of prudence as an Aristotelian virtue, which is unsurprising considering he did not have access to the *Nicomachean Ethics*. When John’s system is translated to the political sphere, grammar and rhetoric are put to use primarily in the interpretation of civil law, which the sovereign must guarantee through his administration of equity. For John, the effective administration of equity depends upon the sovereign’s capacity to interpret the civil law in line with the perceptual framework dictated by the natural law given to man by God. In the act of interpreting the
law, the sovereign must employ an Aristotelian rhetorical-dialectical methodology to distinguish between the letter of the law and its intended sense in execution. To demonstrate this rhetorical system in actual practice, I examine a small selection of John’s written correspondence on ecclesiastical court cases, where the judge takes on the role of the sovereign. These cases reveal how grammatical interpretation and rhetorical-dialectical methodology were actively applied in the construction of legal defenses and prosecutions.

The third chapter of this dissertation turns to the example of rhetoric found in Book 7 of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* and analyzes the relationship between rhetoric and ethics in the *Fürstenspiegel* genre. For Gower, rhetorical practice is restricted to the expression of truth through plain language and requires that a rhetorician possess a virtuous disposition. In particular, Gower’s definition of rhetoric expresses an anxiety over the potential for elevated language to induce sensory desire that leads the audience to pursue their own desires rather than the common profit. In this chapter, I argue that Gower most fully depicts his system of rhetorical practice through two exempla, the tales of Lucrece and Virginia, that demonstrate how fleshly lust can complicate the act of rhetorical deliberation and how authoritative figures can productively leverage the ambiguity found in contingent situations to achieve their political aims through the centering of their own interpretation. Within the wider rhetorical and political culture of fourteenth-century England, this rhetorical practice is found in the attempted canonization of Edward II by Richard II. This episode serves as a productive coda to Gower’s theory of deliberative rhetoric as Richard struggles to control the interpretation of Edward’s body because he himself lacks a virtuous disposition.
In the fourth chapter, my analysis Lydgate’s fifteenth century *Fall of Princes* traces the increasing recognition of rhetoric as a legitimate discipline in the secondary schools and royal court of medieval England and argues that Lydgate’s emphasis upon rhetorical stylistics reflects this broader cultural trend. By the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, rhetoric became separated from grammar as a discipline taught in secondary schools, and the teaching of rhetoric became an authorized subject within the king’s household. As Lydgate adapted the *De casibus* tradition to more closely align to the ethical framework found in the *Fürstenspiegel*, his amplifications of Boccaccio’s and Premierfait’s definitions of rhetoric denote a theory of rhetorical authorship in which a rhetorician’s use of ornamentation and eloquence are the main determiners of effective persuasion. For Lydgate, this theory of rhetoric is embodied in the person of Cicero, who uses sweet oration and rhetorical performance to achieve his political goals.

Finally, the dissertation’s concluding chapter articulates the four main interventions that study of the *Fürstenspiegel* as a rhetorical genre makes to the field of medieval rhetorical historiography. First, I argue that the *Fürstenspiegel* tradition provides a chronological case study that supplements existing scholarship on that traces the recovery of Aristotelian texts through the medieval educational system. Second, the definitions of rhetoric found across these three *Fürstenspiegel* all draw upon notions of the virtue of prudence, which suggests modern scholarship should more fully embrace the connection between these two capacities. Third, the repeated use of exempla to articulate rhetorical practice in *Fürstenspiegel* denotes that this literary genre was understood by medieval authors not only as ethical and didactic but also as fundamentally rhetorical. And, fourth, the deliberative rhetorical theories presented by *Fürstenspiegel* authors are
forms of culturally specific advice that demonstrate how political theory and rhetorical
theory are co-constitutive. In short, this dissertation concludes that Fürstenspiegel
provide an effective textual tradition for analyzing the broader culture of medieval
rhetorical practice.
CHAPTER II
RHETORIC AS THE FOUNDATION OF LEARNING: JOHN OF SALISBURY’S
METALOGICON AND POLICRATICUS

In the middle of the twelfth century, the philosophical tradition of the Latin West was reinvigorated by the recovery and wide circulation of the Aristotelian logical texts of the Organon. Although Marius Victorinus had translated the Categories and De Interpretatione in the fourth century and while Boethius’ translations of these texts had wide circulation, the other books within the Organon—the Analytica Priora, the Analytica Posteriora, the Topica, and De Sophisticis Elenchis—did not circulate widely until Arabic scholars translated the Greek works into Latin in the twelfth century.

Naturally, the recovery of Aristotle’s logical works had a profound impact on the theory, practice, and teaching of the medieval trivium, comprised of logic, rhetoric, and grammar. At the time when pedagogical theorists such as John of Salisbury came to enter the newly constituted and institutionalized universities of the Latin West, they would have been confronted by a recovered Aristotelian tradition that both challenged and

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46 Charles Lohr, “The Medieval interpretation of Aristotle,” in Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy, eds. N. Kretzmann, A. Kenny, and J. Pinborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 80-98. While medieval authors did not have access to the complete translated works of Aristotle until the twelfth century, tenets of Aristotelian thought were transmitted through intermediary authors. In rhetorical theory, the works of Cicero and Martianus Capella often summarized or cited Aristotle directly or indirectly. Thus, authors such as Alcuin could be familiar with Aristotelian concepts found in the Topica, for example, without having direct access to the full text.
supplemented the traditional methods of education with which they would have been familiar. By the mid-twelfth century, the dialectical methodology found in the *Categories* and Porphyry’s *Isagoge* that had dominated entry-level logical education came to be supplemented by the fuller treatment of logic found in the final four books of the *Organon*.47 This more robust treatment of logic likewise necessitated a reexamination of rhetorical theory as it was taught in schools and practiced in contemporary politics. For a student like John, who stood as inheritor to both the Neo-Platonic theories of the School of Chartres and the newly recovered Aristotelian inheritance, it would have felt as if the traditional trivium were being challenged and expanded in provocative ways. In short, the trivium was under siege, and John would devote his masterwork on medieval pedagogy to its defense.

Given this context, it is not surprising that rhetoric, the larger trivium, and the medieval liberal arts education would become a contested space. In his *Metalogicon*, John of Salisbury assigns himself the duty of defending the verbal and logical arts of the trivium against those, like the fictional strawman Cornificius, who argue that logic and eloquence cannot be systematically learned but rather are gifts indiscriminately awarded by nature (*Met*. 1.6, p. 24).48 While the challenge of teaching grammar, rhetoric, and logic alongside ethics traces back to classical discussions found in Plato and Isocrates,49

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49 Consider, for example, Socrates’ claim in the *Gorgias* that rhetoric is more akin to a knack or flattery like cosmetics rather than a systematic art. Or, Isocrates’ claims in the *Antidosis* that rhetorical education
the Cornifician position articulated by John also represents a wider distrust in the methodical Aristotelian approach to language use. As John explains, the Cornicians propose to disregard the rules of language and skip over foundational learning so that they may speak however and whatever they like and focus upon the newly in vogue category of logic (1.6, p. 26). Rather than treating the constituent elements of the trivium as arts, the Cornicians conceive of language as a primarily political tool, as a scheme for flattering those in power to further one’s own ends. For a scholastic philosopher like John, influenced as he was by the School of Chartres and the tradition of joining Mercury with Philology, he understands the use of language as foundational to both philosophy and virtue, which necessitates that the components of the trivium function as systematic arts.

This contention over the role of grammar, rhetoric, and logic was not confined to the theoretical texts of the cathedral schools and universities but also extended to the practical judicial and political realms. Written in conjunction with the Metalogicon, John also composed a Latin Fürstenspiegel, which he dedicated and delivered to Thomas Becket in 1159. John’s grouping of his defense of the trivium with his text on sovereignty and political theory suggests that he understood the verbal arts to be a necessary component of good kingship. Indeed, in the Policraticus, John cites the need for the

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50 The question of the precise identity of John’s rhetorical rival Cornificius has been the object of much debate in scholarship on John of Salisbury. Scholars such as Cary Nederman have suggested promising candidates such as Arnulf of Liseux and Bernard of Clairvaux. Cary Nederman, *John of Salisbury* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 65-8. For the fullest treatment of the Cornician position articulated by John in the Metalogicon, including the contradictory descriptions therein, see John O. Ward, “The Date of the Commentary on Cicero’s *De inventione*” by Thierry of Chartres (ca. 1095-1160) and the Cornifician Attach on the Liberal Arts,” *Viator* 3 (1972): 219-73.

51 The *Policraticus* is translated in two editions, that combined, render most of the original Latin text into English. John of Salisbury, *Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers: Being a Translation of*
prince to be “proficient in letters” as it provides him with the capacity to interpret and reflect upon the very divine law that he must guarantee as sovereign (Pol. 4.6). He further expounds that the end of philosophy for the sovereign is to attain true knowledge of the self (Pol. 3.4). Such self-knowledge, however, can only be attained through an education in letters that provides the individual with the dialectical method and capacity for determining the truth of both propositions as a whole and the terms that comprise propositions (Met.4.2, p. 81). However, despite serving as one of the premier educational theorists of the twelfth century, within rhetorical historiography, John’s contributions to rhetorical theory have been glossed over. In part, the lack of serious treatment of John’s rhetorical theory from scholars of rhetorical history stems from early commentary that noted John’s relatively sparse treatment of rhetoric, especially compared to logic and dialectic. As Murphy has discussed, John’s subsummation of rhetoric to logic within the trivium descends from his insistence upon viewing the individual disciplines of the trivium as arts “as opposed to formulae or materia,” and, consequently, John has no issue with reconciling the Aristotelian dialectical methodology within the grammatical-rhetorical tradition exemplified by texts such as Donatus’ Ars Grammatica. While early scholarship acknowledges that John understood rhetoric and the other components of the trivium were constituted as systematic arts, it rather ignored the extent to which


Aristotelian dialectical methodology, which contains many aspects of rhetorical theory and practice, informed the whole of John’s philosophical and political systems.

Though John’s conflation of rhetoric and dialectic under the larger category of logical reasoning has damaged his reputation as a rhetorician, he has received a much warmer reception in the history and philosophy of political thought. Despite John’s extensive writing on the logical arts of the trivium, contemporary scholarship has been much more interested in unpacking the various metaphors that are used throughout the *Metalogicon* and *Policraticus* to exemplify John’s theory of the political state. Most famously, Books 5 and 6 of the *Policraticus* establish a corporal metaphor that advances a “secular political theory” in which the prince rules the body politic from the place of the head, with clerics occupying a position outside the body proper in the same way that the eternal soul is not coterminous with the physical body.54 In contrast to the anatomical model shared by political theorists preceding John, his organic metaphor adopted a “physiological” approach to describing the political state in which all members of the body worked “according to a shared principle.”55 Although contemporary scholarship has examined the importance of a medieval political theory whose foundation lies in cooperation rather than antagonism, it has, at the same time, elided a key component that

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makes such a communal state possible—the capacity for rulers, as the head of the state, to determine the proper end of action. As a reading of the *Policraticus* alongside the *Metalogicon* reveals, the effective constitution and governance of a political state requires a head of state who possesses the capacity for discernment that emerges from prudential knowledge. 

Over the next chapter, I will argue that, for John, his insistence upon the Aristotelian dialectical method and his incomplete understanding of Aristotelian virtue ethics leads him to closely associate prudential knowledge with grammatical-rhetorical knowledge. As will become evident, as disciplines, rhetoric provides the methodology for arriving at the truth of contingent situations, and grammar provides the *materia* upon which rhetorical methodology is put into practice, which leads John to consequently conflate grammatical and rhetorical knowledge under the larger banner of the trivium that he seeks to defend.

John’s collected writings, then, function as an ideal case study for examining the liminal position of the rhetoric as it was articulated during the recovery of Aristotle in the twelfth century. At the time of the *Policraticus*’s composition, John would have had access to the *Organon*, but the not the *Ethics*, the text that would dominate and comprise later *Fürstenspiegel*. As the foundation of education within the Latin West pivoted toward Aristotelian influence, the definitions and depictions of rhetorical practice found in *Fürstenspiegel* likewise adapted to the theories of language use articulated within the *Organon*. Such shifts within the linguistic and pedagogical foundations of the

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56 As Cary Nederman argues, the *Policraticus* and *Metalogicon* were most likely composed piecemeal during the same period of time, from 1156-7. The *Policraticus*’s chapters on philosophy were the first composed, followed by the sections on the frivolities of court life. In 1158, John most likely composed the first half of the *Metalogicon*, and by 1159, John had completed the *Metalogicon* and edited the *Policraticus* to more fully support the themes of the two texts. Cary Nederman, *John of Salisbury*, 21-7.
Fürstenspiegel naturally affected the sovereign’s role within the political state. In particular, in the Policraticus, John’s incomplete understanding of prudence as a type of knowledge compels him to delineate a different form of knowledge as the foundation for the practice of virtue and language. Perhaps unsurprisingly, John turns to the trivium and his philosophy of language as the knowledge that helps the king determine particular matters in contingent situations and leverage this knowledge toward virtuous action.

Compared to later Fürstenspiegel that follow a more standardized model, the Policraticus is constructed in a haphazard manner, with theoretical precepts along the continuum form philosophy to flattery being introduced and explicated without an overarching philosophical principle; instead, the pedagogical function of the text is constrained to the exegetical marginalia that provide commentary on the main sections of the text.

According to Julie Barrau, the text’s construction and its dedication to Beckett suggests that the Policraticus is intended not primarily as a Fürstenspiegel focused upon practical action but rather as a philosophical treatise devoted to the constitution of a political state. However, as Irene O’Daly has argued, divorcing the theory presented in the Policraticus from its practical application runs the risk of interpreting the text in an anachronistic manner that ignores the social action performed by the genre. Instead, she argues that the Policraticus must be understood more broadly as a Fürstenspiegel that seeks not only to instruct the king in ethical behavior but also the whole of polity. Much like the organic, physiological metaphor analyzed by Nederman, O’Daly’s examination


58 Irene O’Daly, John of Salisbury and the Medieval Roman Renaissance (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 15.
of John’s theory of the body politic emphasizes the spirit of cooperation that exists between its constituent parts but does not fully recognize the extent to which grammatical-rhetorical knowledge makes this cooperation possible. As I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, the political theory espoused by John across the *Policraticus* and *Metalogicon* cannot function if the sovereign does not possess a robust knowledge of grammar and rhetoric.

In this chapter, I use John of Salisbury’s *Metalogicon, Policraticus*, and collected letters to answer the following questions: How did the recovery of Aristotle supplement the dominant Ciceronian tradition of medieval rhetorical theory? And, how did this shift precipitate new understandings of the political role of rhetoric as it was practiced? To answer these questions, I first examine how reading functioned as an active practice for developing prudential knowledge by analyzing some of the resonances between Hugh of St. Victor’s *Didascalicon* and the works of John of Salisbury. Then, I describe John’s definitions of rhetoric and prudential knowledge as they appear in the *Metalogicon* and in his source texts. Then, turning to the *Policraticus*, I articulate how knowledge of the trivium prepares the sovereign for dealing with the practical realities of rulership. Finally, by examining John’s early letters, I demonstrate how John put the rhetorical precepts that he articulated in the *Policraticus* to his own use in his capacity as the secretary of Archbishop Theobald. Ultimately, this case study will demonstrate how, for John, knowledge of grammar, rhetoric, and logic were fundamental to the functioning of his imagined philosophical and political systems.

**The Trivium, Memory, and Reading**

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The whole of John’s theory of education and, more broadly, the entirety of medieval education as it relates to the trivium, imagined its students as containing two distinct but related capacities—natural or immanent talent, *natura*, and the ability to apply, *exercitatio*, precepts of a systemic art, *ars*, in a given situation.\(^5^9\) As understood by medieval theorists, an individual’s natural talent describes his natural intelligence, which is often rendered as a capacity for discernment. However, in the same manner that philosophy is a dead branch of knowledge without the vivifying effects of rhetoric, an individual’s natural talent will wither if not cultivated through the consistent practice, *exercitatio*, informed by a systematic method of study, here, for John, the arts of the trivium. Although John is obviously concerned with the actual exercises that students undertake within the arts of the trivium,\(^6^0\) in his refutation of the Cornifician position, he is primarily concerned with challenging the notion that natural talent in speech obviates the need for the systematic treatment of language. For this reason, John elaborates his educational theory on the relationship between *natura* and *ars*. In the medieval schema, natural talent is cultivated through the application of artistic principles via the influence of the memory and reason. By way of example, drawing upon a division that goes back to Isocrates, John distinguishes between those naturally talented orators who composed the first successful orations by chance and those later rhetoricians who discerned the central


\(^{60}\) For example, in a highly cited passage, John details his precise order of study under Bernard of Chartres, including the various imitative exercises that he would complete (*Met*, 1.24).
artistic precepts from these first disputations and developed a systematic method for composing new disputations (?Met. 1.11, p. 35). While natural talent provides the initial spark to invent the art, in this case logic and rhetoric, the actual development of the art and its ultimate implementation comes about through the concerted effort of study.

Each of these capacities, in turn, is connected through the activity of the memory. As John explains, nature “first evokes our natural capacity to perceive things, and then, as it were, deposits these perceptions in the secure treasury of our memory,” and reason, through “careful study” determines which sense perceptions should remain within the memory to serve as the foundation for scientific inquiry (?Met. 1.11, p. 34). John summarizes this central tenet of his educational philosophy through his proclamation that nature “begets the habit and practice of study, which proceeds to provide an art, and the latter, in turn, finally furnishes the faculty whereof we speak” (?Met. 1.11, p. 34). For John, while a successful student must possess a certain natural intellect, this intellect would go to waste if not accompanied by a robust education that serves to enlarge the number of sensory perceptions stored within the memory and to train the student how to access them put them to use.

While John’s project of defending the trivium does not permit extended discussion of the role of memory in the development of the student, his close contemporary Hugh of St. Victor provides a compelling model for the relationship between the arts of the trivium and the development and activity of the memory.\footnote{John was certainly familiar with Hugh’s Didascalicon, which he references, though not always explicitly, six times throughout the Metalogicon. Despite the relatively low number of textual citations, John borrowed extensively from Hugh, including, most importantly, Hugh’s distinction between art and nature (?Met. 1.11, p. 34), methods of philosophical inquiry (?Met. 1.23, p. 64), and division of knowledge (?Met. 2.2, pp. 76-7). Hugh of St. Victor, The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts,}
Neo-Platonists like Hugh of St. Victor and the School of Chartres, the act of silent reading was not a solitary act of meditation but instead a “hermeneutical dialogue” between two memories, those of the reader and author. Citing the examples provided by Petrarch and Gregory the Great, Mary Carruthers argues that the act of reading produces a “memory phantasm” within the reader that “is both a likeness (simulacrum) and one’s gut level response (intentio) to it.” For higher-level reading practices such as tropological interpretation, the hermeneutical dialogue between the reader’s own memory and the memory of the author compels the reader to consider “what the text means to us when we turn the words, like a mirror, upon ourselves, how we understand it when we have domesticated it and made it our own.” In other words, the act of reading involves taking up heretofore unconsidered perspectives and utilizing the reason to synthesize these perspectives to the practical actions that characterize one’s life. This model of reading closely resonates with the social aims of the Fürstenspiegel genre, which seeks to engage the sovereign in the remaking of his own persona through the development of prudential knowledge. As John would have understood it, the reading of exempla was not merely a recreation of school exercises but rather an intimate sharing of experiential knowledge.

For Hugh, the mind itself is Platonic in nature, with its form being determined by the nature of the sensory perceptions that it collects: “the mind, imprinted with the likenesses of all things, is said to be all things and to receive its composition from all

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63 Ibid., 211.
64 Ibid., 210.
things and to contain them not as actual components, or formally, but virtually and potentially” (Did. 1.1, p. 47). The mind, then, takes within itself two types of knowledge, which Hugh distinguishes as the intellectible or understanding, “pure and certain knowledge of the sole principles of things,” and the intelligible or knowledge or imagination, the “sensuous memory made up of the traces of corporeal objects inhering in the mind” (Did. 2.1, pp. 66-7). As the mind forgets itself through the enticement of “sensuous forms,” it becomes necessary for the mind to restore itself “through instruction” so that the individual may once again recognize himself, the central pursuit of philosophy (Did. 1.1, p. 47). As Hugh explains throughout his Didascalicon, the form of this instruction occurs primarily through the activity of reading and interpretation through which the individual determines the historical, allegorical, or tropological senses of passages and incorporates these interpretations into the storehouse of the memory to serve as the foundation for future knowledge, which Hugh divides into four, the theoretical, the practical, the mechanical, and the logical. Following Boethius, Hugh designates logical knowledge as the starting point of education because logic itself is necessary to know “what form of reasoning keeps to the true course of argument” so that the individual may determine “the imperishable truth of things” (Did. 1.11, p. 58). As it relates to the genre of the Fürstenspiegel, Hugh’s elevation of logical knowledge to the forefront of education demonstrates the emphasis that writers of the genre placed upon the systematic exegesis of grammar, rhetoric, and logic in the openings of their texts. This logical education provided their audience with the tools necessary for interpreting and discerning the truth of the practical and mechanical knowledge that followed.
Drawing upon a metaphor common within the rhetorical tradition, Hugh compares the development of the mind through systematic study to the construction of a structure, and, in so doing, he demonstrates how reading and interpretation serve as the keystone for the development of the student. For Hugh, the intellectible and the intelligible are only properly understood when accompanied by a relevant foundation found in the memory, which itself is developed through two activities: “reading and meditation” (Did. 3.7, p. 91). While meditation serves as the developmental activity for those whose minds are perfected, reading is useful to those who are just beginning their journey toward higher knowledge. As an interpretive practice, reading conveys meaning through three modes, the historical, which provides a straightforward and literal narrative, the allegorical, which communicates the mysteries of the church, and the tropological, which teaches how to act ethically (Did. 5.2, p. 120). The order of reading that Hugh prescribes follows the movement of understanding within the intellect—a movement from the physical thing to the idea signified by that thing. Following Aristotle’s De interpretatione, Hugh recognizes the internal act of interpretation as beginning with the culturally determined signifier of the “word,” progressing to the “concept” represented by that word, before finally arriving at the “thing” signified by the concept held within the memory (Did. 5.3, p. 122). Upon recognizing the “thing” ultimately represented by the “word,” the intellect returns to higher-order abstract modes of thought through which it comes to understand the “idea” communicated by the “thing” and to “arrive at Truth” through the contemplation of this “idea” (5.3, p. 122). As this pattern of interpretation demonstrates, within the broad medieval theory of education, the memory serves as that capacity which connects sensory perceptions with the faculty to translate these sensations
to the larger universal knowledge that they represent and communicate. The memory comes to serve as the storehouse of sensory perceptions that the reason confirms as useful for the intellect to draw upon in those contingent situations that require interpretation. As Hugh will explain later in the *Didascalicon*, in the same manner that sensory perceptions serve as the foundation upon which contemplation and understanding operate, the act of reading history serves as the foundation for the later allegorical and tropological interpretation of texts.

The role of sensory perception as the foundation of understanding necessitates the importance of reading within the individual’s education. As an extension of the neo-Platonic and Aristotelian traditions, the medieval theory of education expounded within the School of Chartres emphasized that sensory perceptions formed the foundation of all scientific knowledge; however, those individuals beginning their journey toward higher knowledge may lack the repository of sensory perceptions held within the memory necessary to engage in higher-order abstract thinking, interpretation, and contemplation. To address this lacuna within the memory, Hugh advocates that individuals engage in reading, as the act of reading works dually to “instruct the mind with knowledge” and “equip it with morals” (*Did. 5.6*, p. 127). As Hugh understands it, reading of this sort produces knowledge through two modes, the mode of example, in which the individual learns correct behavior through the interpretation and imitation of another’s actions, and instruction, in which the individual is brought to knowledge through the didactic explanation of methods of self-discipline (*Did. 5.7*, p. 128). Of the three modes of reading, it is the interpretation of history and the literal sense communicated by narration that most closely aligns with the exemplary and didactic functions of interpretation.
insofar as it provides the learner with knowledge of “what has been done, when it has been done, and by whom it has been done” (6.3, p. 135-6). In fact, Hugh views a broad knowledge of history as a prerequisite for allegorical and tropological interpretation in the same way that sensory perception precedes the production of higher knowledge: “The foundation and principle of sacred learning, however, is history, from which like honey from the honeycomb, the truth of allegory is extracted” (6.3, p. 138). In Hugh’s educational framework, the reading and interpretation of history functions to provide the individual with a collection of experiences that can be held in the memory in lieu of sensory perceptions and thereby supplement the foundational knowledge base upon which abstraction and contemplation depend. Hugh’s prescription for the reading of history strongly corresponds to the educational aims of the Fürstenspiegel genre, which seeks to illustrate its theoretical and philosophical precepts through the example provided by history.

However, historical interpretation in and of itself is not enough to provide individuals with the knowledge necessary for philosophical pursuit. As Hugh explains, the ambiguity and difficulty of particular passages and the difference between a passage’s literal meaning and the sense communicated by the passage necessitates the possession of “certain principles of faith” that form the “starting point” of all interpretation. Similar to Augustine’s admonition that the interpretation of holy scripture should always center the principles of loving God and loving one’s neighbor, Hugh establishes that the structural foundation of knowledge should privilege certain ethical and philosophical precepts that inform all higher modes of knowledge production and interpretation: “Truly, the

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judicious student ought to be sure that, before he makes his way through extensive volumes, he is so instructed in the particulars which bear upon his profession of the true faith, that he may safely be able to build onto his structure whatever he afterwards finds” (Did. 6.4, p. 142). In so doing, the student can ensure that his interpretation does not privilege the literal meaning of a passage at the expense of the sense of the passage, and vice versa.

Although Hugh was referring specifically to the interpretation of scripture, this general precept is transposed into the educational theory that animates the Fürstenspiegel genre. Indeed, from a pedagogical perspective, the construction of Fürstenspiegel within the Letter to Alexander tradition, insofar as the genre couches the interpretation of its exempla through the philosophical lens explicated at the beginning of its texts, provides the young nobility who comprise its audience with the perceptual framework that governs the whole literary force of the text. In so doing, the Fürstenspiegel simultaneously addresses the two problematics that Hugh identifies as affecting the act of reading for young readers. Through its extended use of historical exempla, the Fürstenspiegel supplies its readers with the necessary foundation upon which later allegorical and tropological interpretation can occur; at the same time, the literary ambiguity present within these historical exempla is ameliorated by the perceptual foundation communicated in the opening of each Fürstenspiegel’s discussion of philosophy and ethics. Beyond guiding the reader to correct interpretation, the perceptual framework that opens the Fürstenspiegel also addresses the desire-producing effect that rhetorical fiction can have on the individual through its ability to excite arousal through the “stateliness or arrangement of words,” which may compel the reader to privilege the sense over the
letter, or vice versa (*Did. 5.7*, p. 128). The guiding hermeneutics found in the opening of the *Fürstenspiegel* reframe the historical exempla shared later in the text so that their narrative elements recede in prominence when compared to the “virtues set forth” by the historical examples that the reader ideally desires to emulate (*Did. 5.7*, p. 128). The inherited tradition of generic instruction ensures that the audience of the *Fürstenspiegel* trains the capacity for interpretation at the same time that they develop the storehouse of memory necessary for future allegorical and tropological interpretation.

When considered holistically, the *Fürstenspiegel* addresses the four divisions of knowledge that Hugh identifies in the *Didascalicon*. Hugh’s division of knowledge includes theoretical knowledge, practical knowledge, mechanical knowledge, and logical knowledge. Within the *Fürstenspiegel* tradition, these branches of knowledge are represented respectively in teaching the young nobility how to interpret sensory perceptions, how to live an ethical life, how to manage one’s household, and how to determine truth from falsehood. Across these four modes of knowledge, it is the first, theoretical, and the last, logical, that form the perceptual framework that governs the act of reading. When viewed through Hugh’s scientific schema, the *Fürstenspiegel*’s consistent discussions of rhetoric extend beyond rhetoric’s immediate civic and political applications; instead, rhetoric’s positioning within the larger discussion of theoretical knowledge is designed to figure rhetorical knowledge as a prerequisite and supplement to philosophy and contemplation. Since reason operates within the intellect to discern which sensory perceptions are worth storing within the memory to serve as the foundation for scientific knowledge, naturally, the reason itself must be developed through concentrated and systematic study. As Hugh explains, reason becomes exercised through the activity
of discernment, an extension of logical knowledge. Rhetoric, contained as it is within the broader category of logical knowledge, is concerned with “the conceptual content of words,” particularly “invention and judgment,” which instruct in how to discover and judge the veracity of arguments (*Did.* 2.28-30, pp. 80-1). While dialectic is concerned with determining absolute truth from falsehood, rhetoric’s object of analysis is limited to “persuading to every suitable thing” (*Did.* 2.30, p. 82). Since *Fürstenspiegel* always supplement their discussions of philosophy and science with examples drawn from contingent situations in the form of exempla, readers must possess both a strong knowledge of dialectical methods, which help readers determine the truth of universal principles, and knowledge of rhetorical methods, which proscribe which actions are most suitable for a given situation.

Though Hugh did not compose a *Fürstenspiegel* of his own, his discussion of the acts of reading and interpretation productively supplement the educational theory that informs the social action performed by the genre of the *Fürstenspiegel*. At its core, the *Fürstenspiegel* worked to cultivate the natural talent possessed by the young nobility by providing a wide range of historical exempla upon which the nobility could base their behavior and enact ethical action. If the authors of *Fürstenspiegel* hoped to achieve their aim of providing an education capable of disciplining the person of the sovereign, this education had to include a robust discussion of logical knowledge—the very knowledge that empowered readers to discern both truth and ethical action. Rhetorical knowledge, then, encompassed not only its classical associations with civic action but also extended to a contain an internal disposition toward the interpretation and expression of language. The rhetorical disposition advocated by the *Fürstenspiegel* served as a tool, much like the
virtuous disposition taught by the Fürstenspiegel, that sovereigns could use to authorize their sovereignty.

John’s Rhetoric

As the self-proclaimed sole true inheritor and interpreter of Aristotle, the writings of John of Salisbury provide an excellent example of the initial Aristotelian influence on the Fürstenspiegel tradition in the Latin West. Born in 1120, John studied with the Chartres school under the preeminent teachers and language theorists of his day, most notably Peter Abelard, William of Conches, and Thierry of Chartres. After completing his education, in 1148, he joined the household of Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury, where he served as a secretary in charge of Theobald’s correspondence. Due to his vocal opposition to Henry II’s policies curtailing the power of the English church, John was banished from the royal court in 1156-7 and took up residence in France. It was during this time that he composed his most extensive treatment of rhetoric, the Metalogicon.

In the Metalogicon, John defines rhetoric as the art of eloquence and the “faculty of appropriate and effective verbal expression” that accurately represents the intentions of the soul (Met. 1.7, p. 26). As is typical in twelfth-century rhetorical theory, John locates the origin and purpose of speech within the Ciceronian tradition that associates the production of speech with the development of civil society. As John notes, the marriage of speech with reason “has given birth to so many outstanding cities, has made friends and allies of so many kingdoms, and has unified and knit together in bonds of love so many people” (Met. 1.1, p. 11).\(^6\) John notes that nature has “elevated man by the

\(^6\) See, for example, Cicero, De Inventione (1.1-1.3), where he delineates the pairing of eloquence and wisdom as being most beneficial to the establishment of cities and the maintenance of peace and the sundering of eloquence and wisdom as causing discord within the political state.
privilege of reason” and “distinguished him by the faculty of speech” and that both of these capacities are necessary for individuals to “attain the true crown of happiness” (Met. 1.1, p. 9). Indeed, drawing on Martianus Capella, John views the capacities of eloquence and reason as mutually constitutive, with reason moderating eloquence’s potential for driving individuals away from truth and with eloquence providing reason with a foundation for expression so that it is not “feeble and maimed” (Met. 1.1, p. 10).

Following Cicero, John describes eloquence and expression as the arts that actualize and vivify the theoretical precepts understood by philosophy. As Keats-Rohan has stated, John recognizes that “rational powers are useless without the verbal arts to bring them to life,” and Aristotelian logic serves as a method for determining probabilistic “truths in a world which is otherwise reliant on sense data.” In short, John assigns three categories for the exercise of rhetorical knowledge: commerce, “what contract could be duly concluded;” education, “what instruction could be given in faith and morals;” and politics, “what agreement and mutual understanding could subsist among men” (Met. 1.1, p. 11). By designating rhetoric as governing these three realms of practice, John positions rhetoric as a more voluminous capacity than found in Latin rhetorical theorists such as Cicero.

In fact, in the opening of the Metalogicon, John implores his audience to understand the use of language in its broadest possible sense. Following Boethius, John designates logic as “the science of verbal expression and [argumentative] reasoning” rather than designating only argumentative reasoning. In such a formulation, eloquence,

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which itself governs verbal expression, is sublimated into the larger category of logic. Consequently, for John, rhetorical knowledge is inextricably linked with all forms of rational knowledge and the virtues that extend out of rational knowledge. As John explains later in the *Metalogicon*, the rational knowledge of logic functions as the foundation for “the whole activity of prudence,” which itself is the “root of all virtues” through its capacity to investigate truth and take truth as its subject matter (*Met.*, 2.1, p. 74). Drawing on Cicero’s *De officiis* and Capella’s *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, John limits the domain of prudential knowledge to the investigation of truth and defines its methodology as equivalent to the art of argumentative reasoning. According to John then, prudential knowledge is gained through the systemic implementation of logical reasoning, which “discloses manners of disputation and analyzes the construction of proofs, as well as provides methods whereby we may distinguish what is true from what is false, and what is necessary from what is impossible” (*Met.* 2.3, p. 78). This conception of prudential knowledge is quite different than the Aristotelian conception articulated in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, a text that had not been translated in wide circulation by the mid-twelfth century.  

For Aristotle, although prudence is also associated with truth in its capacity for determining the proper end of deliberation, prudential knowledge is not a systematic art but rather a habituated disposition developed through experience that is still responsive to teaching and learning. While both Aristotle and John understand prudential knowledge as foundational to the practice of virtue and as concerned with

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69 We can infer that John did not have access to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, especially considering his proclamation that Aristotle “should be regarded as a [learned] master of argumentative reasoning, rather than of morals, and he should be recognized as a teacher whose function is to conduct the young on to more serious philosophical studies, rather than [directly] to instruct in ethics” (*Met.* 4.27, p. 244). For a full review of John’s direct knowledge of Aristotle, see Cary Nederman and J. Bruckmann, “Aristotelanism in John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus*,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 21, no. 2 (1983): 203-29.
determining the truth of particular situations, John departs from Aristotle by conceiving of prudential knowledge as something that can be systemically and explicitly taught in the same manner as argumentative reasoning. This shift in the functioning of prudential knowledge leads John to position verbal and logical knowledge as the very ground from which virtuous practice sprouts.

Later in the *Metalogicon*, John provides a fuller treatment of prudential knowledge that closely associates prudence with linguistic knowledge and the operation of reason. Drawing primarily on Cicero, John recognizes prudence as that capacity within the mind which discerns sensory information to determine what is correct and what is incorrect so as to systematically turn information into knowledge (*Met.* 4.11, p. 221). Consequently, the faculty of prudence is necessary to the whole program of Aristotelian science, which takes sensory information as the foundation of all higher knowledge and seeks to always arrive at moderate behavior, which following Aristotle, involves identifying the mean. As John describes it, the operation of prudence assesses the present and the past so as to determine the correct course of future action:

> prudence looks to the future, and forms providence; recalls what has happened in the past, and accumulates a treasury of memories; shrewdly appraises what is present, and begets astuteness or discernment; or takes full cognizance of everything [whether past, present, or future], and constitutes circumspection (*Met.* 4.12, p. 222).

In principle, John’s recognition of prudential knowledge drawing upon memory echoes the Aristotelian designation of prudence being developed through lived experience, but John is less inclined to assign experience and memory as the primary capacities for the determination of truth. Indeed, John is skeptical of the efficacy of prudence since

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prudence itself is “handicapped as it is by errors begotten by sense perceptions,” which hinders prudence as it aims to investigate and comprehend the truth of particular situations (Met. 4.14, p. 224). These errors may descend from sensory information apprehended in the moment as well as from human memories, which are themselves fallible due to the influence of sensory perception. Since John understands human action to be focused upon “the ability to make circumstantial determinations regarding the proper course of conduct,” sensory error represents a major obstacle in John’s adapted Aristotelian system.\footnote{Cary J. Nederman, “The Aristotelian Doctrine of the Mean and John of Salisbury’s ‘Concept of Liberty,’” Vivarium 24, no. 2 (1986): 128-42, at 138.}

Thus, in John’s system of scientific knowledge, prudence must be supplemented with “Philologia” which orients the individual toward the enactment of “reason,” “nature’s power to discriminate and distinguish immaterial entities, in order to examine things with sure, unvitiated judgment” (Met. 4.15, p. 225). The capacity of reason, in turn, is developed through systematic study, involving each component of the trivium. With the help of systematic learning, reason ascends to its rightful place upon the throne of judgment, “situated between the chambers of imagination and memory, so that from its watchtower, it may pass upon the judgments of sensation and imagination” (Met. 4.17, p. 229). For this reason, John draws a philological distinction between prudence and wisdom, with prudence simply operating as the “appetitive delight” that orients the individual to desire truth (4.29, p. 247).\footnote{John’s distinction relies upon the Greek root of frono meaning “I relish.” He borrows this distinction from Cicero (De Off. 1.43.153).}

In other words, prudence alone cannot investigate and determine the truth. It may help the individual to desire the truth and provide the individual with a repository of sensory information upon which to draw their
discernments, but the prudential impulse must also be checked by the operation of reason, which John understands as developed through the study of grammar, rhetoric, and logic.

For John, then, the trivium, does not only function as the foundation for higher study in philosophy and natural science but also provides the individual with knowledge necessary to determine the truth of contingent matters. As David Bloch has shown, though John viewed himself as an inheritor of the Aristotelian scientific method, his actual discussion of the *Posterior Analytics* reveals a lack of direct knowledge of the text. Instead, Bloch has demonstrated that the scientific method described by John in the *Metalogicon* is fundamentally “probabilistic” and therefore derived from dialectical and rhetorical principles, rather than the first principles that characterize Aristotle’s discussion of science.73 As John further categorizes the art of argumentative reasoning, he divides the genus of logic into two species, necessary logic, concerned with absolute truth, and probable logic, concerned with likelihood (*Met.* 2.3, p. 79). John divides the category of probable logic into dialectic, which uses syllogisms to investigate “the meanings expressed by words” and rhetoric, which uses induction and oration to investigate the same (*Met.* 2.4, p. 81). Dialectic and rhetoric are further delineated by their respective audiences and purposes, with dialectic being employed primarily in interpersonal conversations carried out in educational spaces and rhetoric being used to move large audiences to collective action (*Met.* 2.12, p. 102). Rhetoric is lastly distinguished from dialectic in taking its object as questions concerning particular circumstances whereas dialectic is concerned with “reasoning of a more general nature, and does not of its own right descend to particulars” (2.12, p. 102). In both rhetoric and

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dialectic, John identifies a system for determining the truth of any given situation and for verbally expressing this truth in a manner that can lead others to the same conclusion. Crucially, John understands the rhetorical-dialectical methodology outlined here to be applicable to all branches of science, despite rhetoric and dialectic having no distinct subject matter of their own. John’s emphasis on Aristotelian logic seems designed to address the potential issues that may arise from a scientific system that takes sensory data as its foundational knowledge.

In fact, within John’s educational system, scientific knowledge precedes ethical knowledge and serves as the soil from which virtue sprouts. Philosophical inquiry and virtuous practice are themselves dependent upon the literacy practices that characterize the trivium: “reading, learning, meditation, and assiduous application” (Met. 1.23, p. 64). John understands these basic literacy practices to be necessary for the flowering of virtue as they provide individuals with the scientific knowledge that directs them toward the practice of virtue. In turn, these basic literacy practices are the domain of grammar, which, alongside sensory perception, “is the basis and root of scientific knowledge,” since its domain is the training of the mind “to understand everything that can be taught in words,” including both interpretation and expression (Met. 1.23, p. 64; Met. 1.21, p. 60). However, it must be acknowledged that it was not only John’s sense of prudential knowledge that looked to rhetorical-grammatical knowledge for its establishment and development. As O’Daly has demonstrated, John’s ethical system drew on the Ciceronian rhetorical distinction between the honorable and the expedient as the ends of action for deliberative rhetoric.74 By reconciling the Greek concept of oikeiôsis to the Christian

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74 Irene O’Daly, John of Salisbury, 94-9.
tradition of *caritas*, John developed an ethical system in which concern for oneself was consciously subsumed to a broader concern for one’s community. Consequently, the ethical political state is comprised by its various components working to achieve their predetermined social role—the honorable—in cooperation with the whole body politic so that the ends of the state can be achieved—the expedient. Naturally, the constituent parts of the body politic cannot determine expedient ends on their own. This determination depends upon the head of the state possessing the capacity to determine prudently the ends for which the state should aim. While scientific knowledge is necessary for the practice of virtue, it is not sufficient in and of itself. Scientific knowledge must be accompanied by “grace,” which “brings about the willing and the doing of good” as well as “the faculty of writing and speaking correctly to those to whom it is given” (*Met.* 1.23, p. 65). For John, grammatical knowledge provides individuals with the scientific knowledge necessary for the operation of reason, but the actual judgment of reason is also dependent upon the acceptance of grace, which orients the individual to put their scientific knowledge to the enactment of the good. As it relates to the development and exercise of prudence, grammar—that is, the interpretation of the authors—provides the raw material that is treated by John’s rhetorical and dialectical methodology. Through this treatment, the individual trains the intellect to pursue the course laid out by prudence.

If logic, comprised of dialectic and rhetoric, functions as the method through which truth is uncovered, then speech likewise functions as the instrument through which truth becomes articulated through deliberation. John does not imagine the act of reasoning to be abstracted and divorced from sensory perception; rather, John describes the act of reasoning as being “clothed in speech,” both unvoiced internal speech and
voiced external speech, which enter into the sensory perception “through the ears with the aid of words” (*Met.* 2.12, p. 102). As Daniel McGarry has argued, for John, the enactment of eloquence works “as the eternalizing complement of reason, [through which] individual thinking is projected on a social scale to achieve enduring cooperative results” (pp. 668-9). In this understanding, the act of reasoning depends upon speech as the instrument of its expression, for, without speech to enliven “thoughts of judgments,” reason itself would be “dead and powerless” (*Met.* 2.12, p. 102). Consequently, for John, the end of a dialectical education includes not only instruction in the dialectical methodology but also the grammatical-rhetorical “to forge a strong, versatile, and efficacious instrument [of speech], and to provide instruction in its use” (*Met.* 2.12, p. 102). John succinctly describes the copulative relationship between speech and reason by denoting that reason “frequently conceives from speech” insofar as the faculty of speech vivifies the “prudent exercise of the human mind” (*Met.* 1.1, p. 11). As John systematizes it, the faculty of reason, as the governor of deliberation, determines what is true via the sensory information gathered through perception. To operate effectively, however, during the process of deliberation, reason must employ language to interpret truth and the instrument of speech to express it. Without speech, abstracted universal knowledge cannot be leveraged toward practical action.

For these reasons, John argues that species of logic such as dialectic and rhetoric not only represent a systemic knowledge for interpreting and expressing truth but also serve as the categories of knowledge that “organize and vivify” other branches of knowledge (*Met.* 2.11, p. 101). In contrast to the Cornificians, John does not believe that

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rhetoric and dialectic themselves possess a standardized body of knowledge for their own sake but rather believes that rhetoric and dialectic are valuable insofar as their systematized methods are applied to practical disciplines to encourage the operation of reason. It is unsurprising, then, that John categorically distinguishes between those who are “Verbose, rather than eloquent” through the creation of “verbal leaves that lack the fruit of meaning,” a distinction that John further expands on in the *Policraticus* between flatterers and philosophers (*Met.* 1.3, p. 13). While dialectic and rhetoric can be used to determine universal principles, the determination of these principles is only useful in “its application to particular cases” (*Met.* 2.11, p. 100). The student of rhetoric and dialectic is challenged not only to “talk about definitions, arguments, genera, and the like” but also to apply the methods used to determine these categories across “the several branches of knowledge” (*Met.* 2.9, p. 95). No matter the specific branch of knowledge, the systematized methods of dialectic and rhetoric can be used to categorize the branch of knowledge, determine the universal first principles that characterize the branch of knowledge, and apply those principles to particular cases. John’s larger defense of the trivium as a necessary component of a liberal arts education proceeds from this concept that the systematized knowledge of the trivium, grammar with interpretation, logic with deliberation, and rhetoric with expression, is the very knowledge that makes higher learning obtainable.

Within this system of knowledge, rhetoric functions as an art of expression that leads the audience toward concluding what is probable in contingent circumstances and “estimating utility or goodness,” a definition drawn from Cicero (*Met.* 1.15, p. 46). While John dedicates the majority of his theoretical discussion of the trivium to defining the role
of grammar and articulating dialectical methodology, his discussion of speech emphasizes the need for “clarity and easy comprehensibility” (Met. 1.19, p. 56). Rhetoric itself is closely conflated with the art of grammar, which John designates as governing the use of figures of speech and rhetorical tropes. Under John’s conception of rhetorical invention and organization, an orator must be cognizant of “schemata together with rhetorical tropes, sophisms which envelop the minds of listeners in a fog of fallacies, and the various considerations which prompt the speaker or writer to say what he does, and which, when recognized, make straight the way for understanding” (Met. 1.19, p. 56).

Rhetorical invention, then, is comprised of two bodies of knowledge, “the precise force of each and every term” used in an oration and the various circumstances surrounding an oration, including the speaker himself, the exigency of the speaking occasion, and the nature of the audience (Met. 1.19, p. 58). With these factors in mind, the rhetorician can invent and draw upon common topics that help the audience to determine what is most probable for a given situation.

While John clearly understood the whole of Aristotle’s Organon to be valuable, he isolated the eighth book of Aristotle’s Topics as the foundation of all disputation and rhetorical practice. Indeed, throughout the Metalogicon, John develops a linguistic metaphor to describe the course of scientific study, with the foundational Categories functioning as the “alphabet,” On Interpretation as the “syllabic,” the first seven books of the Topics as the “verbal,” and the eighth book of the Topics as the end of reasoning (Met. 3.10, p. 190). Following the opinion of Cicero and Quintilian, John finds the eighth book of the Topics to provide both “the principal source of the rules of all eloquence” and “the initial starting point for the study of rhetoric” (Met. 3.10, p. 190-1). Echoing his
earlier audience-centric distinction between dialectic and rhetoric, John further explains that dialectic finds its end in convincing of probable truth while rhetoric’s end lies in persuading toward communal action (*Met.* 3.10, p. 193). Since a rhetorical oration is performed for a crowd whose capacity for reason cannot be wholly known, the rhetorician must rely upon the “more gentle” strategy of induction rather than the coercive syllogism that is best suited for disputation with a reasonable individual (*Met.* 3.10, p. 192-3). Following Aristotle, John delineates two rhetorical tools that fall under the broad umbrella of inductive reasoning, inference and example.\(^{76}\) By utilizing inductive reasoning, the rhetorician aims to persuade his audience to accept a universal or particular proposition that proceeds from several instances. John directly cites Cicero to explain the most effective way to guide an audience to accept a given proposition is to draw from examples that are widely known and accepted within a given cultural milieu (*Met.* 3.10, p. 193).\(^{77}\) As it concerns the sovereign’s rhetorical practice, the sovereign must be inclined toward using inductive reasoning because an “illiterate person” is more inclined to accept a proposition through inductive reasoning by example rather than deductive reasoning by syllogism (*Met.* 3.10, p. 199).

As John understands it, the problem with rhetorical practice that proceeds by inference and example is that successful interpretation requires the audience of a speech or text to have a certain collection of sense data stored within the memory. While the rhetorician is primarily focused upon the act of invention, his audience is occupied with the constitutive act of interpretation. When relying upon inference and example


\(^{77}\) Citing Cicero, *De Inv.* 1.31.53
especially, rhetorical oration is dependent upon the audience’s capacity to leap from particular situation to universal principle, for example, the warranted proposition within the enthymeme, which John identifies as “both the greatest secrets of success and the chief obstacle to progress” (Met. 3.10, p. 197). This reliance upon the audience’s capacity for inference requires that effective rhetoricians clearly establish and delimit the universal propositions to which they appeal through example. Additionally, persuasion concerning a contingent matter is only possible when all “disputants…correctly understand the issue under discussion” so that oration and disputation can focus on the primary issue of discussion rather than devolving into quibbles over the precise meaning of terms, the very disruptive act that John accuses the Cornificians of consistently undertaking (Met. 3.10, pp. 193-4). For these reasons, the rhetorician is obliged to take care in determining the precise meaning of each term used within an example since “a single statement may readily imply several propositions…[and]…several statements may be reduced to a single proposition” (Met. 3.10, pp. 197). The rhetorician is most effective, then, when he expresses himself through “Unsophisticated and straightforward ways of putting things,” which allows him to conceal the ultimate intention of any given oration while also assisting the audience in its apprehension of the connection between particular examples and universal principles (Met. 3.10, p. 193). As becomes evident in John’s contemporary political writings, the efficacy of political rhetoric is intimately connected to a sovereign’s extensive background literary knowledge from which he may draw suitable examples and his natural talent for rendering these examples in a relatively straightforward manner, since this knowledge serves as the material for the development of prudence. Much like the broader category of scientific knowledge, an individual’s
rhetorical skill descends from the combination of grammatical, rhetorical, and dialectical study and God-given grace.

Since rhetoric finds its persuasive capacity through inductive reasoning, when compared to syllogistic demonstration, it is particularly susceptible to sensation as a power of the soul. Following Aristotle, John explains that universal principles, and first principles in general, “derive their credibility from the fact that they are inductively inferred from particular things” (*Met.* 4.8, p. 215). This point of order within the Aristotelian scientific system was clearly a major point of emphasis for John, as he includes one of his longest direct quotations from Aristotle to clarify this concept:

> The only possible way to conceive universals is by induction, since we come to know abstractions by induction. But unless we have sense experience, we cannot make inductions. Even though sense perception relates to particular things, scientific knowledge concerning such can only be constructed by the successive steps of sense perception, induction, and formulation of universals…Sense perception is a prerequisite for memory; the memory of frequently repeated sense perceptions results in experimental proof; experimental proofs provide the materials for a science or an art (4.8, p. 215).78

As is clear from this citation, sensory perception provides the basis for the production of memory. As sensory perceptions of particular circumstances are repeated, they become the foundation from which universal first principles are extracted, which themselves form the basis of systematic knowledge. Since rhetorical persuasion is co-constitutive between rhetor and audience, the effective rhetorician must invent and adapt examples that access the audience’s collective memories and lead them to infer what is most probable in a given situation. To determine this, the audience relies upon the faculty of their imagination, which “conceives of the future in terms of present or past perceptions” (*Met.* 4.10, p. 219). This process, however, is not infallible as the imagination may impress an

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78 Citing Aristotle, *An. Post.* 1.13.81b (2 ff); 2.19.100a (3 ff)
incorrect image upon the soul, causing the act of judgment to be deceived (*Met.* 4.11, p. 221). For this reason, especially when engaging in political oratory, it is imperative to draw upon examples and referents that are widely understood and accepted within a cultural milieu. Since rhetorical persuasion, by default, must rely upon inference and example, if the examples chosen for a given oration do not possess a commonly understood referent, the oration’s efficacy will be vitiated as the audience may struggle to connect the particular situation to an abstracted universal principle.

The *Metalogicon* provides a full treatment of John’s limited understanding of rhetoric’s role within the Aristotelian system of science. For John, rhetoric functioned as an extension of logic, closely conflated with dialectic, but focused upon the proving of probability through induction for large audiences. By creating sensory perceptions that imprint the memory, rhetorical oration prompts audiences to engage the faculty of imagination to see the future as it may be by drawing upon their stored memories. From these particular situations, prudence may guide the individual to abstract universal principles, but this process must be informed by the judgment of reason, which itself is developed through systematic study of the trivium, particularly grammar. Rhetorical practice, then, is characterized by the invention and adaptation of sense data that are widely accepted and understood by a given audience. As John transitions from his theoretical to practical political writing, he provides a map for sovereigns aiming to navigate the challenge of political oration. Under John’s rhetorical-grammatical system, effective political oration focuses upon identifying the dominant characteristics of a particular situation, adapting those characteristics to reference an abstracted universal
principle, and expressing those adaptations in a manner that can be easily understood by
an audience.

**Rhetorical Knowledge and the Interpretation of the Law in the *Policraticus***

While the central concern of the *Policraticus* lies in the distinction between true
philosophy and self-flattery within the royal court, John both employs rhetorical theory
throughout his composition of the text and explicates the importance of rhetorical
practice for the sovereign. As John explains in the dedication to Thomas Becket that
opens the *Policraticus*, sovereigns must engage with an education in letters both so that
they may have a lasting legacy in the manner of historical monarchs such as Alexander,
Caesar, and Constantine, and that they may, through education, ensure that “the soul is
purged of its defects and is revivified even in adversity by a mysterious and serene
cheerfulness” (*Pol.* 1.ded.). From the beginning of the text, John claims the primary
problem of sovereignty lies in the self-deceptive nature of fortune, which has granted
sovereigns and the wider nobility with such “wealth and pleasures” that precipitate a
“craving for self-indulgence” (*Pol.* 1.1). As the nobility become accustomed to having
their every desire satisfied, their intellect becomes oriented toward pursuing pleasure
rather than truth. John defines this phenomenon as the act of the “creature of reason
becom[ing] a brute,” which results in pride destroying understanding and undoes the
Ciceronian motif of reason and eloquence establishing civilization and common welfare
(*Pol.* 1.1). This problem is further confounded by the presence of sycophantic flatterers
within the royal court whose constant praise of the sovereign deludes him into seeing
himself as other than he actually is. This tension between self-deception and truth forms
the continuum through which John examines the role of educating the prince, ideally a consistent orientation toward philosophy and away from flattery.

In the same manner that rhetoric and dialectic vivify the scientific arts, a sovereign’s education is only effective insofar as its first principles can be practically applied to the art of rulership. For sovereigns, the end of philosophy lies in its innate capacity to uncover the truth and thus to help them resist the self-deception of flattery. Therefore, the sovereign’s education in the liberal arts, which for John includes the whole of the trivium, focuses upon sharpening the skill of discernment into “an instrument which sharpens the mind amazingly and distinguishes individual things, the one from the other, by the peculiar attributes of their nature,” or, to borrow language from the Metalogicon, to develop prudential knowledge (Pol. 2.18). John designates the ultimate goal of a liberal arts education to be in the precise understanding of one’s self “through the consideration of what he himself is” (Pol. 3.2). However, while John focuses in the Poliecraticus upon self-knowledge, we must recognize that self-knowledge for John does not carry its modern connotations; rather, as Brian FitzGerald has argued, when considered within the physiological metaphor of John’s body politic, knowing oneself is the means by which “the renewal of the political community” occurs.79 Consequently, the first inquiry that a sovereign must undertake in philosophy involves answering the questions implied by the ten categories. Once these questions have been addressed, the individual can use these answers as the foundation for answering the practical and ethical questions that characterize sovereignty. However, this philosophical program is always threatened by the flatterer who “always speaks to give pleasure, never to tell the truth”

(Pol. 3.4). As the sovereign navigates the royal court, he must be conscious of the role that flattery plays in turning philosophical contemplation into the “deceptions of vanity” that guide the individual to vice (Pol. 3.4). Philosophical contemplation, then, closely resembles the course of trivium education described in the Metalogicon. Of course, philosophical contemplation concerns the answering of ethical questions, but these questions can only be addressed once the individual precisely understands the terms and propositions that comprise particular questions, which necessitates a robust competency in both the interpretation and expression of words. Throughout the Policraticus, John consistently employs exempla that demonstrate how effective rulership intimately descends from a sovereign’s trained capacity to interpret truth apart from flattery and to also except criticism as an educational tool when appropriate.

For John, a sovereign’s skill in grammar, rhetoric, and logic are essential insofar as his interpretive and analytical capacities are employed in the service of guaranteeing and maintaining the rule of law within the realm. In John’s political system, a prince is distinguished from a tyrant in that a prince is “obedient to law,” a law which John identifies as descending from the natural order laid out by God (Pol. 4.1). As the head of this order, the prince serves as “the public power and a certain image on earth of the divine majesty” (Pol. 4.1). The prince, therefore, serves as a natural exemplum, whose actions are interpreted by the public community and form the foundation of virtuous activity within the kingdom. For this reason, the prince must be especially conscious of

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80 The precise placement of the king within the civic and ecclesiastical systems of law was perhaps the greatest problem of medieval jurisprudence. John’s Policraticus provides a single instantiation of this political and legal theory through an admittedly biased perspective in favor of the Catholic church. Fuller treatments of the king’s position in relation to the civil and canon laws can be found in Walter Ullmann, Principles of Government and Politics in the Middle Ages, (London: Methuen, 1961). Michael Wilks, The problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).
the public persona that he embodies, as this persona actively functions as the avatar of 
God’s majesty upon the earth. It is unsurprising, then, that John would call upon the 
prince to embrace the tenets of philosophy so that he may know himself accurately and 
completely because to do otherwise would threaten the prince’s persona as an image of 
equity within the kingdom. According to Richard Rouse and Mary Rouse, John’s 
references to equity in describing the law handed down by God suggest that John is 
identifying “justice with custom,” specifically suggesting that a tyrant in one who seizes 
prerogatives that have not traditionally been afforded to the crown.81 While John 
acknowledges that the prince is “an absolutely binding law unto himself” insofar as the 
prince ideally should not fear the “penalties of the law” (Pol. 4.2), he defines the effective 
sovereign as one who does not abuse this “special situation” of being above the law to 
follow his own private will but instead administers the law equitably to further the 
interests of the public community (Pol. 4.3).82 However, within John’s system, this does 
not imply that the prince himself operates without restriction with regard to the 
implementation and interpretation of the law. Indeed, drawing on the example of the 
priests of Levi, John distinguishes between the civil law of the realm that is “impressed 
upon the page” and the natural law of God that is “written in the book of his [the 
prince’s] heart” (Pol. 4.6). As the prince administers equity throughout the kingdom, he

81 Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, “John of Salisbury and the Doctrine of Tyrannicide,” Speculum 42, 
82 John’s discussion of the law as a means for the sovereign to administer equity shares resonances with 
the preface to Ranaulf de Glanville’s treatment of English law: “With such felicity may our Most Illustrious 
King conduct himself, in the periods of Peace and War, by the force of his right hand, crushing the 
insolence of the violent and intractable, and, with the sceptre of Equity, moderating his justice towards 
the humble and obedient, that as he may be always victorious in subduing his Enemies, so may he on all 
occasions shew himself impartially just in the government of his Subjects” (xxxv-xxxvi). Ranaulf de 
must draw upon his grammatical and rhetorical knowledge to ensure that his interpretation of the civil law corresponds to natural law.

A capable prince, then, is defined through his capacity to interpret the meaning and stricture of civil law and align it with the characters of virtue that characterize the natural law. As John acknowledges, no written civil law can fully account for the complexities and ambiguities that emerge from contingent and particular situations, those moments that “are supported by the authority of neither faith, sense, nor apparent reason, and which in their main points lean toward either side” (*Pol.* 7.2). In these moments, it is the duty of the prince to administer equity to the public community in line with the principles of natural law. This process naturally entails that the prince be “a diligent reader [and] a disciple of the law” so that he does not “distort the law as captive to his own discretion, but he accommodates his discretion to meaning and integrity” (*Pol.* 4.7). In this capacity, the prince’s primary role is to safeguard the language of the law and its ultimate interpretation. John is less concerned that the precise terms of the civil law be slavishly followed and is more interested that the spirit of the natural law be preeminent, a process that relies upon the prince engaging his rational faculties: “the ruler may be allowed some direction over their terms, yet still the integrity of the law must be conserved through the rational balancing between the honorable and the useful” (*Pol.* 4.7). The prince’s role in interpreting the law necessitates his proficiency in letters and learning, and, if the prince lacks this capacity, he must draw upon advisors have been trained in literacy practices (*Pol.* 4.6). However, relying upon counsellors alone is problematic given the potential for flattery to deceive the sovereign from knowledge of
himself. The prince’s primary duty, then, requires his competency in interpretation and expression.

By consistently utilizing historical exempla, John simultaneously demonstrates the efficacy in adopting non-coercive inductive reasoning as the primary evidence in a proposition and models the course by which political rhetoric should be effectively implemented. John employs his own style of leveraging historical exempla in straightforward language to achieve his own aims throughout the *Policraticus*. As he explains in the prologue to the seventh book, he asks his audience of nobility to pay attention not to the “superficial meanings of [his] words but the source of the thought and the thought to which they lead,” which he explains is the unadorned truth gathered from historical authors (*Pol. 7.prol*). And, like the princes to which he writes, in moments when historical examples do not resonate with a particular situation, John incorporates examples that are “culled from daily usage and experience” (*Pol. 7.prol*). In particular, John draws upon historical exempla that, taken together, craft the ideal sovereign’s disposition toward language, both interpretation and expression. In the fourth book of the *Policraticus*, John clarifies that the historical lives of previous rulers function as texts provided by the grace of God upon which contemporary rulers may base their own actions:

> Accordingly, their deeds are incitements to virtue; their words are so many lessons in moral matters. Ultimately their lives, in which vice was subdued and captured, have been constructed like triumphal arches consecrated to posterity: arches which list their magnificent virtues, proclaiming in everything the faithful acknowledgement that all these excellent acts were done not by our hands, but by the Lord’s (*Pol. 4.6*).

As princes encounter these historical examples and when they read in general, their attention should focus on “those matters which lay the foundation of the life of the state”
(Pol. 7.9). Considering that many historical examples of effective rulership come from non-Christian princes, the particular details of a given example are less preeminent than the virtuous action that the example points toward. While the sovereign must have a working knowledge of philosophy and virtue, insofar as it is necessary for the sovereign to know himself, this knowledge must be leveraged toward the action of administering equity.

To fulfill his role as guarantor of the law, the efficacious prince must draw upon the historical examples provided by his distinguished forebearers so that he may direct royal policy toward common equity. During the process of interpreting historical exempla, John calls upon the prince, in his capacity as the interpreter of the law, to engage in exegesis that does not seek to translate “everything in the syllable-to-syllable” but rather to express “the essence of the author,” in this case, the natural law impressed on the soul by God (Pol. 5.2). To illustrate his point, John provides the common example of Lycurgus, the Spartan king who, after revising the Spartan legal system, demanded and received a pledge of loyalty that the new laws would not be changed until he had returned from a trip. Rather than returning, Lycurgus elected to live in perpetual exile in Crete so that his law would remain eternal. In a similar exemplum, John cites the model of Codrus, the king of the Athenians. During a war between the Dorians and Athenians, the oracle predicted that the Dorians would be successful in battle as long as they did not kills Codrus. Upon hearing the prediction, Codrus entered the Dorian camp, allowed himself to be killed, and, in this manner, preserved the Athenian state (Pol. 4.3). While these exempla were commonly cited in medieval political tracts, for John, the metaphorical importance of these exempla lie in their close connection between the
actions of the sovereign and the interpretation of common law. Found within a larger discussion of the prince’s role as a minister and the nature of faithful ministry, these exempla literally exemplify John’s political worldview. As John understands it, the precise terminology of any common law is less important than the higher spiritual law to which the common law must necessarily point. For this reason, John describes princes as inferior to ministers, even as they themselves are the ministers of the state in their capacity to administer equity. In the cases of both Codrus and Lycurgus, the interpretation of their common law is guaranteed through the sacrifice of their physical bodies. The preservation of the law and its interpretation is thus understood as the ultimate expression of sovereign power.

Once the sovereign has assembled the raw material provided by grammatical interpretation, he may then move to administering equity through the production of eloquence and oratory that harmonizes contingent situations with truth through the employment of the rhetorical-dialectical methodology. While John does not go as far as to claim that eloquent oration can produce truth and knowledge, he does believe that linguistic expression can make the truth widely accessible to a given population. The effective orator is defined by his ability to regulate “language according to the requirement of the theme and [make] the theme appropriate to the occasion” (Pol. 7.12). Eloquence is not confined solely to the invention of an oration but, given John’s close conflation between rhetoric and dialectic under the broad category of logic, also contains the capacity to distinguish between truth and falsehood, specifically through “the ability to detect the sophistries of false reasoners” (Pol. 7.12). As the image of equity in the kingdom, the prince’s rhetorical practice must also aim toward reconciling the realities of
mortal existence with higher spiritual aims, a process that relies on “mak[ing] language
harmonize with facts and facts with the times” (Pol. 7.12). Such a disposition toward
language entails a broader habitual orientation toward virtue as eloquence cannot be
“attained without rules for wisdom,” as the speaker who lacks an orientation toward
wisdom lacks the capacities of discernment to either produce speech that harmonizes
particular and contingent facts with universal principles or to identify sophistical
reasoning as it appears in other arguments (Pol. 7.14). The ideal sovereign orator, as John
imagines it, is one who draws upon historical example to interpret the particular facts of a
situation and aligns his judgment with the natural law that governs all creation. To
achieve this rhetorical practice, the sovereign must possess a keen sense of discernment, a
broad philosophical understanding, and the desire to commonly administer equity.

As explained throughout the whole of the Poli craticus, the sovereign’s
relationship to the linguistic arts is defined by the connected dual responsibilities of
resisting the impulse of flattery to self-deception and harmonizing particular facts with
the precepts laid out by natural law. While the connection between flattery and equity, on
the surface, may not seem obvious, under John’s political model, the prince’s role as the
image of equity and avatar of the embodiment of natural law necessitates that the prince
possess accurate self-knowledge, as this knowledge forms the basis of the virtuous
disposition that commonly administers equity throughout the kingdom. Since the civil
law that the prince guarantees cannot accommodate all possible contingent situations, in
moments when the prince must utilize his capacity for discernment, he must aim his
discernment at reconciling the political needs of the kingdom with the laws of morality
that define Christian polity. To aid the prince in this duty, John recommends a broad
knowledge of history so that the prince may draw upon the example of distinguished forebears. Once the prince has a complete knowledge of himself so that he may resist the impulse to indulge flattery, he may fulfill his duty as the guarantor of the civil law and embodiment of the natural law. Thus, John’s political system or, at least, the prince’s role within this political system, is underwritten by a foundation in the liberal arts. For this reason, John’s pairing of the *Policraticus* and the *Metalogicon* as sister texts that intimately connect politics and the liberal arts makes perfect sense.

The Sharing of Exempla and the Construction of Persona

In line with Hugh’s suggestion that the perceptual frameworks that govern interpretation be practically developed through the accretion of particular examples, John’s *Fürstenspiegel* seeks to construct the rhetorical persona of the sovereign primarily through the act of rhetorical compilation, or *compilatio*—that is, the selection and deliberate ordering of pieces of information found in disparate works into a new text.83 While, in many ways, the tradition of medieval composition and invention, is dominated by the act of compilation and the adaptation of complied materials by authors exerting their own agency, John’s extended use of exempla within the *Policraticus* functions to simultaneously provide his intended audience with a broad collection of examples to be held in the memory and to guide the reader toward the development of an effective rhetorical persona. As a collection of knowledge held in the memory, these exempla serve as a foundation upon which a reader may build higher-order allegorical and

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83 The medieval tradition of the *florilegium* serves as a representative example. *Florilegium* were comprised of aphorisms or *sententiae* taken from classical authors that were compiled together on particular topics. Indeed, as Scott D. Troyan has demonstrated, these *florilegia* often contained excerpts collected from texts that were lost to the Latin West and, in this way, provided a basic if incomplete schooling in rhetoric. Scott D. Troyan, “Unwritten between the Lines: The Unspoken History of Rhetoric,” in *Medieval Rhetoric: A Casebook*, ed. Scott D. Troyan (London: Routledge, 2004), 217-45.
tropological interpretations; at the same time, the allegorical and tropological interpretations made possible by the foundation built by the historical exempla aid the sovereign in constructing an effective rhetorical persona that authorizes his own sovereignty. For John, the act of compiling historical exempla serves as an effective method for collapsing the distance between himself and the sovereign, explicating the perceptual framework found in his *Metalogicon* and *Policraticus*, and teaching the sovereign how to ethically engage in rhetorical interpretation and performance.

While John consistently constructs the text of the *Policraticus* to follow the order of interpretation defined by Hugh in the *Didascalicon*, in his discussion of the sin of vainglory, John provides his most succinct example of how the gathering of historical exempla can develop a rhetorical persona that allows for higher-order interpretation and ethical governance. The sin of vainglory, the desire for the possession of false praise that does not correspond to one’s actions, serves as the fountainhead from which spring the seven vices and is totally inimical to the rhetorical persona that John seeks to cultivate in his audience. To emphasize the dangers of vainglory, in the second book of the *Policraticus*, John inundates his readers with a collection of short historical exempla, 28 in total drawn from such illustrious figures as Plato, Alexander, Julius Caesar, and Augustus Caesar, among others. John uses these examples to demonstrate how these individuals displayed forbearance to resist the urge to accept flattering speech, which produces vainglory in the individual (*Pol*. 2.14). According to Clare Mongale, John understood the writing of history through a pedagogical lens in which the actions of predecessors can “be a source to later generations for understanding the constellations of
laws, duties, and customs that contributed to their present reality.” In his *Historia pontificalis*, John’s treatment of history mirrors his broad interest in dialectic as a pedagogical tool. Within the *Historia*, history is presented as a series of conflicts between men in which each individual attempts to establish his primacy over a particular situation. The sheer number of exempla shared here by John suggests that the literal, narrative knowledge contained within the exempla is of utmost importance to the ethical governance of the realm. Unlike later *Fürstenspiegel*, which often accompany exempla with exegesis of the sense communicated by the example, John’s historical exempla are presented in quick succession without commentary, the only governing perceptual framework being the framework that governs the whole book—to know thyself as a ruler.

The rhetorical structure of the *Policraticus* as described in this section mirrors the very structure of the grammatical texts that John himself cited as influential to his own learning of grammar and rhetoric as a student (*Pol. 2.10*). According to Karin Fredborg, John took William of Conches’s *Glosulae* as his primary object of study for the art of grammar. Within the *Glosulae*, William endows Lady Philosophy with the characteristics of effective pedagogy: “‘Dame Philosophy follows the correct pedagogical order in teaching, first building the faith so that the audience believes the teacher, then giving the logical reasons so the proofs are stated.’” This construction closely parallels the reading methodology advocated by Hugh of St. Victor, in which initial literal

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86 Quoted in Fredborg, “Grammar and Rhetoric,” 114.
historical truths provide the foundation for the later exegesis of the allegorical and tropological meanings behind these narrative events. Considered as a collection, the exempla, then, seem designed to provide a reader with a broad collection of particular examples that are used to exercise prudence. Considering the actual content of the exempla makes this claim even more evident.

Across the exempla shared in the second book of the *Policraticus*, John depicts a rhetorical persona in which a sovereign carefully measures the precise meaning of an utterance, considers the author and context surrounding the utterance, interprets the utterance in line with truth rather than flattery, and, finally, produces his own response that prudently accepts criticism and rejects flattery. In the rhetorical paradigm posited by here by John, a sovereign’s rhetorical efficacy is reflected in the capacity to resist the impulse toward rhetorical action that satisfies his own desires so that the sense communicated through the law can be preserved. In order to resist the effects of flattering speech, the sovereign must possess a keen self-knowledge and a willingness to accept criticism when it is warranted. While the whole of the exempla depicts this rhetorical persona, it is especially evident in an exemplum that John adapts from Suetonius concerning the Emperor Augustus and a veteran of his army who seeks his support when called to court (*Pol.* 2.14). Though Augustus initially acts magnanimously in providing the veteran with a distinguished lawyer for his defense, the veteran criticizes Augustus’ actions as fulfilling the technical requirements of the feudal relationship while violating the close bonds of intimacy that ideally characterize it: “‘But, I, Sire, in your hour of need at Actium, sought no substitute. I fought for you with my own hands’” (*Pol.* 2.14). Rather than becoming angry at the shame brought about by these comments or allowing his own
vainglory to color his response, Augustus accepts this criticism and agrees to serve in person as the veteran’s defense. It is through the act of accepting criticism that Augustus comes to restore the sense communicated by the laws governing subject and vassal relationships. If flattery is the act which separates the individual from self-knowledge, criticism serves as the balm of instruction that restores the intellect to its natural state. For these reasons, John follows Augustine in declaring that rulers should “prefer to be criticized by anyone whomsoever rather than be praised by one who is mistaken or who flatters” (Pol. 2.14). The sovereign’s challenge lies in exercising prudence to determine the difference between flattery and criticism and connecting these utterances to perceptions held within the memory so as to determine the correct course of action.

Beyond depicting effective rhetorical practice, the compilation of exempla found in the early sections of the Policraticus collect particular examples that function within the memory as a foundation for the development of prudential knowledge and the higher-order interpretations that prudence makes possible. At the beginning of Book 7 of the Policraticus, John transitions the form of his Fürstenspiegel from merely compiling exempla together to engaging in tropological and allegorical interpretation; however, such a rhetorical move is only possible because of the foundation established with the earlier historical exempla. Throughout the Policraticus, John has used the literary example of Gnatho from Terence’s Eunuch as a metonymy for all who flatter and accomplish their aims through the deception of honeyed language (Pol. 3.4). To begin his discussion of vice and virtue, John returns to the image of Gnatho and his braggart captain Thraso to demonstrate the tropological and allegorical aspects of flattery (Pol. 7.1). Whereas earlier exempla did not include extensive exegetical commentary, by Book
7, the historical sense of Gnatho and Thraso’s actions have been subsumed by the larger discussion of how these actions are reflected within John’s contemporary courtly society, with John declaring that “Terence has in that play depicted the life of very nearly all of us” (Pol. 7.1). The recession of the narrative mode allows for an allegorical interpretation that explains how flattery’s development of vainglory within the individual precipitates the birth of sin, through pride, which reproduces itself along with “the whole jungle of vices” (Pol. 7.1). The connections that John makes between the literary characters and the birth of sin requires a level of abstraction absent in his earlier exempla that privileged the “letter” of the exempla over the “sense” communicated.

In moving from allegorical to tropological interpretation, John’s later exegesis works to reincorporate allegorical abstraction within the practical framework of action necessitated by the genre of the Fürstenspiegel. As John considers Gnatho and Thraso’s actions within a practical framework, he shifts his discussion to the theoretical confluence of flattery and the art of rhetoric. Here, John is primarily concerned with the similar aims found in flattery, criticism, and epideictic rhetoric; consequently, his discussion seeks to demarcate the boundary between the ethical and unethical applications of speech. For John, following Quintilian, speeches of praise find their object from three sources, “from the mind or body or from external circumstances” (Pol. 7.2). When considering the content of praise, John emphasizes that speech must be analyzed along three lines to determine whether it points at truth or deceives with flattery, the person praised—the way in which one earns praise—the person praising—the virtues and vices possessed by the speaker—and the context surrounding the praise—the cultural mores that place different values on certain virtues and vices (Pol. 7.2). As the allegorical moves to the
tropological, John provides his audience with a methodology for enacting the rhetorical disposition that he depicted earlier in the text. To enact this disposition requires that a sovereign possess a robust memory, a certain level of prudential knowledge, and an educated capacity for reading and interpretation.

As these curated examples show, John uses exempla to depict the ideal rhetorical persona for a sovereign and, at the same time, to provide the sovereign with a model for the development of prudential knowledge. Due to John’s incomplete understanding of prudence as found in Aristotle, his version of prudential knowledge takes on many aspects of the liberal arts trivium that he so ably defends across his corpus. Rather than being comprised solely of lived experience, John’s prudential knowledge is developed through the act of reading and the collection of particular examples that come to serve as a foundation upon which higher-order abstraction can be based. Through abstraction, the sovereign can accurately interpret particular situations by resisting the allure of flattery and accepting the instruction of criticism. In John’s model, prudence’s act of discernment follows a clearly developed path from the narrative and literal “letter” of a speech to its allegorical and tropological “sense” that instructs why and how to live virtuously.

**Maintaining the Sense of the Law**

Although not composed from the perspective of the sovereign as articulated in the *Policraticus*, John’s letters provide a trove of rhetorical practices that follow the precepts laid out across his theoretical treatises on the liberal arts. In these letters, John describes the role of the judge, who, like the sovereign, must work to orient their desire toward discerning the truth and make his judgment in line with the equity of the realm. The central thematic of John’s forensic rhetoric—that it is the duty of the claimant and the
judge to harmonize the facts of a particular case with the natural law that governs creation—serves as a consistently invoked focal point in John’s correspondences written on behalf of Archbishop Theobald of Canterbury describing the various cases held at Theobald’s episcopal court. After being appointed to Theobald’s court in 1147, John served as Theobald’s personal secretary until he was briefly exiled from the court at the command of Henry II in 1156. In his capacity as Theobald’s secretary, John was tasked with composing letters written to various Catholic luminaries, particularly Pope Adrian IV, that both described the reasoning behind particular judicial decisions and advanced certain cases that had been appealed by interested parties to the higher episcopal court in Rome. In John’s collected letters, written both under Theobald’s and his own name, John consistently grapples with defining the limits of the civil law in relation to the natural law, with John dependably forwarding the preeminence of the natural law governed by the episcopal court. In this short analysis of a small collection of John’s letters, I do not want to suggest that a king such as Henry would necessarily agree with John’s reasoning or enact his specific judiciary recommendation; rather I want to present John’s letters as an example of an authoritative figure using the combination of grammatical material and rhetorical-dialectical methodology to achieve prudential judgment in the same manner as a sovereign, as theorized in the *Metalogicon* and *Policraticus*.

Across John’s dictaminal corpus, he advocates for the use of a rhetorical-dialectical methodology in which claimants invent their arguments under the general precept that the grammatical interpretation of civil law is fundamentally determined by natural law. While this phenomenon occurs throughout John’s correspondence, this principle is succinctly presented in a letter composed by John on behalf of Theobald and
sent to Robert Warelwast, Bishop of Exeter, who is determining an issue of succession and possession of a church.\textsuperscript{87} At the conclusion of the letter, John provides his general counsel on all matters in which the civil and natural law come into conflict: “The sum of my counsel is this: that you should obey the law of God and the sacred canons in accordance with your profession and, whenever you are faced with such difficulties, should remember that it is safer to fall into the hands of men than into the hands of the living God” (lt. 6, p. 11).\textsuperscript{88} Consistent with the political theory articulated in the \textit{Policraticus}, the counsel delivered by Theobald and John exhorts Warelwast to craft his rhetorical intervention in a manner that harmonizes the facts of the situation with the natural law, in this case, the disputed course of succession brought about through the issuing of “illicit grants and substitutions” with the Apostolic precepts confirmed at the Second Lateran Council (lt. 6, p. 11). In other words, Theobald and John recommend that Warelwast invent his arguments following a perceptual framework that takes the decisions of the Second Lateran Council as the foundation for disputing the illegally granted order of possession. Through the presentation of the narrative facts of the case, Warelwast can hope to persuade the judge through an allegorical argument that focuses upon reconciling the flawed common law of succession with the supreme divine law. In

\textsuperscript{87} As John Hudson has argued, Henry II worked to reform the English system of jurisprudence that had been interrupted by the violence that occurred during the reign of King Stephen. To this end, Henry II sought to place local jurisprudence under the increasing authority of the crown through the establishment of itinerant judges, known as eyres. Due to the chaos of Stephen’s reign, a major matter of concern for the English legal system was the inheritance of property, an issue that occurs repeatedly in the letters of John and Theobald. Under Henry II, these reforms led to the establishment of the Constitutions of Clarendon of 1164, which created a major schism between Henry and Thomas Beckett. John Hudson, \textit{The Formation of the English Common Law: Law and Society in England from King Alfred to the Magna Carta}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed., (London: Routledge, 2018), 119-46.

\textsuperscript{88} All references to John’s letters are taken from John of Salisbury, \textit{The Letters of John of Salisbury: Volume I: The Early Letters (1153-1161)}, eds. W. J. Millor, H. E. Butler, and C. N. L. Brooke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). In-text citations are given by letter and page number.
the same manner that the narrative elements of historical exempla provide the raw material that leads to sovereign to prudential judgment, the undisputed facts of the Second Lateran Council provide the basis upon which Warelwast must build his argument. This tension between the civil laws of succession and the episcopal court’s privilege to admit course cases concerning prelatic matters serves as the dominant impetus for John’s preserved correspondences.

When Theobald’s court is confronted by a similar question of episcopal succession, the court employs one of the rhetorical practices described in John’s theoretical works to advance the case to highest pontifical court in Rome. John’s commentary on the case exemplifies the grammatical practice that Suzanne Reynolds has identified as the dominant mode of reading during the twelfth century—namely the recovery of authorial intention as a hermeneutic category, which “represents the most profound erosion of the boundary between grammar and rhetoric.”89 The case in question concerned the possession of the church of Chilham, which was contested by the monks of St Bertin and Hugh of Dover. As mandated by Adrian IV, Hugh had been ordered to vacate the church and “restore” its possession to the monks. However, Hugh argued that the order could not be fulfilled as mandated because of the impossibility of “restoring” possession of a property that had never fully come into a group’s possession (lt. 23, p. 39). Hugh’s argument hinged upon the distinction that possession of the church had been granted to “a certain Odo,” who never transferred possession of the property to another individual or group (lt. 23, p. 39). Given the facts of the case, Theobald’s court favors the claim of Hugh, who consistently makes himself available for trial, over the monks, who

refuse to sit for the trial until their property has been restored, but Theobald is hesitant to
advocate against the direct mandate of Adrian IV, who granted the original order of
restoration. Theobald’s court ultimately decides to forward Hugh’s interpretation of the
case and calls upon Adrian to hear his appeal, which itself is derived from what John has
described as the foundational rhetorical practice—that is, the precise definition of terms
that comprise a proposition so that authorial intention can be discovered. As Theobald
frames it, the appeal to be heard by Adrian consists in reconciling the specific language
of his mandate with the intent held by its author: “…your majesty had not ordered that
they should be instituted, but that they should be restored, and that in virtue of the word
‘restoration’ and others contained in your sacred rescript trial of the case was in the
fullest terms committed to us” (lt. 23, p. 40).

Unlike the sophistical reasoning that John condemns in his theoretical works,
Hugh’s argument receives purchase with Theobald’s court because it seeks to define
terms precisely rather than engage in linguistic trickery. In other words, rather than
quibbling over meaning without applying the dialectical method to practical action, Hugh
employs the Aristotelian logical methodology emphasized throughout the Metalogicon to
determine the intention behind Adrian’s statement. Hugh’s grammatical reading of
Adrian’s order allows him to develop a rhetorical defense that presents the issue of
inheritance within an Aristotelian dialectical framework. The grammatical text, Adrian’s
order, provides the material upon which Hugh can forward his dialectical argument. This
move within legal cases to adopt a more stringent methodology for determining proof
was not isolated to the ecclesiastical court but was experiencing a simultaneous
development in the civil legal system. Ranaulf de Glanville details a similar method for
establishing truth in legal disputes: “The truth of the fact shall, then, be inquired into, by means of many and various interrogations, made in the presence of Justices, and that, by taking into consideration the probably circumstances of the facts, and weighing each conjecture that tends in favor of the accused.” The outcome of the case ultimately depends upon the judge’s linguistic capacity and his ability to center knowledge in his judgment rather than to allow himself to become deceived through the influence of flattery, a tactic employed by the monks in this particular case. As is revealed by this legal matter, John’s foundational principle that connects knowledge of philosophy with a broader literary knowledge was not merely a theoretical precept conceived to defend the program of liberal arts education but also was actively employed to determine the outcome of contingent situations.

This tactic of disputing the relevance of a given legal accusation by contesting the precise term against which one was charged was employed consistently throughout Theobald’s court, and, consequently, the effective operation of the court depended upon the judge’s capacity to determine truth from falsehood through the raw material provided by grammatical interpretation and effective rhetorical-dialectical methodology. Letter 65, written by John of behalf of Theobald for Adrian IV, discusses a similar issue concerning the rightful possession of a church, disputed between two claimants, identified as R. and G. (Lt. 65, p. 107). According to G., who initially possessed the church, R. illegally dispossessed him from the church during the war under the advisement of Simon de St. Liz II, earl of Huntington, without a judicial order. When G. contested R.’s actions, R. and his men assaulted G. in a cemetery of a different church and compelled him to grant

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their illegal possession under threat of a “speedy death” by renouncing his claim in front of the archdeacon (lt. 65, p. 107). When these accusations were brought to Theobald’s court, each side employed different rhetorical strategies to support the truth of their claims. G. relied upon what Aristotle has identified as inartistic proofs, specifically the testimony of two priests who confirmed that G.’s life was threatened when he renounced his legal possession of the church.91 On the other hand, R.’s advocates appealed to the precise definition of the charges laid against R., with the whole of their legal defense being posed in the following questions that are reminiscent of Aristotle’s Categories:


R.’s legal strategy involved not necessarily disputing the testimony of the priests, which, by its very nature is difficult to contest, but rather aimed to dismantle G’s legal case by challenging the imprecise terminology employed in G’s legal appeal, which has unfortunately not been recorded by John in the letter. Unlike the earlier legal case that married grammatical knowledge with rhetorical-dialectical methodology, R.’s legal defense engages in the sophistical reasoning that John criticizes throughout his corpus of theoretical texts. Here, the difference lies in how grammatical and rhetorical knowledge is leveraged in the service of truth. In the case involving Hugh and the monks, Hugh’s appeal sought to precisely determine the intention communicated by the papal order that governed the whole interpretation of the case, since Adrian’s intent behind the use of the word “restoration” determines the truth of possession, insofar as the monks cannot be restored to something that they never possessed in the first place. In the latter case, R.’s

attempt to precisely define terms does not aim at disputing the truth of the accusation of coercion but rather seeks to complicate the legal process by questioning the end of the G’s suit—namely, whether he seeks to repossess the church—rather than the truth of G.’s accusation. The attempted defense employs a rhetorical-dialectical methodology, but this process is not enlivened by the necessary raw material provided by grammar. For this reason, the court was unconvinced by R.’s legal defense and “proceeded to make closer inquiry into the truth of the matter, in order thereafter to elucidate the exact legal position,” but, during this process, R. invoked his right to appeal and extended the court date out to the future (lt. 65, p. 107). When read in conjunction with Hugh’s earlier case, this latter case demonstrates how grammatical and rhetorical knowledge must be accompanied by a broader knowledge of philosophy and desire to attain the truth. If either of these elements are missing from the judge, he may lack the powers of discernment necessary for administering equity.

The distinction drawn across these court cases between language put to the ends of truth and language put to the ends of style strongly resonates with John’s own views of language, deliberation, and argumentation as laid out in the *Policraticus* and *Metalogicon*. While the person of Cornificius may be a strawman fabricated for the purposes of defending the liberal arts tradition, the sophistical practices of Cornificius were employed to some extent in John’s immediate coterie. In Letter 118, John decries how the affordance of language to reveal truth has been undercut by his culture’s fixation upon style at the expense of effective argumentation. In the letter, he criticizes a younger contemporary who consistently rejects John’s counsel due to what the contemporary perceives as incongruous Latin:
It is expedient that what I say should be concealed from his eyes; for if perchance he detects the clash of three vowels, I shall be forced to pay a fine for my lack of euphony and my use of the wrong word. It would be useless to quote in my defence abuses found in writers of authority to a young man who in answer cites against me the strict laws of language, and keeps watch and ward over the rules of the grammarians. (lt. 118, p. 194)

While John clearly values grammatical knowledge insofar as it provides the individual with the ability to make himself understood and to interpret the lessons depicted in literature, he views the ultimate aim of grammar to consist not in the production of pleasing speech but rather in the communication of truth. For this reason, as it concerns legal cases, John prefers “to win the case at the cost of [his] grammar, rather than to lose it in order to speak grammatically” (lt. 118, p. 195). In support of this position, John cites the careers of two contemporary priests who adopted differing rhetorical styles when deliberating on ecclesiastical matters:

There were once two advocates (but now, it is said, they are shepherds of souls holding the office of bishop at Lisieux, to wit, and Chichester) who proceeded by different methods: the bishop of Lisieux preferred to spoil his case rather than his speech, while he who is now bishop of Chichester yielded to him in elegance of style, but snatched the glory of victory from him by his careful attention to the matter at hand. (lt. 188, p. 195)

Whereas Arnaulf, bishop of Lisieux, employed sophisticated Latin, his excessive rhetorical ornamentation earned him a censure at the Council of Tours. On the other hand, Hilary, bishop of Chichester, was widely regarded as the most effective English jurist and defended Henry II at Sens in 1164. Despite Hilary’s deficiencies in Latin composition, his extensive knowledge of logic allowed him to effectively communicate the truth of a given situation. This vignette of rhetorical practice reiterates the challenge faced by those who must adjudicate legal cases and constructs the binary that operates across all of John’s theoretical writings. The effective judge and orator, under John’s rhetorical model, must always aim at uncovering and communicating the truth, but this
aim is consistently challenged by the realities of linguistic expression, which in the
culture of twelfth century England often valued sophisticated Latinity over the pursuit of
truth.

So, what are we to conclude from the depiction of rhetorical practice in John’s
personal correspondence and in his letters written on behalf of Theobald? Across the
letters, John and Theobald reiterate that effective rhetorical practice begins first with the
precise definition of terms that comprise a proposition. When these terms are confirmed,
the individual can move forward to the determination of truth through the employment of
rhetorical-dialectical methodology. When confronted by contingent legal situations, the
primary aim of the judge or the sovereign should be to harmonize the civil law with the
natural law, a process that engages the rational capacity of judgment.

Conclusion

John’s two texts meant to provide a robust moral and logical education for the
nobility demonstrate how the slow recovery of Aristotle affected the philosophical,
epistemological, and pedagogical aims of the Fürstenspiegel genre. As it relates to
rhetoric, John’s incorporation of Aristotelian methodologies and epistemologies resulted
in the close association between logical and rhetorical expression. Indeed, for John, the
two were so closely intertwined under the larger umbrella of logic that rhetorical
invention in and of itself found its expression through the precise analysis of the terms
that make up a proposition. John’s privileging of the logical aspects of rhetorical practice
even caused rhetoric to take on some aspects of prudential knowledge—insofar as John
imagined grammatical and rhetorical knowledge substituting for experiential knowledge.
For the ideal rhetorical sovereign envisioned by John, rhetorical practice involved the
training of prudence through the act of reading and interpretation to determine truth from vanity and thereby ensure that sense of the laws that governed the kingdom were never sublimated to their literal meaning—an act that required the sovereign to have a keen self-awareness. As we will see through the next two case studies, as Aristotle’s corpus was further recovered, the epistemological role of rhetoric within the division of sciences would once again shift, this time to a position governing politics and ethics. From John, though, we can see an Aristotelian thinker pushing the boundaries of contemporary knowledge concerning rhetoric. Given John’s goal of preserving the trivium as the premier method of education, his contributions to the rhetorical tradition have been overlooked. However, considered within the context of the Fürstenspiegel genre, John’s theoretical treatment of rhetoric provides the sovereign with a method for authorizing his own sovereignty through the maintenance of law and order.
CHAPTER III

POLITICAL RHETORIC AND ITS ETHICAL COMPONENT: GOWER’S “LUCRECE’ AND “VIRGINIA” AND RICHARD II AND EDWARD II

By the late fourteenth century, the shifting cultural and philosophical landscape of western Europe produced corresponding changes within the genre of the Fürstenspiegel. First, as recovered Aristotelian texts circulated more broadly within the Latin West, Fürstenspiegel incorporated Aristotelian concepts and definitions, particularly of virtue, into their discourses on the proper dispositions of sovereigns. Second, following the broad literary trend toward the vernacular, Fürstenspiegel began to be composed in vernacular languages rather than in Latin. While vernacular Fürstenspiegel authors still relied upon well-known classical and Biblical stories, their rendering of these stories within their vernacular languages allowed them to adapt the particular narrative details of each tale through the process of translation to better reflect their contemporary political needs and situations. As these two traditions became represented in the container of the Fürstenspiegel, the composition of Fürstenspiegel themselves became much more strongly inflected by the discursive category of “literature,” with the traditional emphasis on the natural and moral sciences being supplemented with extended fictive exempla designed to represent the moral categories that Fürstenspiegel sought to incubate in their target audience. As I will argue in this chapter, the widespread circulation of Aristotelian philosophy, the compositional shift toward the vernacular, and the heightened importance
of fictive exempla all combined to shift the definitions and depictions of rhetoric found in Fürstenspiegel. While earlier Latin Fürstenspiegel positioned rhetoric as closely aligned with the aims of logic, these later vernacular Fürstenspiegel associated rhetoric with the practice of hermeneutics, specifically conceiving of rhetoric as an interpretive act that opened the space for political intervention.

In Book 7 of the Confessio Amantis, English poet John Gower broke with his immediate rhetorical tradition by elevating the practice of “Rhetorique” to an epistemological category on the same level as “Theorique,” knowledge of the natural world, and “Practique,” the practical action of rulership (lines 7.30–49).92 As Rita Copeland has demonstrated, Gower’s adaptation of the traditional Aristotelian division of the sciences did not spring out of the ether but rather served as the culmination of a gradual shift in defining rhetoric that can be traced through the writings of authors such as Brunetto Latini and Giles of Rome.93 Although Brian Vickers has made the provocative claims that medieval rhetoricians’ adaptations to their inherited rhetorical tradition represent a fragmentation of classical rhetorical theory put to utilitarian uses and that the cultural and political climate of the medieval period foreclosed the possibility of a native deliberative tradition,94 Gower’s positioning of his discussion of rhetoric within the genre of the Fürstenspiegel suggests that he understood rhetoric as an inherently political practice and that the knowledge contained under the category of rhetoric was instrumental for the governance of a kingdom.

While recent scholarship has traced medieval adaptations to the classical deliberative theory present in medieval meta-rhetorical handbook traditions, these studies have focused upon the constraints of medieval political environments rather than the praxis of these adaptations by rhetorical actors. Shawn Ramsey has shown that the social practice of *consilium*, the offering and acceptance of counsel between lord and vassal, functioned as a deliberative tool for addressing contingent and uncertain situations for writers such as Latini and Thierry of Chartres.\(^5\) Evidence of deliberative rhetoric is even stronger in the traditions of English vernacular literature, in which poets such as Geoffrey Chaucer grappled with reemergent Aristotelian notions of citizenship and constitutionality. Matthew Giancarlo has argued that these vernacular writers, by appropriating the voice of the commons, provided a didactic moral framework through which a sovereign could function as the self-authorized embodiment of law within the kingdom.\(^6\) However, unlike the deliberative rhetorical practices espoused by these earlier writers, which fundamentally draw upon democratic traditions of counsel, Gower depicts rhetoric as a hierarchical system specifically adapted for the monarchy in its melding of rhetorical practice with Aristotelian virtue ethics. Thus, Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* represents an important and overlooked contribution to medieval rhetoric.


Given the close relationship between grammatical and rhetorical instruction and the teaching of moral virtues, it is not surprising a vernacular poet such as Gower would turn to the Fürstenspiegel as the container for his rhetorical advice. Drawing on the Pseudo-Aristotelian tradition of the Secretum Secretorum, the Fürstenspiegel provided princes with an education in moral virtue by presenting the audience with classical and Biblical exempla that must be interpreted to uncover the meaning concealed by the text’s fictive and poetic elements.\(^97\) Despite frequently containing explicit discussions of rhetorical practice, the genre of the Fürstenspiegel has been analyzed primarily as disciplining sovereigns within moral or legal frameworks.\(^98\) In line with a classical tradition stretching back to Cicero and Quintilian,\(^99\) the Fürstenspiegel closely associated proper rhetorical practice with ethical instruction, particularly the development of prudence. By teaching its audience strategies of interpretation and deliberation through fictive exempla, the genre of the mirror for princes posited a truly Aristotelian conception of deliberative rhetoric in which rhetoric is a trained capacity developed through habituation and deliberation to always determine the proper course of political action.

In this genre of texts, rhetorical practice often assumed many of the ethical aspects of the virtue of prudence—the virtue most commonly associated with the capacity for discerning the proper end of deliberation—though rhetorical practice involves the


oratorical expression arrived at through deliberation rather than merely the act of deliberation itself. Within Giles of Rome’s *De regimine principum*, the most widely circulating *Fürstenspiegel* of the late medieval period, this concept is represented by an analogy between an archer and his arrow and the sovereign and his state. Just as the archer “ruleth þe schot and the arwe to þe mark,” it is “more spidefol þat a kyng knowe þe end and felicite þan it is þat þe people knowe it, for þe kyng ruleth þe people” (*Gov.* 1.1.5). As a sovereign, the king is tasked with deliberating and determining the end of “felicite,” so that the people of the realm, who may lack the sovereign’s habituation toward virtue, can prosper through peace and common profit. To determine these virtuous ends requires a sovereign who is both habituated toward virtue and skilled in the rhetorical arts of interpretation and deliberation, the very capacities trained by the *Fürstenspiegel*.

Within Book 7 of the *Confessio Amantis*, Gower explores the tension that emerges when proper rhetorical practice is dependent upon a sovereign’s habituation to virtue. Despite being both the “first known discussion of rhetoric in the English language” and the first vernacular English *Fürstenspiegel*, Gower’s actual discussion of rhetoric and his depictions of rhetorical practice found in Book 7 are relatively understudied. While modern scholarship has persuasively traced how Gower’s designation of rhetorical practice as revealing “pleine trouthe” is complicated by the slipperiness of language, I argue that Gower provides a theory of deliberative rhetoric.

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that centers the role of the virtuous sovereign who leverages the very hermeneutic gap inherent in language to achieve political praxis that aims to preserves peace and common profit in the kingdom. By defining rhetorical practice in this way, Gower draws a close connection between the sovereign’s role as the moral guarantor of “trouthe” within the kingdom and the rhetorical practices of deliberation that guide the sovereign and, by necessity, the kingdom, toward the aim of felicity. In Gower’s scheme, rhetoric functions as the second part of philosophy and as a reasoned capacity that allows individuals to connect knowledge of particular, contingent circumstances with knowledge of natural universal truths so that they may determine the proper course of moral action. This act of deliberation naturally requires the individual to be properly habituated toward virtue, a quality most commonly held in Gower’s view by the upper classes. Through the exempla in Book 7, Gower explores the following question: If the commons of the kingdom are incapable of engaging with reasonable speech, what consequences emerge when authoritative figures leverage the ambiguity of linguistic and non-linguistic signs to serve their own individual profit rather than the common profit of the kingdom?

In this chapter, I answer this question by exploring the shift toward defining rhetoric as a hermeneutic and interpretive art as represented in two distinct but related moments in late fourteenth century England: Gower’s depiction of rhetorical practice in Book 7 of the Confessio Amantis and Richard II’s attempted canonization of his great-grandfather Edward II during the earliest years of his majority. I argue that, in both this literary and political case, rhetorical practice functions as an individual’s capacity to interpret ambiguous signals, in both cases by interpreting the meaning concealed behind violated bodies. The characters in Gower’s exempla and Richard himself both leverage
the ambiguity surrounding violated bodies to open a space for political intervention through the act of interpretation that serves either the common good, in Gower’s exempla, or singular profit, in Richard’s political program. To fully develop this argument, I establish a theoretical framework that demonstrates Gower’s indebtedness to the inherited tradition of Aristotelian virtue ethics. With this tradition as a framework, I proceed to examine Gower’s philosophy of language and the political estates as found across the whole of his trilingual corpus. These theories ultimately inform the theory of deliberative rhetoric that Gower espouses in Book 7 of the Confessio. Next, I analyze this theory of rhetoric and trace its connection to the moral virtue of chastity through a close reading of Gower’s depiction of rhetorical practice as found in his versions of the Lucrece and Virginia myths. Finally, after fully defining Gower’s theory of deliberative rhetoric, I conclude the chapter by reading Gower’s theory of deliberative rhetoric into a contemporary political situation, Richard’s attempted canonization of Edward. Through these combined analyses, I aim to show the wide extent to which deliberative rhetoric circulated in late medieval England and how the theories of rhetoric found in Fürstenspiegel could be inflected within contemporary political action.

**Gower’s Rhetorical Tradition**

Gower’s elevation of rhetoric to an epistemological category in the *Confessio* reflected the medieval occupation with hermeneutics, specifically the interpretation of symbolism. Following Augustine, the object of medieval hermeneutics was to interpret the hidden meaning concealed by the ambiguity inherent in conventional signs. In *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine distinguished between natural signs, which signify “without desire or intention of signifying (*sine voluntate atque ullo appetitu*...
significandi),” and conventional signs, which are used by rational creatures to convey “the motion of their souls, or that which they have sensed and understood (motus animi sui, vel sensa aut intellecta quaelibet)” (Doc. 2.1.2; 2.2.3).102 Drawing upon distinctions common to classical rhetorical theory, Augustine extended his semiotic theory to encompass both linguistic (verba) and non-linguistic (res) signs and clarified that linguistic signs should be interpreted in line with the intention or will of the sign-maker. As Augustine explains, the problem of interpretation lies in the conventional signs of language and the things which they signify being designated as either literal signs, which signify that which they are held to represent by convention, or as figurative signs, which signify something beyond that which they are held to represent by convention (Doc. 2.10.15). This theory manifests in four traditional levels of hermeneutics: the literal, the tropological, the allegorical, and the anagogical. In the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas expounded upon these traditional divisions and clarified that these four modes of interpretation are more perfectly divided into the literal, “whereby words signify things (qua voces significant res),” and the spiritual, “whereby things signified by words have themselves also a signification (qua res significatae per voces, iterum res alias significant)” (ST I, q. 1, art 10).103 Under the Aquinan model, words themselves are always to be interpreted in the literal sense in that they conventionally signify things, which themselves also carry signification. By interpreting things as signs, the spiritual sense of a sign can be uncovered either as tropology, when the interpretation teaches one how to act, as allegory, when the interpretation reveals hidden truth, or as anagogy, when

the interpretation details perfected action. Put simply, words, for Augustine, and things, for Aquinas, often carry two significations: one that represents the conventional understanding of the signified and one that signifies a higher meaning concealed by the form of the signifier. As this hermeneutical model suggests, discovering the literal meaning communicated by language was relatively simple, but the discovery of true meaning relied upon an individual’s capacity for determining to what extent the things signified by words functioned as ambiguous signs (*signa ambigua*), which were divided into particular signs (*signa prœpria*) and figurative signs (*signa translata*).

Thus, for both Augustine and later Aquinas, interpretation is understood as a fundamentally embodied act that depended upon the individual’s capacity to decode sensory information and connect this information to concepts held within the memory. As R. A. Markus explains, Augustine's semiotic theory centers the individual at the moment of both the sign’s production and interpretation. For Augustine, figurative signs, both words and things, are imbued with their “determinate meaning or range of meaning” by the “sign-maker’s activity.” However, the figurative sign can only be understood by “the subject to whom the sign stands for the object signified” when the interpreter is able to connect the sign, understood by convention, to an already existing concept within the subject’s memory. As a doubly embodied act carried about between sign-maker and sign-interpreter, Augustine's hermeneutics recreated the classical controversy between *scriptum*, the literal meaning of the word, and *voluntas*, the intended signification communicated by the sign-maker. To interpret truly, the sign-interpreter must determine

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105 Ibid., 73.
106 Ibid., 72.
meaning through the lens of the sign-maker’s *voluntas*. According to Kathy Eden, the *scriptum* vs. *voluntas* controversy became inflected within Augustine’s hermeneutics as a distinction between the literal interpretation of ambiguous signs (*signa propria*), which understands a sign only as its literal signification, and the figurative interpretation (*signa figurata*), which seeks the truth symbolized by the thing itself.  

Augustine clarifies that some ambiguous signs must be interpreted literally while others must be interpreted figuratively, depending upon sign-maker’s *voluntas* (*Doc.* 3.5.9; 3.10.14). Since humans lack direct intellection, their interpretation of ambiguity is informed primarily by their sensory perceptions and their capacity to connect these sensations to mental concepts already existing within the memory, which expose the individual to fallibility and confusion. In short, the hermeneutic problem, as understood by Augustine and Aquinas, concerned the embodied nature of interpretation, which pitted the sign-interpreter’s potentially fallible sensory perceptions against the sign-maker’s *voluntas*, or intention.

The embodied nature of interpretation creates an interesting cultural and political problem. If correct interpretation is always dependent upon potentially fallible sensory perceptions and the capacity to connect these sensory perceptions to mental concepts in the memory, then a disposition inclined toward moral virtue and a wide range of particular experiences is necessary for any individual who aims at symbolic interpretation, especially within a political space. As the *Fürstenspiegel* genre adapted the

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108 For Augustine, in Biblical hermeneutics, proper interpretation depended upon the sign-interpreter’s moral character and his capacity for reading with a sense of charity. In line with classical theory on the development of the ideal orator, Augustine argued that proper interpretation could only be achieved by one who embodied virtue.
education of the prince within a Christian framework, authors drew upon Aristotelian virtue ethics, which denoted a close relationship between the virtue of prudence and the individual’s habituation toward virtue and capacity for deliberation. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle explains that, while intellectual virtues are developed through explicit instruction, moral virtues emerge as “a result of habituation” (*NE* 1103a-15).\(^{109}\) For Aristotle, the process of habituation is realized as individuals develop moral virtues “by first exercising them” (*NE* 1103a-31). An individual is only able to embody a virtue through the enactment of virtuous actions, which ultimately produces a disposition or habituation toward virtue. As medieval authors drew upon Cicero’s discussion of Aristotelian virtue ethics and applied this framework toward the ends of preparing a sovereign for the act of governance within the *Fürstenspiegel* genre, they emphasized the importance of a sovereign who exhibited the cardinal virtues of prudence, temperance, courage, and justice (Latini 1993, 2.56).\(^{110}\) As textual representations of emergent political theory, the *Fürstenspiegel* genre focused most closely upon those virtues that center a sovereign’s *actio*, or the practical elements of rulership.

These dual emphases resulted in *Fürstenspiegel* authors following Aristotle in articulating prudence as the most important virtue for the development of the sovereign. For Aristotle, prudence is the intellectual virtue most closely associated with habituation because it is the knowledge produced by prudence that is concerned with “particular facts” that “come to be known from experience” (*NE* 1141b-15). As a type of knowledge, prudence contains both knowledge of universals, what the individual should aim at, and


particulars, which necessitates that a “decree is to be acted on, as the last thing reached in deliberation” (NE 1141b-27). For Aristotle, deliberation involves determining “what is useful toward the end” that has been set by prudence, and good deliberation involves melding reason with experience and habituation to arrive at “correctness in thought,” which requires both the aim of something good and correct inference (NE 1142b-15-35). As Aquinas clarifies, prudence operates within the reason “to regulate the means (disponere de his quae sunt ad finem)” of moral virtues “by applying universal principles to the particular conclusions of practical matters (applicans universalia principalia ad particulares conclusiones operabilium)” (ST II-II, q. 47, a. 6). Unlike other intellectual virtues, prudence, as a form of knowledge, is not developed solely through explicit instruction but rather through experience in the act of deliberation, which requires one drawing upon his habituation to virtue. For this reason, Aristotle emphasizes that prudence is not a knowledge that can be possessed by the young because they are “not experienced, since experience takes a long time to produce” (NE 1142a-15). Young, inexperienced rulers lack the knowledge of particulars and experience necessary to become prudent, so Fürstenspiegel aimed to provide sovereigns with exempla that simulate the experience necessary for proper governance.

Much like Aristotle’s theory of habituation, the exempla that comprised Fürstenspiegel aimed to cultivate moral virtue by providing individuals with experience deliberating on particular and contingent matters as they interpreted the tropological or allegorical meanings concealed through the exempla’s poetic and fictive elements. As J. Allan Mitchell has shown, exempla should not be understood as static objects of interpretation that teach a single normative moral but instead as functioning to become
literally embodied within the future lives and actions of the sovereign as the sovereign applies the teachings of the exempla to discover “how to live a moral life.” When confronted by an exemplum, the sovereign is prompted to interpret a particular situation, most often the narrative action and puzzle of the text, and to connect this to a larger universal principle, the didactic moral of the tale, through his habituation toward virtue. Within the Fürstenspiegel genre, the sovereign’s interpretation of exempla participates in the co-construction of “ethical systems that guide the individual choices rulers must make.” Consistent with medieval political theory, this act of co-construction between text and sovereign posits a corporate fiction in which the Christian sovereign is depicted as an always-in-construction “exemplary figure, concretizing in a single subject-position the moral values that the audience shares.” As Giancarlo has argued, the Fürstenspiegel serves as a textual, didactic regimen through which the sovereign constructs and limits his own sovereignty through the “embodied praxis” of interpretation aimed at moral virtue. Through this “licit performance of power and regiminal self-governance,” the sovereign disciplines himself under a pre-existing moral framework so that his political authority “can be exercised for the good of the community through the establishment of peace.” For exempla to be effectively interpreted, a sovereign must draw upon his existent habituation toward virtue as he utilizes prudential knowledge to determine the correct end of his own deliberation. While not a perfect replacement for the experience of age that informs prudence, this interpretive process constructs a virtuous

112 Misty Schieberle, Feminized Counsel, 9.
113 Larry Scanlon, Narrative, 82.
disposition that provides the sovereign with one of the most important practices of ruling: deliberating on uncertain matters to arrive at a conclusion informed by prudence that guides the realm toward the end of felicity.

Within this tradition, while the end of deliberation—correct moral action that produces common profit—is relatively straightforward, the process of deliberation is complicated by the realities of sensory perception, which can mislead the intellect toward bad judgment. Aristotle and later Aquinas identified pleasure as a passion of the bodily senses belonging to the sensitive part of the soul. This sensitive part of the soul itself is “governed by reason (regulatur ratione)” and therefore must “be tempered and checked through reason (temperari et refrænari per ratione)” (ST I-II. Q. 31 a. 5 ad. 3). Indeed, as Jordan Loveridge has shown, for Aquinas, the very act of deliberation depended upon the “sensory experience ordered within the memory.”

Under the Aquinan model, sensory perception and memory produced phantasia within the mind that aided the process of rhetorical deliberation by helping to “bridge the gap between singular and universal reasoning” through the storage and recollection of “specific representations of events and phenomena” that can be connected to universal generalizations, as informed by prudence. However, while sensory perception and its concomitant pleasure can aid in deliberation, it can also hinder the use of reason by distracting the reason, by being contrary to reason, or by fettering the reason (ST I-II. Q. 33 a. 3).

Therefore, a sovereign with a virtuous disposition must supplement prudential knowledge with its associated virtues, particularly the virtue of temperance. Aquinas

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117 Ibid., 182-3; 189.
identifies temperance as “that which inclines man to something in accordance with reason
(quae inclinat ad id quod est secundum rationem)” and as functioning to ensure the
sensitive part of the soul is governed by reason rather than sensual pleasure or pain (ST
II-II. Q. 141 a. 1). Later writers such as Latini thus cited temperance as the virtue that
aligned moral habituation with prudential knowledge aimed at common profit. Latini
defines temperance as the virtue that ensures the soul privileges reason in the act of
deliberation by “oppos[ing] the desire for delight, for if a person allows himself to be
overcome, reason remains subject to desire, and desire has its own end.”118 While the
operation of temperance is not always a conscious act, in the sense of deliberation, the
possession of a temperate disposition helps the individual to determine the ends that aim
at common profit rather than individual profit, and, thus, a sovereign’s temperate
disposition inclines him to lead the realm toward felicity.

Exempla, as fiction and therefore a productive type of knowledge according to
Aristotle, can stimulate both aspects of sensory apprehension, that which produces the
pleasure of truth and inclines the individual toward proper interpretation and that which
overstimulates the senses and prompts the individual to forego reason in favor of bodily
pleasure. Fürstenspiegel, with their emphasis upon inculcating moral virtue in the
sovereign, employ fictive exempla to simulate the process of deliberation and provide the
sovereign with a wider range of mental concepts and experience in tempering the sensory
pleasure that can complicate deliberation. In the Aristotelian classification, rhetoric, as an
art, is concerned with production while prudence is concerned with action (NE 1140a-
18). As Matthew Irvin has demonstrated, for Gower, like other Fürstenspiegel authors,

118 Brunetto Latini, Treasure, at 2.20.
the exempla shared throughout the *Confessio* call attention to the role of fiction, *fictio*, in the development of moral virtue in the sovereign, *actio*. The use of fictive exempla to teach ethical virtue can be traced back to 12th century medieval commentaries in which poetry and fiction was depicted as “probable and believable so that its utility could be clearly communicated to an audience of young readers,” who would draw upon these examples to guide moral behavior. Exempla function to provide the sovereign with an education in prudence, the ultimate end of virtue, through the interpretation of fictive particular, contingent circumstances that themselves work to construct an ethical and moral framework that habituates the sovereign toward virtue. As Latini explains, prudential knowledge, here the ethical and moral framework constructed through the interpretation of exempla, is necessary to confirm the individual’s habituated impulse toward virtue: “Works of the soul exist according to the measure of moral virtue and according to the measure of prudence and quickness of wit and astuteness; therefore, virtue directs the thoughts of man to what is just, and prudence, that is to say, sense confirms these things.” For exempla to fulfil their pedagogical function within *Fürstenspiegel* of providing an education in prudence, they required a sovereign who

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120 Jordan Loveridge, “Poetics, Probability, and the *Progymnasmata* in Matthew of Vendôme’s *Ars versificatoria,*” *Rhetorica* 37, no. 3 (2019): 242-64, at 249.
121 As Richard Firth Green has shown, the young nobility’s primary education included both practical skills or “noriture,” such as hunting and music making, and intellectual skills or “lettrure,” such as Latin translation and composition. This early education was focused upon providing nobility with the basic functional literacy skills that they would need to conduct their business interests or, in this case, the basic grammatical knowledge necessary for literary interpretation. Consequently, relatively elementary texts, such as Donatus *Ars Grammatica* were most widely used. Richard Firth Green, *Poets and Prince-pleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 73
possessed a temperate disposition and the grammatical and rhetorical training necessary
to interpret the fictive elements of the text.

**Rhetorique and Chasteté**

Gower’s elevation of rhetoric to the epistemological category governing both ethics and politics reflected his understanding of language use as foundational to both of these realms of knowledge as well as his overarching moral philosophy. Modern scholarship on Gower has found within his corpus, primarily in his three major works, the French *Mirour de l’Oemme*,\(^{123}\) the Latin *Vox Calamantis*, and the English *Confessio Amantis*, an overarching moral philosophy that, over time and in response to the political crises of Richard’s reign, evolved into a political philosophy that emphasized the reasonable government of the individual as a model for the effective government of the political state. As John H. Fisher, Gower’s first modern biographer and major critic, has laid out, Gower’s political and moral writings are grounded by the foundational belief that “when [social] order is not maintained, chaos ensues.”\(^{124}\) Since, for Gower, the natural state of society is represented by accord between the estates whose members aim at achieving “comun profit” within the political state, he views the conduct of the individual as the means by which the political state constitutes and maintains itself (CA prol.377). Naturally, in this society, the conduct of the king and his corresponding “propria persona” reflect the moral health of the entire kingdom, and this persona is the primary determinant for the maintenance of social order between the estates that

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\(^{123}\) The *Mirour de l’Oemme* is a modern title. On Gower’s tomb, his reclined head rests on a pile of his three major works. On the tomb, the *Mirour* is given the title *Speculum Meditantis*, presumably to match the grammatical construction of the other two texts.

constitute the kingdom.\textsuperscript{125} Such a construction leads Russell A. Peck to conclude that
sovereignty and common profit function as “psychological as well as political concepts”
for Gower and that Gower’s works as a whole position the problem of right rule as a
negotiation between following true counsel—generative love that privileges natural
truth—and self-flattery—destructive desire that satisfies appetite.\textsuperscript{126} Put in its simplest
terms, Gower’s moral philosophy is that juvenile self-love should mature, through the
intervention of reason, into love of common profit as the individual ages.

According to Gower, common profit can only be achieved when the individual
and political state are both governed by reason rather than desire or appetite—a process
that ensures that love is put toward productive rather than destructive ends.\textsuperscript{127} For
individuals, government by reason involves living a life devoted toward truth and
avoiding sin, especially those sins that transgress the oaths of one’s station, such as
priests violating orders of chastity or peasants mimicking the behavior of higher estates
by, for example, making binding formal agreements with one another (VC 1.2, 1.7, 1.9,
1.12, 3.23). As these individuals, who serve as microcosms of the political state, come
together, their individual proper moral conduct ensures social order rather than social
chaos within the kingdom as each estate acts in accordance with the natural state allotted
to them. While modern scholarship has defined Gower’s moral philosophy and
illuminated the connection Gower draws between individual moral conduct and the
health of the kingdom, it has relatively elided the extent to which proper language use,

\textsuperscript{125} Matthew Irvin, \textit{Poetic Voices}, p. 241.
\textsuperscript{126} Russell A. Peck, \textit{Kingship and Common Profit in Gower’s Confessio Amantis} (Carbondale: Southern
\textsuperscript{127} John Gower, \textit{The Major Latin Works of John Gower}, trans. E. Stockton (Seattle: University of
Washington Press, 1962). All citations from the \textit{Vox Clamantis} will be indicated by book, chapter, and line
number, where applicable.
both on the individual and societal levels, is figured as a component of government by reason aimed at achieving common profit.

As revealed across the arc of Gower’s corpus, the foundations of Gower’s moral philosophy, with its emphasis on the role of truth to preserve social order, are based upon a linguistic conservativism in which each estate’s correct behavior relies upon individuals within each estate properly using and leveraging language to achieve accord and peace within and across the three estates. Indeed, such a linguistic conservativism is even how Gower constitutes his own narrative authority in the *Vox*. While Gower criticizes disorder in the realm, he repeatedly cites the proverbial claim that “The voice of the people agrees with the voice of God” and that he himself is articulating the “common voice” of the people in his text (*VC* 3.15.1260-70; 5.1.10-20). Here, even as Gower describes the revolt of the commons against the realm in the *Vox*, he cites the common voice as incapable of communicating falsehood and insulates himself from criticism through the invocation of proverbial truth. As Gower imagines it, individual language use should follow the example of prayer where a man:

Must pray with absolute plainness,
He says, when a man prays to God,
Without speaking elaborately
And without double meaning,
He will speak a plain word,
From a plain thought, for God,
Will not hear a double tongue. (*ML* 10226-31)\(^{128}\)

When elaboration and double meaning enter into one’s moral conduct, the potential arises for discord to enter into the political state as well-ordered estates transform into unruly mobs through the intervention of unreasonable and false language. In Gower’s ideal

society, as depicted in both his descriptions of the estates in the *Vox Clamantis* and the Prologue to the *Confessio Amantis*, social order is guaranteed and maintained by a linguistic conservatism in which the ambiguity inherent in language use does not produce interpretations of speech that depart from the intention of the speaker. In the Prologue to the *Confessio*, Gower makes an explicit connection between semiotic ambiguity, sin, and political discord as God punishes Nembrot for building the Tower of Babel:

Wherof divided anon ryht  
Was the langage in such entente,  
Ther wiste non what other mente,  
So that thei myhten night procede.  
And thus it stant of every dede  
Where Senne takth the cause on honde  
It may upriht night longe stonde;  
For Senne of his condicioun  
Is moder of division  
And tokne whan the world schal faile. (CA prol.1022-31)

In line with medieval commentary on the Babel story, Gower views the division of languages at Babel as a further consequence of sin separating humanity from direct intellection in the Garden of Eden. Once ambiguity enters into language—once signs no longer perfectly signify—political enterprise, in this case, the construction of the Tower of Babel comes to an end and is replaced by division and discord. Gower expands upon this theme in Book 5 of the *Vox* in which he graphically narrates how improper language dismantles the political state:

A tongue sets quarrels in motion, a quarrel sets battles in motion, battles set people in motion, people set swords in motion, swords set schisms in motion, and schism brings ruin. A tongue uproots rulers from their kingdoms, sends estates up in flames, and pillages homes. A tongue loosens marriage bonds, and makes into two what God has declared to be one. (*VC* 5.880-90)
As Gower makes explicit here and throughout his corpus, proper language use is foundational to and precedes political action. Harmony between the estates and peace within the kingdom can only occur when ambiguity has been removed from language.

When we consider the close relationship between habituation, deliberation, prudence, and temperance, Gower’s elevation of rhetoric to an epistemological category seems designed to produce a theory of rhetoric that addresses the traditional tension between sensory desire and truth by limiting rhetorical practice to only those who possess a reasonable, temperate disposition. While Gower’s reputation as a rhetorician has improved from the earliest scholarship, modern conversations tend to emphasize Gower’s theory of speech and plain truth, in which the rhetor is charged with using language to perfectly represent “the hertes thoght which is withinne” (CA 7.1512). These interpretations often center Gower’s adaptation of the Ciceronian myth of rhetorical origins found in Latini. Rather than following Latini in associating the development of rhetoric with “a primal social compact which generates verbal signs as part of the forging of society,” Gower instead identifies rhetoric as a freely-given gift of God that serves as the “ethical foundation” that morally obligates humanity to “ne

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129 For example, in Murphy’s foundational article, he concludes that England had no vernacular rhetorical tradition equivalent to the continent and that Gower’s references to Cicero and Aristotle were simply names drawn from Latini. James Jerome Murphy, “John Gower’s,” 409. For an alternative view, see Martin Camargo, who argues that England experienced a renaissance of Anglo-Latin rhetorical theory in the late fourteenth century, centered primarily around Oxford. Martin Camargo, “Chaucer and the Renaissance of Anglo-Latin Rhetoric,” Studies in the Age of Chaucer 24 (2012): 173-207.

130 See Patrick Gallacher’s argument that, throughout the Confessio, the misinterpretation of ambiguous language that does not correspond to the speaker’s intentions often produces unproductive sexual unions, as in the “Tale of Nectanabus” that closes Book 6. In contrast, the productive love aimed at by Genius is communicated through plain language that lacks ambiguity. Patrick Gallacher, Love, the Word, and Mercury: A Reading of John Gower’s Confessio Amantis (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1975).

131 Edwin Craun, Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 120.
For Gower, language is merely borrowed from a higher power, and it is incumbent upon humanity to put it to proper—that is, ethical and virtuous—use, especially considering that rhetoric forms the epistemological category governing ethics and politics. Consequently, rhetoric must ascend to the top of the traditional trivium with “Gramaire” and “Logique” functioning respectively to “speke upon congruité” and distinguish “Between the trouthe and the falshode” (CA 7.1529-33).

In the same manner that prudence determines the end of action, Gower represents rhetorical speech as determining the end of the intention of the soul, which he views as a moral imperative to represent correctly. Since language is our only means for revealing these intentions, Gower declares that the “word above alle erthli things / Is vertuous in his doinges” (CA 7.1547-8) in its capacity to do both good and evil. As Gower explains, the fundamental problem of rhetoric is the hermeneutic gap that exists between the conventional signs of language and the intentions of the speaker, which he describes as when the “word to the conceipte / Descordeth in so double a wise” (CA 7.1554-5). As Gower explains through his exemplum on the Catiline Conspiracy, eloquence can “excite” sensory pleasure within the audience, which can result in the audience being moved toward individual desire rather than common profit and virtue (CA 7.1618).

Gower’s theory of rhetoric is thus dependent upon a rhetorician whose reasonable and temperate disposition habituates him toward engaging in rhetorical interpretation and practice that aim at truth and common profit.

For Gower, proper language use closely resembles Aristotle’s theory of habituation insofar as language and deliberation direct an individual toward morally correct conclusions that inform virtuous actions. For this reason, Gower declares that language is the “techer of vertus,” precisely because it is through language that individuals deliberate and bridge the gap between universal moral principles and the particulars of contingent situations (CA 7.1520). As a science, rhetoric is concerned with the justification and selection of words that correspond with the aim determined by prudence so that the rhetor may “knette upon conclusion / His argument in such a forme / Which mai the pleine trouthe enforme” (CA 7.1636-8). In the same manner that virtue of character is “concerned with pleasures or pains” and an individual’s lack of virtue stems from “pursuing or avoiding the wrong [pleasures and pains]” (NE 1004b-10-25), proper language use is complicated by its accompanying sensory perceptions. While love of truth should make plain speech pleasing as “Whan wordes medlen with the song,” words that have been “Coloureth in another weie” can lead an audience away from truth through sensory excitement (CA 7.1586, 7.1625).

As modern scholars have shown, Gower’s adaptations to the Aristotelian rhetorical tradition are preoccupied by the rhetorical possibilities that accompany sensory desire. Citing the influence of Giles of Rome, Georgiana Donavin argues that Gower’s definition of rhetoric is an “Aristotelian psychomachia of inventio…in which Reason and Will conjoin to produce morally compelling speech,” with rhetoric exciting the passions
of the soul and in the process “moving the Will toward intellectual contemplation of the Good” and prompting the Intellect toward probable reasoning.\textsuperscript{133} When the whole project of the \textit{Confessio} is interpreted through the lens of Aristotelian psychological allegory, the character of Genius functions as the Imagination that attempts to mediate the desire of Amans, representing the Will, through the intervention of Reason, to arrive “at a compromise between sensual desire and reason.”\textsuperscript{134} While ethical speech can guide the soul toward virtuous action through the pleasure produced by intellectual truth, improper speech can excite the senses through ornamentation that seems pleasing but leads the audience away from virtuous action. Within the context of the \textit{Fürstenspiegel}, it is through the very interpretation, internalization, and embodiment of the moral lessons taught through fictive exempla that the reader develops prudential knowledge to ward against the emotional excesses that rhetoric often excites and, in turn, comes to possess the virtuous disposition necessary for effective and ethical rhetorical practice.

Gower’s solution to the classical problem posed by sensory desire is to restrict the type of speech that is classified as rhetorical to encompass only “the reverence/ Of wordes that ben resonable” (\textit{CA} 7.1524-5). As the freely-given gift of God, proper language use takes on a religious significance for Gower, especially considering that proper language use ensures that “pes [is] sustiend” within the realm (\textit{CA} 7.1576). Due to language’s inherent ambiguity and potential for arousing unproductive sensual desire, Gower ascribes language with the power to sow harmony and discord within the

kingdom. In both of his exempla on improper rhetoric, Gower emphasizes that rhetorical speech can either serve the common profit, as in the case of Silanus’ speech against Catiline, or subvert the common profit, as when Ulysses persuaded Antenor to betray Troy or when Caesar’s eloquence set the judges’ “hertes to pité” as he pled for Catiline’s life (CA 7.1621). By equating rhetorical speech with reasonable speech, Gower functionally limits rhetorical practice to only those individuals who are capable of moderating their desire and putting language to its appropriate use.

While individuals on their own possess the capacity for self-government by reason—that is, after all, the underlying foundation of the Fürstenspiegel as a genre—collections of individuals are vulnerable to the influence of desire excited through eloquent language. As Gower articulates in the first book of the Vox Clamantis, the peasantry, in particular, are prone toward unreasonable behavior, which Gower depicts through their transformation from men into “irrational brutes (brutorum…irracionis)” who “had no power of reason (nil racionis erat)” (VC 1.3.178, 1.3.238). When the realm is faced with contingent, uncertain matters, the peasantry’s general lack of reason necessitates the elevation of a sovereign authority capable of tempering the passions of the crowd, interpreting the hidden truth concealed by ambiguity, and guaranteeing government by reason throughout the realm. As Gower demonstrates within the Vox, when the commons are subjected toward pleasing language, they lack the deliberative capacity to moderate their desires to productively engage with deliberative rhetoric. Gower depicts the speech of Wat Tyler, represented as a jay skilled in the “art of speaking (arte loquendi),” but not necessarily the science of rhetoric (VC 1.9.681). As a jay, Tyler recreates the sounds of pleasing language and leads the crowd to be deceived
by his “ambiguous words (Vocibus ambiguis)” that are not aligned with virtue, which he declares shall no longer remain in the world (VC 1.9.703). The crowd becomes aroused by Tyler’s persuasive shouting to follow his unreasonable course of action, ultimately resulting in the discord of the Peasants’ Revolt (VC 1.9.718).

As Gower later adapted this theory of deliberative rhetoric into the context of his Fürstenspiegel, he selected exempla that demonstrate how the stability of the realm depends upon a figure of authority who can ethically interpret uncertain and contingent matters for an audience who lacks deliberative and hermeneutic capacities. For Gower, a sovereign’s rhetorical efficacy is intimately tied to his propria persona, “the truthful, decorous ways in which he relates his persona to his political context,” which involves closely matching one’s words to his actions.\(^{135}\) Given the contingent situations that characterized the medieval English court, a sovereign’s effectiveness in matching his persona to the political context relied upon his capacity to correctly interpret ambiguous situations and express his interpretation and intentions regarding these matters in a manner that could not be misunderstood. To properly use language necessitates that the rhetor be habituated toward virtue so that the end of his deliberation points toward what prudence has identified as the end of happiness, which, as Aristotle explains, requires a particular type of education in one’s early life—the very education provided by the Fürstenspiegel. Gower thus enacts a truly Aristotelian conception of deliberative rhetoric in which effective rhetorical practice consists of the reasoned capacity to leverage the hermeneutic gap of language to achieve political action that is aligned to the rhetorician’s virtuous disposition and the common profit of the realm.

\(^{135}\) Matthew Irvin, Poetic Voices, p. 264.
Since sensory desire can affect the sovereign’s intellect during the moment of deliberation and interpretation, Gower cites the need for a sovereign who has a chaste disposition. Of the five areas that he defines as constituting practical rulership, “Trouthe,” “Largesse,” “Justice,” “Pité,” and “Chasteté,” Gower most openly explores how sovereigns leverage rhetorical practice toward political ends in his discussion of chastity. While Gower never explicitly refers back to his definition of rhetoric in the chastity exempla, it is highly suggestive that Gower’s most robust depictions of the practice of rhetorical interpretation and its political consequences are found in the exempla that model chastity, specifically the tales of Lucrece and Virginia. As Scanlon has argued, for Gower, chastity functions as a natural law that applies external Christianized morals to curb the appetite of the sovereign. However, when considered within a rhetorical paradigm, a habituation toward chastity prompts the sovereign to deliberate on contingent matters in line with common profit rather than his own bodily desire.

Gower’s preoccupation with the role of deliberation in rhetorical practice compels him to warn against those moments in which ethical deliberation becomes governed by individual desire rather than reasonable judgment. As Gower explains, being habituated toward chastity ensures that a sovereign “schal mesure / His bodi, so that no mesure / Of fleissly lust he scholde excede” (CA 7.2435-7). Gower acknowledges that lust can create sensory phantasia within the individual that produce a “fool impression / Of his yimaginacioun” that allows for self-deception and the centering of one’s own desires rather than the common profit (CA 7.4271-2). Much like the sense phantasia identified by Aquinas as central to the process of connecting “singular and universal reasoning,”

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136 Larry Scanlon, Narrative, p. 296.
the “fool impressions” that Gower describes function rhetorically within the mind to connect particular contingent circumstances to larger categories of moral action. However, rather than aiding the judgment, these fantastic impressions produce self-deception that causes the individual to follow his own desires and be thrown “fro his astat,” losing control of his reasonable judgment (CA 7.4303). By centering his own chaste interpretation, the sovereign leverages proper language use to ensure that peace is maintained between the estates. In short, Gower establishes a dichotomy between pleasurable and reasonable rhetorical interpretation wherein chastity operates as a habituated virtue that ensures that sovereigns promote the common profit rather than their individual desires during the process of deliberation.

Through his narration of the Lucrece myth, Gower demonstrates how a sovereign may leverage the ambiguity inherent in contingent matters to create a discursive space through which deliberative action and political intervention can take place. In the myth of Lucrece, Gower adapts the traditional tale where Lucrece’s suicide following her rape by a member of the Tarquin family inspires the people of Rome to overthrow the monarchy and establish a republic. During the medieval period, the Lucrece myth circulated within an extensive commentary tradition in which narratives depicting women’s violated bodies to represent “allegories or moral traits or cognitive processes” elided the actual violation in favor of exegesis. As Andrew Galloway has shown, in Gower’s time, the Lucrece myth was especially popular as an object of hermeneutical glossing through which medieval commentators distinguished their own Christian values from the “institutional

and social values of ancient Rome” that Lucrece embodied in the classical versions of the myth.  

As the Lucrece myth was adapted within a Christian moral framework, the hermeneutical focus of the myth centered on an extended discussion of the sinfulness of Lucrece’s suicide, with Augustine famously commenting that Lucrece’s suicide is sinful because it was committed “not for love of purity, but for the burden of her shame (non est pudicitiae caritas, sed pudoris infirmitas).” However, as Gower adapted this myth to the Confessio, he drew upon this hermeneutical tradition while also distancing himself from the moral question of Lucrece’s culpability.

Within the aims of the Fürstenspiegel genre to develop prudential knowledge, Gower’s particular adaptations to the exemplum reveal a concern with depicting rhetorical practices that are inclined toward chastity. Gower transposes the tale as a political and rhetorical exemplum by following Ovid and Livy in focusing upon the characters of the Tarquins and Brutus so as to reposition the narrative as a commentary on “the importance of social responsibility for the private as well as the public face of the ruler,” a particular concern for young monarchs such as Richard II. As an exercise in connecting universal principles to the virtuous action necessitated by contingent situations—the very role of rhetoric in Gower’s classification of the sciences—Gower’s version of the Lucrece myth provides the audience with five depictions in which authoritative figures are compelled to leverage their interpretation of ambiguity surrounding contingent matters to achieve either common or individual profit. Through

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these moments, Gower models his ideal view of a rhetorical sovereign, one who bridges
the hermeneutic gap created by ambiguity, disseminates his interpretation as “pleine
trouthe,” and leverages this interpretation to preserve peace and common profit within the
realm. The characters of Aruns and Brutus thus come to serve as rhetorical foils through
which Gower demonstrates the need for rhetorical skill to be accompanied by a
habituation to virtue, especially the virtue of chastity. When rhetorical practice is not
married to a virtuous disposition, as is the case with Aruns, there can be extensive
political consequences that descend from individual desire displacing common profit as
the end of rhetorical deliberation.

The action of Gower’s tale closely follows his primary source, Ovid, though he
also draws a few scenes from Livy and includes a few novel adaptations. The tale
presents two distinct narrative episodes. In the first, Aruns, a member of the ruling
Tarquin family of Rome, deceives the Gabines and conquers the city through the betrayal
and slaughter of Gabii’s prominent citizens after correctly interpreting his father’s
ambiguous symbolic action. In the second, Aruns rapes Lucrece, who, following Roman
customs, commits suicide to preserve her reputation for chastity. Lucrece’s cousin,
Brutus, then inspires the Roman people to overthrow the monarchy and establish the
Roman Republic by invoking the example of Lucrece. In Gower’s version, the “Lucrece”
myth functions as an exemplum that trains young sovereigns to interpret ambiguity in
line with their habituation toward virtue by depicting the very action that it models in its
primary characters, Brutus and Aruns.

**From Rhetorical Deliberation to Individual or Common Profit**

Through the character of Aruns, Gower demonstrates the consequences that arise
when authoritative figures leverage ambiguity for individual profit rather than the good of the realm. While Aruns obviously functions as the negative moral example of the myth, Gower does portray him as a keen interpreter of ambiguity and, at times, a savvy political actor, but his production and interpretation of ambiguity always aim at his own individual profit rather than the common profit of the kingdom. In the beginning of the tale, Gower includes two scenes that emphasize both the need for authoritative figures to gloss ambiguity and the importance of rhetorical deliberation that is aligned with virtue. The tale begins with Aruns making twelve wounds upon his back to simulate abuse by his father, the king of Rome, so that he may infiltrate and overthrow the city of Gabii (CA 7.4615). When Aruns enters the city, he is arrested as an enemy combatant, but he displays his wounded back and provides a rhetorical performance that hermeneutically glosses this ambiguous non-linguistic sign: “‘I am hier at your wille, / Als lief it is that ye may spille, / As if myn oghne fader dede” (CA 7.4627-9). The Gabines are affectively moved, “token pité on his grief,” and do not interrogate the “trouthe” of the wounds but instead draw pleasure from this change in their own political fortunes as they find it “wonder lief / That Rome him hadde exiled so” (CA 7.4643-5). The Gabines accept Aruns’ hermeneutical gloss at face value and allow their interpretation of the ambiguity produced by Aruns to be determined by their reaction to the pathos of the situation, much like the judges that Gower depicts in the case of the Catiline conspiracy.

The Gabines’ error in judgment reveals their lack of the virtue that Giles identifies as “caucio,” the capacity to know that “speculatif falsnesse is som tyme imelded with sothnesse” and that there is a difference between that which is “good but in semynge” and that which is “good in dede” (Gov. 1.2.8). In this opening to the tale, Gower
establishes two themes that are relevant to his larger discussion of the role of rhetoric within the royal court. First, he demonstrates the problematic that arises when sovereigns produce, interpret, and leverage ambiguity to serve their own individual profit. Second, for the larger audience of his Fürstenspiegel, which includes the advisors of the king, the negative exemplum of the Gabines provides a model for the potential consequences that emerge when deliberation arrives at ends that benefit the common profit accidentally rather than essentially. As Gower understands it, successful political communities are ultimately constituted around figures who can properly interpret ambiguity in line with their habituation to virtue, specifically their possession of the faculty of prudence which guides the realm to felicity.

As the scene in Gabii continues, Gower demonstrates the importance of rhetorical practice precipitating political action that is informed by a virtuous disposition rather than an individual desire. Once again, Gower emphasizes Aruns’ interpretive skill. After Aruns pledges his “trouthe” to the Gabines and gains control of the city’s defenses, he sends a messenger to his father Tarquin for instruction on how to conquer the city. Tarquin gives no direct verbal counsel; instead, he strikes the heads off the lilies in his garden and tells the messenger that this action “Schal ben in stede of thin ansuere” (CA 7.4683). Aruns understands “what it mente” and “sette al his entente” upon achieving the desire of his father (CA 7.4691-2). Aruns reads beyond the surface level of the symbolic action and understands the intention of his father, namely, to gather and kill the prominent Gabine citizens to force the city to surrender. In one of his few novel adaptations to his source text, Gower emphasizes the slaughter of the entire city that comes about due to the improper use of rhetoric, which is absent in Ovid and Livy:
“...the Romeins, / ...tok and slowh the citezins / Without reson or pité, / That he ne spareth no degré” (CA 7.4697-700). Across these two interpretive moments, Gower emphasizes the close relationship between embodied rhetorical interpretation and political action. The presence of ambiguous and contingent visual signs—the wounds on Aruns’ back and Tarquin’s striking of the lilies—necessitates that authoritative figures possess a strong interpretive capacity so that they may leverage these contingent situations to achieve political action, but, in this case, political action ultimately undermines the common profit because Aruns lacks a virtuous disposition.

Rhetorical practice, here, functions less as a heuristic for persuasive speech and more as a reasoned capacity for interpreting truth and leveraging that interpretation to achieve political action. Aruns, as a rhetorician, fills the liminal space of the hermeneutic gap created by the ambiguity of a figurative sign to achieve his own political ends. Gower’s stress upon Aruns breaking his pledge of “trouthe” shows the danger inherent in this embodied theory of deliberative rhetoric. As Gower claimed in the Vox, since the commons of the kingdom are morally impoverished and lack a virtuous disposition that moderates their desires, they are reliant upon the “trouthe” of the sovereign to accurately gloss ambiguous contingent situations that they lack the hermeneutic capacity to interpret. When the sovereign is not habituated toward virtue, he may guide the realm toward what is pleasing to his own ends, here the brutal conquering of the Gabines. Since the ethical implementation of deliberative rhetoric depends entirely upon the “trouthe” of the sovereign, a sovereign must be fully habituated toward virtue, which, according to Aristotle, is impossible for those whose youth precludes experience.
If Aruns models improper rhetorical interpretation, his political, moral, and rhetorical foil within the exemplum, Brutus, functions as a distillation of ethical rhetorical action. Brutus is introduced to the narrative when the Roman contingent visits the temple of Phebus, where a snake devours the Romans’ sacrifice as punishment for the sacrilegious treatment of the Gabines. When the Romans inquire as to “what mai this signefie,” Phebus answers that “which of hem ferst kisseth / His moder, he schal take wrieche / Upon the wrong” (CA 7.4717, 7.4730-2). As in the interpretive scene that opens the exemplum, the collective populace is faced with an ambiguous and contingent visual sign—the snake devouring the sacrifice—and lacks the interpretive capacity to uncover the meaning concealed by the ambiguity. Like Aruns, Phebus himself provides a verbal hermeneutic gloss, but this verbal gloss is itself merely magnifies the ambiguity of the situation.

In contrast to the earlier scene with the Gabines, in this situation, the interpretation of the ambiguity magnified by Phebus’ verbal hermeneutics is carried out by Brutus, a character identified as having a virtuous disposition aligned with the common profit of the kingdom. Brutus reveals his rhetorical skill by exploiting the ambiguity present in Phebus’ statement, dropping to his knees, and kissing the ground since “th’erthe of every mannes kinde / Is moder” (CA 7.4743-4). By recognizing the figurative meaning behind Phebus’ statement, Brutus first fulfils the prophecy before the literal-minded Romans who wait until returning home to kiss their mothers. Gower emphasizes this moment of rhetorical skill by comparing Brutus to the other Romans present in the temple who “were blinde / And sihen noght so fer as he” (CA 7.4738-9; 7.4744-5). In this contingent moment, Brutus’ interpretation of the prophecy does not
rely solely on the intention of Phebus; instead, he recognizes that the ambiguity of the prophecy allows for the leveraging of interpretation in line with the common profit of the kingdom, in this case, the eventual expulsion of the Tarquins. While, in certain situations, the leveraging of ambiguity can undermine the common profit of the kingdom, Brutus’ habituation toward virtue ensures that his interpretations of ambiguity ultimately serve the good of the kingdom.

Since, for Gower, embodied rhetorical deliberation and interpretation function as the first steps in political action, he is particularly concerned with the internal deliberation that connects contingent sensory experiences to the larger moral categories of virtue that govern deliberation and moral action. As the exemplum progresses, Aruns’ contingent returns to Rome to settle a bet on who has the most loyal wife, and Aruns encounters Lucrece, the wife of his cousin Collatin. While spying, Aruns and Collatin witness an unknowing Lucrece pledge her desire to see Collatin return home in a long speech that culminates in the outpouring of Lucrece’s tears, a motif that is repeated later in the exemplum (CA 7.4812-35). Upon seeing this image of Lucrece, Aruns is struck by love’s “fyri dart” and “The resoun of hise wittes alle / Hath lost,” which results in a non-literal reading of Lucrece that elides the intention behind her unselfconscious actions and instead substitutes an interpretation that centers Aruns’ individual desire (CA 7.4852, 4850-1). When Aruns departs from Collatin’s home, he is plagued by the sensory image of Lucrece. For Aruns, prudence’s regulation of internal deliberation is disrupted by the self-deception of desire, which ultimately results in the subversion of common profit in the kingdom.
Across 30 lines of texts, Gower describes how the internal process of deliberation functions, a movement from initial thought, to the production of sensory *phantasia* that Aquinas cites as central to the deliberative process, to ultimate interpretation. As he goes to bed, Aruns begins to “thenke upon” the image of Lucrece, producing a sensory *phantasia* within his mind as he “pourtreieth hire ymage” in his memory that is represented by Gower as a textual blazon of Lucrece’s features and actions (CA 7.4872, 7.4876). When confronted by the sensory *phantasia* of Lucrece, Aruns is “soupled” to “The lustes of his fleissh fulfille,” and his rhetorical deliberation arrives at a non-literal reading of Lucrece as an object of male lust rather than the virtuous and chaste wife that her actions represent (CA 7.4890, 7.4894). As Karla Taylor has demonstrated, Aruns’ attraction to Lucrece stems from her embodiment of femininity, perfectly represented by the natural accord between her inner self, her “entente,” and her chaste body, her “semblant,” which forms a sharp contrast with Aruns’ own ambiguous and unreadable body.\(^\text{142}\) Aruns’ process of deliberation is perverted by his sensory *phantasia* and, as a consequence, he interprets Lucrece’s femininity in line with his own sensual desire and individual profit rather than through a virtuous disposition. Aruns’ fundamental lack of chastity prevents him from moderating his desire, affects his process of rhetorical deliberation and embodied interpretation, and ultimately drives his appetitive actions.

**From Rhetorical Deliberation to Political Action**

As the exemplum concludes, in the characters of Brutus and Lucrece, Gower models his ideal political orator, one who bridges the hermeneutic gap created by

figurative signs and contingent situations, communicates his interpretation to the commons in plain speech, and serves the common profit. Following Aruns’ self-deception, Aruns rapes Lucrece, rendering her body in an ambiguous, unreadable state, much like Aruns’ body at the beginning of the tale. As Irvin has argued, in contrast to the hermeneutical tradition of Augustine and Gower’s contemporaries, Gower’s depiction of Lucrece within the exemplum does not read against her behavior in an attempt to chart her actions within a Christian moral framework; instead, Gower elects to strip Lucrece of direct speech and depicts Lucrece’s virtue and communication within a paradigm that relies upon the expression of natural signs that perfectly encapsulate her intention and makes her chastity impossible to misinterpret. Following the rape, Lucrece’s body transitions into a liminal state where her “desguised” clothes and “unkemd” hair belie the earlier natural expression of her “wommanhiede” (CA 7.5201-3), which thereby prompts Collatin to request a hermeneutical gloss of her ambiguous body: “Why sche so sore hireself beweileth, / And what the sothe wolde mene” (CA 7.5038-9). Lucrece’s family can recognize that there is a “sothe” concealed by her violation and understand Lucrece’s intention to express despair, but, like the Gabines and Romans before them, they need a hermeneutical explanation for the ambiguity represented by her violated body.

In contrast to Phebus’ verbal hermeneutic gloss that magnified the ambiguity of the situation, Lucrece’s perfect embodiment of virtue compels her to provide a gloss that avoids the potential for misinterpretation. Though Lucrece resists verbalizing her trauma, she eventually realizes “sche most nede” to explain the tale to her family so that they may correctly understand the cause of her violation (CA 7.5047). Whereas Ovid has Lucrece

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explicitly verbalize her violation—“‘Must I owe this also to Tarquin,’ she said. ‘Must I speak, speak, this unhappy one, my own shame? (‘hoc quoque Tarquinio debebimus? eloquar’ inquit, / ‘eloquar infelix dedecus ipsa meum?’)—Gower glosses over this direct speech (2.825-6). Instead, in direct parallel to Tarquin’s symbolic cropping of the lilies, Gower emphasizes Lucrece’s symbolic action of taking a sword and committing suicide so that “…the world ne schal / Reproven hire” (CA 7.5063-4). Lucrece’s final action, holding the hem of her dress as she falls so “That no man dounward fro the kne / Scholde eny thing of hire se,” works rhetorically to prompt deliberation that moves beyond the literal and into the symbolic through its representation of her interior “wommanhiede,” in stark contrast to the violated state of her body revealed by a surface-level sensory interpretation (CA 7.5073-4). In this instance, Lucrece’s ability to cut through the ambiguity wrought on her violated body descends from her perfect representation of chastity and habituation to virtue, much in the same manner that the effective sovereign’s interpretation and leveraging of ambiguity aims to advance the common profit of the kingdom. As becomes evident as the exemplum continues, Lucrece’s somatic expression of symbolic actions aims at reconciling the conflicts that are operant within her political and domestic spheres.

While Lucrece’s natural somatic expression extends beyond the domestic sphere into the body politic of the state, her status as a woman ultimately prevents her from engaging in public rhetorical deliberative practice. Gower’s silencing of Lucrece represents his most substantial revisions from Ovid, and these revisions serve the purpose of excluding women from the political sphere in favor of representing the domestic

sphere as the body politic. Extending Diane Watt’s argument, Gower’s revisions also serve the purpose of demonstrating how authoritative figures can leverage ambiguous contingent situations to serve the common profit, as long as the interpretation of that ambiguity is aligned to a virtuous disposition. Through her act of suicide, Lucrece collapses the domestic and political into a single sphere and reconciles the tension inherent within both through her natural expression of her virtue. While Lucrece’s suicide is restricted to the domestic audience, her cousin Brutus, who has already demonstrated his rhetorical skill, translates this act from its immediate domestic aftermath into its larger political contexts.

Through the character of Brutus, Gower again depicts rhetorical practice as an extension of prudence, a reasoned and trained capacity to uncover the truth of contingent circumstances and connect this interpretation to larger categories of virtue and thereby bring about political action. While Gower gives us no description of Brutus’ rhetorical training or previous experiences, his skill as a rhetorician descends from his perfect orientation and habituation toward virtue. In contrast with Aruns and even Lucrece’s own family, Brutus does not base his interpretation of Lucrece upon his visual sense but rather his “herte,” an automatic turn toward his virtuous disposition (CA 7.5083). After Brutus removes the sword from Lucrece’s body, he swears that “he thereof schal do vengance” upon those who have violated Lucrece, thereby fulfilling the prophecy he initially interpreted correctly at the Temple of Phebus (CA 7.5087). Gower, following Ovid, confirms that Brutus has correctly interpreted Lucrece’s actions by having Lucrece’s body posthumously support Brutus’ case for revenge when she displays a “contienance,”

moving her eye “at laste” to behold Brutus (CA 7.5088-9). Isabelle Mast notes that, in this moment, Lucrece’s body seems to acknowledge the role that it will be playing in the subsequent overthrow of the Tarquins through Brutus’ translation of her symbolic action from the domestic to the political sphere.\footnote{146} By interpreting contingent matters through his capacity for judgment and reason, Brutus is later able to leverage his interpretation to serve common profit through the eventual overthrow of the Tarquins.

In the final scene of the exemplum, Gower depicts how authoritative figures can gloss ambiguity through the use of plain speech to bring about political change. While Brutus honorably places Lucrece’s body upon a “beere,” his actual rhetorical argument depends not upon the display of Lucrece’s violated body but rather upon his plain telling of the case and the potential of this telling to translate a domestic occurrence into a political context (CA 7.5098). The precise source for the end of Gower’s tale is subject to some debate. Though Gower seems to follow Livy by describing the Tarquins as deposed by the people of Rome rather than escaping the city, details not found in Ovid, he does not include Brutus’ long speech describing the Tarquins’ iniquity that was “not of a character and temper of his heart that he had feigned up to that day (habita nequaquam eius pectoris ingeniiique quod simulatum ad eam diem)” (1.59),\footnote{147} opting instead to report that “Brutus tolde hem al the tale” (CA 7.5108) in a manner very similar to Ovid: “With a shout, Brutus gathers the Quirites and reports the impious acts of the king (Brutus clamore Quirites / concitat et regis facta nefanda referit)” (CA 2.849-50). For an exemplum that consistently explores the tension between hermeneutical interpretation

and rhetorical practice, it seems curious that Gower would elide direct reported speech from one of his source texts. Gower instead emphasizes that it is through “the sothe herde of the cas” that the people of Rome are capable of arriving at a moral and political reading of the occurrence within Collatin’s household (CA 7.5105).

While it may seem counterproductive to exclude an example of ethical deliberative speech, in a sense, the indirect report perfectly encapsulates Gower’s desire for plain speech. Since the truth of the case is all that is reported, there is no possibility for misinterpretation, as happened in each of the previous verbal hermeneutical glosses. As Latini details, when an orator speaks on “an honest thing, there is no need of any concealment” or rhetorical ornamentation.148 In this final scene, Gower takes this general rule to its logical extreme. Through Brutus’ speech, the people of Rome move beyond the immediacy of Lucrece’s violation and connect this singular violation to a larger moral sickness within the body politic, with the actions of Tarquin family coming

…into remembrance
Of senne the continuance
Which Arrons hadde do tofore
And ek, long time er he was bore
Of that his fadre hadde do (CA 7.5109-13).

In a final literal embodiment of deliberative rhetoric, Brutus speaks with what Giancarlo has identified as the “vox communis,” the totalized and universal perspective that unites the divided commons so as to restore peace within the kingdom by drawing upon penitential language.149 This voice, however, is only effective and possible because it descends from Brutus’ embodied deliberation governed by reason. The commons’ political action is dependent upon Brutus’ interpretation, with his speech translating the

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149 Matthew Giancarlo, Parliament and Literature, p. 115.
singular act of domestic violence in the household into the continued violation of the political state and leading to communal deposition: “Awey, awey, the tirannie / Of lecherie and covoitise” (CA 7.5109, 7.5118-9).

Gower’s Virginia

Though the tales of Lucrece and Virginia are separated in Gower’s source Livy, Gower recognized that each historical exemplum explores the same issues of rhetorical practice and sensory desire and thus situates them next to each other in Book 7 of the Confessio. In his version of the Virginia myth, Gower provides a second example of the consequences that emerge when the desire of the male gaze breaks down the rhetorical contract that exists between sovereign and community. Like Livy, Gower draws an explicit connection between the two tales by positioning Genius’s vernacular moral that concludes “Lucrece” as the guiding hermeneutic for the upcoming “Virginia” that “rihtwisnesse and lecherie / Acorden noght in compaignie / With him that hath the lawe on honde” (CA 7.5125-7). The “Tale of Virginia” follows the basic structure of Livy’s narrative, though it does make a few adaptations, the elevation of Appius from decemvir to king, and omissions, the elimination of Icilius’ position as tribune of the commons, that remove the republican leanings of the tale’s moral and situate it more naturally within the political contexts of late medieval England.150 In Gower’s “Virginia,” the king of Rome, Appius, is struck by the beauty and virginity of Virginia after she walks through the public spaces of Rome while her father, the knight Virginius, is leading the armies of Rome against its enemies. Struck by desire, Appius intends to take possession of Virginia while her father is away, but this is complicated by her betrothal to Ilicius.

150 Judith Ferster, Fictions of Advice, p. 121.
Eventually, Appius schemes with his brother Marcus to submit false testimony that Virginia was Marcus’ slave. Alarmed by this sovereign overreach, the people of Rome oppose Appius’ decision to remove Virginia from her father’s household and win a stay in the legal decision for two days so that Virginius can return from the front to answer the charges. When Virginius arrives, Appius again rules in favor of his own brother, despite the dictates of the law. To preserve the virginity of his daughter, Virginius stabs and kills Virginia and rides through the public spaces of Rome while displaying the still bloody sword. In response to the debasement of Roman law, the common people rise up and depose Appius. A. C. Spearing has argued that, in late medieval theories of authorship, stories drawn from historical sources, such as Livy, were understood as factual, meaning that the essential arcs of narratives could not be changed, while certain elements could be downplayed or emphasized, corresponding to generic distinctions between *historia* and *fabula*.151 As I will argue through this section, the changes that Gower makes and the narrative elements he retains, once again position his version of the tale, nominally about chastity, as an exemplum on proper rhetorical practice and the incommensurability that arises when a sovereign, the guarantor of truth within the kingdom, allows for desire rather than chastity to influence his interpretation of ambiguous signs.

When modern scholarship has tackled “Virginia,” it has primarily identified the tale as an exemplum that seeks to define the limits of authority, whether that be legal sovereign authority152 or its microcosmic reflection in the paternal authority of the

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family.\textsuperscript{153} Indeed, such readings of the tale, ones that privilege the political moral of the exemplum rather than the narrative and characters of the tale, nicely complement Gower’s own hermeneutical project within the whole of Book 7, in which he consistently silences the voices of women characters, such as Lucrece and Virginia, to emphasize the development of male characters and their embodiment of ideal sovereignty.\textsuperscript{154} For Eliot Kendall, the exemplum essentially demarcates the limits of a sovereign’s authority within the patriarchal marketplace of exchange, a marketplace that “reduces dependent women to the function of sign,” in which the bodies of women were exchanged by men to develop and secure inter- and intra-personal alliances.\textsuperscript{155} By falsely invoking the law to disrupt the marriage of Virginia and Ilicius, Appius extends the bounds of civil law into the “larger group of extensive interpersonal bonds” that characterize Roman patriarchal familial society.\textsuperscript{156} In so doing, Appius exerts the supremacy of civil law over the familial structure, resulting, ultimately, in these same interpersonal alliances uniting and organizing to depose Appius and thus preserve their own legitimacy. Similarly, Maria Bullón-Fernandez argues that, in addition to criticizing sovereign overstep, Gower’s version of “Virginia” questions the role of the father within the patriarchal marketplaces of exchange that occur when the nominally private space of the domicile become the site of public interest. As Bullón-Fernandez notes, Virginius’ speech following the killing of Virginia only acknowledges his “daughter’s shame” and “the effect that her shame” would have upon Virginius.\textsuperscript{157} The death of Virginia serves not only to delineate the

\textsuperscript{155} Eliot Kendall, \textit{Lordship and Literature}, 139.
\textsuperscript{156} Eliot Kendall, \textit{Lordship and Literature}, 230.
\textsuperscript{157} Maria Bullón-Fernandez, \textit{Fathers and Daughters}, 152.
extent to which the sovereign’s reach extends into private space but also preserves the supremacy of the father over the daughter’s body in public space, a stance Gower implicitly criticizes.

However, in addition to defining the limits of sovereign authority, Gower’s “Virginia” also explores the consequences that emerge when the rhetorical compact between sovereign and state is thrown into discord through the influence of desire rather than reason. J. Allan Mitchell has argued that Gower’s adaptation of Livy positions his own “imaginative uses of example” against “Livy’s historical facticity” that imagines Roman public virtue, embodied within Virginia, as a “politically ideal and authentic” representation of the moral good that accompanies republican government.\(^{158}\) Rather than portraying the staid speeches of male characters as the rhetorical force that brings about a return to republican rule, it is the “marvel,” a fundamentally visual symbol, produced through the metaphor represented by Virginia’s death that brings the commons to depose Appius.\(^ {159}\) Consequently, for Mitchell, Gower’s “Virginia” exposes the tension inherent in Gower’s theory of polity that privileges rhetorical and legal plainness while, at the same time, relying upon exempla to accretively, reiteratively, and discursively construct the very concept of kingship itself. While Mitchell concludes that, concerning the problem of sovereignty, “the gap between individual desire and public policy must be mediated by the tools of fiction,”\(^ {160}\) I will argue that the fictional rhetorical exempla employed by Gower in this section on chastity serve to demonstrate the necessity of a sovereign does not transgress the relationship between an ambiguous sign and its

\(^{159}\) Ibid., 78.
\(^{160}\) Ibid., 80.
intended referent when he is thrown into “riote” by desire. This interpretation is one that is implicitly endorsed by Gower’s own Latin hermeneutic that accompanies the tale in which he explains that Appius’ “fulfillment of his desire (propositum sui desideria)” produces “false witnesses in judgment (falsis testibus in iudicio)” who declare Virginia to signify as other than what the people of Rome know to be true (CA 7.5137 ff). This transgression of signs brought about by false interpretation engendered through desire leads Virginius to kill his own daughter to preserve her as “a dead virgin (virginem mortuam)” rather than “a live whore (meretricem viunetem)” (CA 7.5137 ff). As Gower makes clear through his guiding hermeneutic, the Virginia exemplum is fundamentally a story about the rhetorical intervention that must take place when a sovereign leverages his interpretation of signs to achieve his own individual desire rather than the common profit of the realm.

“A man of such riote”

As in “Lucrece,” the political tension of “Virginia” arises when the sight of the semiotically stable body of a woman, a sight normally reserved for the private space of the domicile, engenders desire in the body of a sovereign, throwing the sovereign’s body and the kingdom for which it is emblematic into disorder. Like Lucrece, Virginia is described as a “gentil maide” whose body naturally and perfectly signifies her chastity (CA 7.5135). Virginia’s semiotic stability is understood throughout Rome where it is reported “that so fair a lif / As sche was nought in al the toun” (CA 7.5138-9). When this report reaches the “ere” of Appius, “al his herte hath set afire,” and he is compelled by the “flour desire” to “longeth unto maydenhede” and satisfy the “blinde lustes of his will” (CA 7.5141-7). Gower’s depiction of Appius’ blossoming desire is one of his notable
expansions from his source text in Livy. Whereas Livy begins his narration with Appius already “inflamed with a criminal passion,” Gower expands the scene to show a perverse application of the Aquinian epistemology that characterizes his theory of deliberation and his larger philosophical critique of desire and its role in the rhetorical hermeneutics that characterize kingship.¹⁶¹ Much like the case of Aruns and Lucrece, it is not merely the sight of the woman which initially produces desire in Appius but rather the report of Virginia’s chastity. Gower captures the embodied nature of this desire as he emphasizes that desire is produced as sensory information enters the body, in this case, through the “ere” of Appius (CA 7.5141). As in Aquinian epistemology, once the sensory information becomes embodied, it produces perception within the mind, rendered by Gower as “thoght” (CA 7.5142). However, within Appius’ mind, the next stage of the epistemological process, conception, is perverted as “the blind lustes of his will” intervene with Appius’ memory not to correctly match the signifier of “maydenhede” with its signification but instead to misread the sign and, consequently, Virginia’s body, as inducing sexual desire (CA 7.5147; 7.5145). Once Appius allows his body to be governed by desire, he becomes “a man of such riote,” a sovereign whose body and intentions are incapable of both being reconciled to the civil law of the land and being interpreted by his subjects. In short, the sensory phantasia produced within Appius’ mind cloud his deliberative capacity and ensure that his interpretation of Virginia as a sign descends from his own bodily desires rather than from a moral disposition.

As the narrative continues to depict Virginia’s trial, Gower emphasizes the impossibility of proper governance when the sovereign himself becomes governed by

¹⁶¹ Livy, History, at 3.44
desire. However, it is important to note that, for Gower, proper governance is intimately tied to the practice of rhetorical hermeneutics. As desire rules Appius, he fails in his capacity as sovereign to both interpret the law correctly and to disseminate this true interpretation to his subjects. Even as Appius tramples upon the rights of Virginius and Virginia, Gower is careful to consistently reinforce that Appius does so while operating within the legal and political system that comprises the kingdom. It is not the legal and political institutions themselves that produce inequity but instead Appius’ perverse interpretations of these systems that are nominally designed to aid the king in the practice of rhetorical hermeneutics. As a king should, Appius looks to counsel on this issue, but the counsel he follows is that of his brother, Marcus, another man of riot, who conspires with him to produce false “witnesse” to claim that Virginia belongs to the household of Marcus (CA 7.5177). Unlike in “Lucrece,” where the commons needed the guiding hand of Brutus to interpret the sign of a woman’s body, the people of Rome, who know Virginia’s virtue and parentage firsthand, recognize these claims a “falshed everydel” and plead to Appius upon the “comun lawe” to allow Virginius to address these false claims (CA 7.5186-8). Since Virginia’s body has not yet been violated, for the people of Rome, it still functions as a signa ambigua propria that requires nothing more than a surface level reading. However, in the person of Appius, much like Aruns, desire has produced an inversion of Gower’s ideal of kingship, in which the sovereign serves as the guarantor of truth by interpreting ambiguity within the law truly and communicating this truth to his subjects; instead, the people of Rome are compelled to appeal to the law itself, rather than the sovereign whose interpretation has become perverted, to achieve justice. Once again, however, Appius responds to popular appeal through the methods of proper kingship, but
the end result remains unsatisfactory because his will is governed by desire rather than reason: “For al the clamour that he herde, /The king upon his lust ansuerde, / And gaf hem only daies tuo / Of respit” (CA 7.5197-200). While Appius’ actions mirror the rhetorical hermeneutics of kingship advocated by Gower—sensory perception, followed by interpretation, followed by the dissemination of royal decree—the effect of desire and the pleasure produced through desire separate the civil application of the law from its signification, much like the peasants reacting to Wat Tyler’s speech in Book 1 of the Vox Clamantis.

The infection of desire within the body of the sovereign produces a political situation in which the validity of political and legal structures breaks down because the sovereign can no longer guarantee fidelity between the true signification of these structures and his own guiding interpretation of the signs that comprise civil law. When Virginius arrives to dispute the false witnesses, Appius realizes that “no sleihte mihte availe” in his attempt to circumvent the law, and he ceases the pretense of proper sovereignty and instead follows “his lustes blinde” while “half in wraththe” and “Deceived of concupiscence” to rule in favor of his brother, despite the true evidence produced by Virginius (CA 7.5218-23). In doing so, the civil law of Rome becomes “torneth out of kinde” as the intent of the sovereign becomes completely divorced from the signification of the law (CA 7.5220). By basing his legal justification on self-pleasure rather than common profit, Appius “fails to take control of the exemplary authority only a king can produce and misses the opportunity to produce it not only in his realm, but in the very regulation of his body.”162 As Gower emphasizes, desire not only inflames the

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162 Larry Scanlon, Narrative, p. 296.
passions of the sovereign’s soul but also makes his body unreadable to his public. Just like Aruns, Gower describes Appius’ desire for lechery as held “al withinne his oghne entente” (CA 7.5227); however, unlike Aruns, whose intent could not be understood by his counsellors, Appius’ very public position as judge precludes his intent to violate Virginia from being entirely unknown. Instead, while the people of Rome fundamentally understand the lecherous intentions of Appius, they are powerless to challenge his ruling within the legal apparatus because Appius’ interpretation of the law has so greatly transgressed its true signification: “Bot agein him was non appel, / And that the fader wiste wel” (CA 7.5233-4). The problem raised by Appius’ legal ruling extends beyond the violation of Virginia’s individual rights and Virginius’ patriarchal rights. Appius’ ruling challenges the semiotic foundation of the civil law. Despite widespread recognition that the witnesses produced by Marcus are false and that Virginius’ testimony is true, these words carry no truth value because the ultimate guarantor of truth, Appius, has become blinded by desire. At the same time, Appius’ ruling also transgresses the semiotic stability of Virginia herself. In contrast to Virginia’s earlier depiction in the exemplum, Appius’ ruling has placed a signifier, slave, that does not correctly signify Virginia in any way. While Livy has Appius verbally declare her a slave—“Go, lictor, remove the crowd, and make way for the owner to seize his slave”—Gower is careful to refer to her, both in his own narration and the reported speech of Virginius, “maide” or “maiden,” preserving both her chastity and semiotic stability. As we will see, the transgression of semiotic stability within the kingdom necessitates intervention that restores the fidelity between sign and signified.

163 Livy, History, at 3.48.
Virginius as rhetorician

As in “Lucrece,” a male relative of the violated woman leverages the ambiguity of the visual image of the violated woman’s body to create a space for rhetorical and political intervention that rejuvenates the political realm. After hearing Appius’ ruling, Virginius moves to comfort Virginia, pulls out a sword, and kills Virginia. Traditionally, modern scholarship has imputed two justifications for Virginius’ actions. First, Genius explains that Appius’ ruling has “Untrewly” obstructed Ilicus’ right to marriage, an obvious sovereign overreach into the domestic sphere (CA 7.5241). Second, Virginius himself claims that Appius’ ruling brings shame and “evele named” down upon his own person as the father of Virginia. As Bullón-Fernandez notes, in Gower’s version of the tale, Virginius’ justification for the killing of Virginia is reported across two sources, the voice of the narrator and the direct speech of Virginius, which serves to question the motivation attributed to Virginius in Livy’s text, in which the justification is reported entirely through direct speech.\(^{164}\) However, when read alongside “Lucrece,” it is clear that Virginius’ actions mirror the hermeneutical structure Gower employs throughout the earlier exempla. At the moment when Appius’ desire brings about false interpretation, Virginius engages in a symbolic action, the killing of Virginia, designed to compel the correct interpretation of his daughter’s body. This action, though, calls out for verbal hermeneutical glossing because of both the ambiguity of Virginius’ motivations and the brutality of the act itself. While Virginius’ direct speech is obviously self-serving and motivated by his own patriarchal pride, his hermeneutical explanation for his action also

\(^{164}\) Maria Bullón-Fernandez, *Fathers and Daughters*, 152.
points to the necessity for the restoration and preservation of signifiers that properly and naturally signify:

For me is levere upon this thing
To be the fader of a maide,
Thogh sche be ded, than if men saide
That in hir lif sche were schamed. (CA 7.5248-51)

Virginius’ concern here is not only with the public nature of shame and reputation but also with ensuring that the ambiguity of his daughter’s body is properly interpreted, in this case as a *signa ambigua propria* rather than as a *signa ambigua translata*. For Virginius, it is preferable to kill his own daughter, and thereby preserve her as “maide,” than to allow her to live and become signified by the verbal language of men that does not accurately represent her. As the exemplum shows, the core problematic of Gower’s theory of deliberative rhetoric emerges when a sovereign rejects his role as the guarantor of truth within the kingdom and instead leverages the centrality of his interpretation to achieve his own desires rather than the common profit.

As Virginius’ actions become overtly political, Gower emphasizes that Virginius does not succeed as an orator because his oratorical strategies produce belief but rather because he is able to accurately gloss the ambiguity that is concealed by a visual sign, in this case, the bloody sword that he used to kill his own daughter. As with Brutus in “Lucrece,” when Virginius addresses the “pouer” of Rome, a lengthy direct speech in Livy is condensed to a single line—“and tolde hem al the cas”—followed by a long narrative explication of the matter with a specific focus on addressing “the grete unrihtwisnesse” at home (CA 7.5265-6; 7.5270). Again, though Virginius seeks to persuade through speech, it is not his speech that carries the rhetorical force of the argument but rather a symbol of the sovereign’s iniquity, “his swerd droppende of blod /
The which withinne his douhter stod” (CA 7.5263-4). Much like the body of Lucrece, the bloody sword functions to open a space for rhetorical and political intervention through the centering of an interpretation that reveals the truth of the matter. Upon seeing the sword and hearing the case, it is functionally impossible for the crowd to contest the charges of iniquity that Virginius lays upon Appius. Gower describes the sword as “this merveile which thei sihe,” and emphasizes that the collective decision to undertake political action occurs not because of speech understood through the ear but rather through the marvel “So apparant tofore here yhe” (CA 7.5277-8). The crowd’s sensory apprehension of the sword structures their understanding of Appius’ overreach into the domestic sphere, but the crowd is only capable of connecting this visual image to a universal concept through Virginius’ hermeneutical glossing. If Virginius succeeds as a rhetorician is it not because of his skill as a speaker. Gower does not even deem it necessary to record his direct speech in full. Instead, he succeeds because his actions and interpretations of ambiguous signs counter the semiotic transgression perpetrated by Appius and his desire.

Once the interpretation of ambiguity has returned to government by reason through Virginius’ intervention, the legal and political structures perverted through Appius’ transgression return to their stabilizing roles and allow for the addressing of sovereign iniquity through popular deposition. After seeing the bloody sword, the commons of Rome swear an oath to stop tyranny within the kingdom. In a parallel with Appius’ earlier perversion of Aquinian epistemology, Gower describes their collective decision-making process through the same Aquinian method. As each member of the commons shares their stories of sovereign iniquity, the information “Cam openly to
mannes ere” (CA 7.5289). However, rather than producing desire and, ultimately, the transgression of signs as in Appius, this sensory information instead “broghte in the comun feere” for “him [Appius] that so hem overladd” (CA 7.5290-2). With fear as the motivating factor, the commons come together and depose Appius “Thurgh comun conseil of hem alle” and “receiven the penance / That longeth to such governance” (CA 7.5294; 7.5299-300). In this closing scene, Gower reiterates how rhetorical practice should ideally function within a kingdom. The commons, brought to understanding by Virginius’ hermeneutical glossing, interpret Appius’ actions in line with their own moral disposition so that the proper emotion, here fear, is produced within the crowd. The fear that the commons have concerning Appius’ overreach in turn motivates them to carry out political action, in this case, the deposition of Appius. When true signification regulates the legal and political systems of Rome, the law functions as intended, as a vehicle for communicating, disseminating, and guaranteeing natural and moral truths throughout the kingdom. Gower’s “Virginia” serves as a rhetorical exemplum that teaches not only the consequences of sexual desire and the limits of sovereign authority but also the danger that arises when a sovereign’s interpretation privileges his own desire rather than the common profit.

**Richard II’s Attempted Canonization of Edward II**

The hermeneutic and philosophical traditions discussed above were not constrained to ecclesiastical and political matters but extended quite broadly into most aspects of medieval life. As Marie-Dominique Chenu has described it, by the twelfth century, the medieval mind followed “the conviction that all natural or historical reality possessed a *signification* which transcended its crude reality,” which produced a cultural
affinity to simultaneously engage in the practice of hermeneutics and to construct an “intrinsic set of categories and values” through which to interpret nature and history.\textsuperscript{165} These hermeneutic categories and the broad tradition of \textit{enarratio poetarum}\textemdash commentary on classical authors\textemdash assumed rhetoric’s traditional aim “to grasp discourse as action, as totality, and to reunite the signified with the signified” through hermeneutics’ appropriation of the “prescriptive strategies of rhetoric.”\textsuperscript{166} In other words, by the late medieval period, rhetorical practice and hermeneutical interpretation had become largely conflated with one another. The interpretation of ambiguity, specifically the amplification, abbreviation, and variation of particular hermeneutical categories, functioned similar to the canon of \textit{inventio} in classical rhetoric. The medieval rhetorician could intervene rhetorically through the practice of hermeneutics by centering his own interpretation of hidden truth as the standardized interpretation, which is the exact practice simulated by exempla in \textit{Fürstenspiegel}. In short, a sovereign’s interpretation of exempla closely resembled the vernacular author’s rhetorical translation of source texts. The productive force of rhetoric descended not from the ability to invent something new but rather in the capacity to remake and reimagine what has already been so as to better serve one’s own ends. Ideally, in the case of the sovereign, rhetoric helps to construct ethical frameworks that preserve peace and common profit within the kingdom.

Thus, within the realm of politics, a king’s interpretation of ambiguity became yet another tool for maintaining and realizing his sovereign authority. When monarchs practiced hermeneutics, the visual image emerged as a productive site of interpretation

\textsuperscript{166} Rita Copeland, \textit{Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 83.
through what Hugh of St. Victor defined as *coaptio*, the “transference or elevation from the visible sphere to the invisible through the mediating agency of an image borrowed from sense-perceptible reality.” Like the *phantasia* of Aquinas, the visual image served to mediate between the particular and contingent circumstances of the immediate situation and the universal categories of virtue necessary to uncover the truth concealed by ambiguity. Following Aquinas, medieval hermeneutics privileged sight as the sense most responsible for structuring the perception of reality. Visual images, given their immediacy and lack of mediation through language, became particularly productive sites of hermeneutics, specifically the interpretation of higher symbolic meaning.

In line with the larger aims of this dissertation, I want to suggest that the practice of chaste rhetorical interpretation found in the *Confessio* shared resonances with rhetorical practices operant in the broadly conceived political discourse of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries in England. The rhetorical practices depicted by Gower in the Lucrece and Virginia tales—namely, the centering of an authoritative figure’s interpretation of a violated body to create a space for rhetorical and political intervention—was not confined to literature but closely resembled Richard II’s attempted canonization of Edward II, an attempt to implement his own ideology of majesty as the dominant political theory in late medieval England. In both cases, political leaders leveraged the ambiguity of a violated body to intervene within their political spheres and bring about some sort of political change. Despite the copious production of political propaganda during his reign, his institution of the discursive ideology of majesty, and his role as the benefactor of Chaucer and Gower, two prolific late medieval English poets

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whose works dominate the vernacular English rhetorical tradition, Richard himself is an unexamined figure in contemporary medieval rhetorical historiography. As Richard II declared his majority in 1389, he found his rule in a precarious situation. Like all kings crowned as children, he faced challenges to his sovereignty by the very individuals who were supposed to support his reign. In Richard’s case, his sovereignty was tested by the Lords Appellant, who just a year previously had briefly forced Richard to abdicate his throne and executed his closest allies during the Merciless Parliament.168

The problem Richard faced was not merely a problem of politics but, specifically, a problem of rhetoric. Throughout the late medieval period, the English monarchy was conceived as constructed through a series of discursive texts, such as coronation oaths, civil laws, commentaries, exegesis, and, as we have seen above, even fictional texts like Fürstenspiegel, that provided a juristic framework that simultaneously defined and limited the sovereign’s power. As Gower demonstrated through his exempla, a sovereign’s efficacy as the juristic head of the kingdom lay in his capacity to successfully navigate these discursive constraints and disseminate his interpretation of textual documents throughout the kingdom using literacy skills associated with grammar and rhetoric. In response to what he perceived as unjust constraints upon his authority during the Merciless Parliament, Richard initiated his rule by implementing a rhetorical program centered around the elevation of his own body and royal persona. By understanding rhetoric not merely as a textual practice but rather as a constellation of practices defined through action, this section seeks to answer the following question: How did Richard II employ a similar version of the rhetorical practices depicted by Gower to advance his

political aims, and what does this suggest about the larger intersection between sovereignty, deliberative rhetoric, and the ambiguity inherent in signs? While I do not want to suggest causality between Gower’s exempla and Richard’s rhetorical program in either direction, by placing these literary and political examples side-by-side, we can trace the broadly rhetorical culture of late medieval England.

In the earliest years of his majority, Richard II took a keen interest in guiding the realm’s interpretation of the violated body of his great-grandfather Edward II, within whom he saw many parallels to his contemporary political situation. Specifically, Richard sought to have Edward canonized as a saint. Much like a woman’s violated body in medieval exempla, the medieval interpreter understood the king’s body as something to be read tropologically or allegorically as revealing a higher moral or spiritual meaning. As Ernst H. Kantorowicz has detailed, within medieval political theory, the king himself was understood to have two bodies, a natural and physical body, which was subject to all the ailments of living, including sensory fallibility, and a sovereign body, an eternal incorporation of the entire kingdom, including the rule of law.169 Under this theory, the sovereign power of a kingdom became reified within the natural body of the king, who is vested with power through the force of civil law and represents the inherent power of the sovereign through his capacity to uphold that law.170 Beyond this useful political

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170 There was, of course, great debate on the precise nature from which a sovereign constituted his authority and sovereignty. In the broadest terms, two competing theories co-existed throughout the late medieval period. The hierocratic conception figured lay rulers as receiving their sovereignty through the will and grace of God, represented on earth through the Pope and the authority afforded to St. Peter by Christ, in a top-down arrangement. This view was challenged by Aristotelian-materialist constitutionalism which suggested that sovereign authority was a function of the civil law, represented as the will of the people, to which the sovereign served as an embodiment. See, Michael Wilks, *The Problem of Sovereignty in the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). Also, Walter Ullmann, *Principles of Government and Politics in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 1961). For a contemporary
distinction, the human body also served broadly as a metaphor for the state because of the perceived “stability and normative nature of the human organism” with a single ruler, represented by the governing head.\textsuperscript{171} The political realities of this metaphor had a major implication for the interpretation of bodies and, especially, the king’s body as visual signs. Since the king’s natural body was understood to incorporate the king’s sovereign body and since the efficacy of the body as a political metaphor depended upon its perceived stability, any ailments on the king’s natural body were interpreted symbolically as social ills within the kingdom itself, a concept known as the corporate fiction. When faced with the visual sign of a sovereign’s violated body, the medieval interpreter had to determine whether to understand its violation as an \textit{ambigua signa propria}, as a literal violation, or as an \textit{ambigua signa translata}, as a violation rendered upon the body that represents a further violation of the social order. It is not surprising then that the canonization of royal and baronial saints took on a political dimension in late medieval England as the crown struggled with the barony over the implementation of its sovereign authority.\textsuperscript{172} For each group, the authentication of a saint by the Church was seen as a symbolic legitimation of the rightness of their cause, and, once the deceased sovereign or baron became canonized, they came to function as a political symbol that both represented and authorized the principles of government espoused by the crown—

\textsuperscript{171} Michael Camille, “The Image and the Self: Unwriting Late Medieval Bodies,” in \textit{Framing Medieval Bodies}, eds. S. Kay and M. Rubin, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 62-77, at 72. Contrary to modern perceptions of the body, the medieval body was understood not as a whole, integrated organism but as a union of unlike parts that required governance by the head to function. Within the metaphor of the body politic, the head represented the sovereign while the other organs and limbs represented other classes and estates in the kingdom.

ultimate freedom of the sovereign—and the barony—the maintenance of their privileges, including the right to counsel the king and even depose him when necessary.

In the person of Edward, Richard found a perfect symbolic representation of his political challenges, and, in the image of his violated body, he found a productive ambiguous sign to interpret in line with his political program. While Richard could claim descent from Saint Edward the Confessor,\textsuperscript{173} for his own political aims, achieving the canonization of Edward would be a great symbolic legitimation for his ideology of majesty through the elevation of his own body.\textsuperscript{174} Like Richard, Edward’s reign was characterized by conflict between the crown and barony and the constant threat of deposition. Just as Richard faced deposition in 1387, Edward himself was deposed under pressure from Roger Mortimer and Queen Isabella in January of 1327 when he abdicated his throne in favor of his son Edward III. In September, while imprisoned at Berkeley Castle, Edward died and was possibly murdered for political reasons. Within the chronicle tradition, Geoffrey le Baker describes his death as a mutilation in which a hot poker was inserted into his anus, an obvious piece of propaganda tied to Edward’s alleged homosexuality.\textsuperscript{175} Whether Edward was brutally murdered or not, the three months between his death at Berkeley and his funeral in Gloucester decomposed his body.

\textsuperscript{173} In the \textit{Wilton Diptych}, a young Richard is depicted kneeling before the Christ Child and Virgin Mary and flanked by Edward the Confessor, Edmund the Martyr, and John the Baptist.

\textsuperscript{174} Nigel Saul explains that Richard’s ideology of majesty sought to influence how his subjects interpreted him as a ruler. Throughout the 1390s, Richard worked to cultivate “a lofty, almost God-like image of himself” as a rationally legislating king (876). One of his strategies for fashioning this ideology of majesty was the adoption of a new vocabulary for addressing the king—addressing the highness and majesty of the king—and, consequently, emphasizing the distance between Richard and his subjects (857). Nigel Saul, “Richard II and the Vocabulary of Kingship,” \textit{The English Historical Review} 110 (1995): 854-77.

to the point that a royal effigy was produced of an “image ad similitudinem regis [to the likeness of the king]” to cover the violated body of the king, the first use of such an effigy in English royal funerals.\textsuperscript{176} As a rhetorician, the challenge that Richard faced during the canonization of Edward was the very hermeneutic problem discussed by Augustine and Aquinas: should the violations wrought on Edward’s body be interpreted as an \textit{ambigua signa propria}, as representative of a literal shortcoming in Edward himself that would justify his deposition, or as an \textit{ambigua signa translata}, as symbolic of the transgression of natural law by the overstepping barony?

For both Edward and Richard, the inability to practice the proper rhetorical interpretation at the center of Gower’s theory of deliberative rhetoric served as one of the baronial justifications for the discursive constraint of the sovereign’s authority and, ultimately, the deposition of the monarch. In 1311, Edward was forced to submit to a series of 41 Ordinances by the English peerage.\textsuperscript{177} While most of these ordinances concern limiting the crown’s authority to appoint officers and spend freely without baronial consent, the document repeatedly references Edward’s inability to interpret the truth of his subjects, the same problem that plagued Aruns and Appius. In the preamble, the Ordainers justify their actions because of the presence of “bad and deceitful counsel” that has “debased and ruined” the king’s dignity.\textsuperscript{178} Similarly, in language carefully designed to shift blame away from the king, the Ordainers legitimated their right to appoint members to the king’s household precisely because Edward “has been badly

\textsuperscript{176} Ernst H. Kantorowicz, \textit{The King’s Two Bodies}, p. 420.
\textsuperscript{177} \textit{Ordinances of 1311}, in \textit{English Historical Documents III (1189-1327)}, 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. H. Rothwell (London: Routledge, 1996).
\textsuperscript{178} \textit{Ordinances}, 527, at “Preamble.”
advised and guided by evil councillors” who must be removed and replaced. The Ordainers reserved an article specifically for the banishment of Piers Gaveston whom they argued had exploited the king’s lack of *caucio* as he “has badly advised our lord the king and has incited him to do wrong in diverse and deceptive ways.” The Ordainers also note that Edward’s failure to interpret correctly has had impacts beyond his household as criminals within the kingdom feel emboldened to commit crimes since “the king, through evil counsel, so lightly grants them [criminals] his peace against the provisions of the law.” Much like Appius’ misinterpretation and misapplication of the law threw Rome into discord, Edward’s inability or refusal to enforce the justice of the law as written produced discord within the realm. The rhetoric that the Ordainers use to justify their discursive constraint of sovereign authority consistently emphasizes that Edward’s inability to interpret truth has led to his disenfranchisement by his counselors who co-opt his sovereign authority and govern his body, which has produced widespread social unrest throughout the realm.

The rhetoric that justified these constraints would have been extremely familiar to Richard as the Lords Appellant used the exact same political strategy to justify their actions during the Merciless Parliament. In their appeal to Parliament, the Lords Appellant explain that they were compelled to bring this matter before Parliament’s law because Richard’s counselors perceived “the tender age of our lord the king and the innocence of his royal person…[and] caused him to believe many lies devised and plotted by them,” which led to Richard rejecting the good counsel of “his loyal lords and lieges,”

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179 *Ordinances*, 531, at “Article 13.”
180 *Ordinances*, 533, at “Article 20.”
181 *Ordinances*, 533, at “Article 28.”
which included the Lords Appellant. Further, much more explicitly than the Ordainers, the Lords Appellant noted that Richard’s inability to interpret truth, descending from his young age and lack of experience, threatened the stability of his own body and the body politic. The Lords Appellant claimed that the king’s false counselors compelled Richard to swear “an oath saying that he would be governed, counselled, and led by them…and] manipulated the king to obey their false theories, schemes, and deeds,” which has produced “troubles, inconveniences, misfortunes, and destructions” throughout the kingdom. The preamble to the Merciless Parliament is especially enlightening, since, as the introduction to the charges laid against Richard and his closest allies, the items listed in the preamble structured the justification for baronial intervention as a whole. As it appears in these two documents, the barony developed a theory of political constraint that centered the sovereign’s capacity for distinguishing between what is true and what seems true. When the sovereign fails in this function—when he fails as a rhetorician—the peerage is required to constrain his authority. For Richard’s political goals, this situation was untenable, so he sought to subvert these discursive constraints by changing how the realm interpreted the deposition of Edward.

Although the surviving archival evidence is scarce and one-sided, the textual record suggests that Richard’s interest in canonizing Edward extended beyond a general filial affection and his broader interest in elevating English martyrs through the rhetorical intervention inherent in canonization. As Richard sought to intervene within his contemporary political discourse, he turned toward linguistic and symbolic means. Beginning with a letter written for Pope Urban VI sometime between 1385 and 1389,
Richard embarked upon an ultimately unsuccessful campaign to receive Papal recognition of the miracles associated with Edward’s tomb at Gloucester. In the letter, Richard forgoes rhetorical embellishment and centers his argument for Papal support “for the sake of the repeated and conspicuous miracles (propter crebra miaculorum insignia)” associated with Edward’s tomb in Gloucester.\(^{184}\) Though not described in detail in this correspondence, Jennifer Bray has documented that Richard’s argument for Edward’s canonization continually emphasized the human body, both the potentially exaggerated account of Edward’s rumored torture and the miraculous cures to physical maladies granted to those who prayed at his tomb in Gloucester.\(^{185}\) The evidence for canonization, then, had little to do with the saintly character of Edward’s life but rather with the horrors wrought upon his body during his death, which, if canonization were achieved, would be divinely confirmed as an unnatural transgression of the natural law by an overstepping barony. In October of 1390, the *Westminster Chronicle* reports that Richard made a very public appearance at Edward’s tomb to pray for the soul of his great-grandfather “whose translation he was very anxious to effect” and to debate the validity of the miracles observed around the tomb with his retinue.\(^{186}\) The chronicler’s reference to the translation of Edward obviously refers to the traditional definition of moving the body of a saint or ruler from one location to another,\(^{187}\) but it also suggests Richard’s incipient deliberative rhetorical program which relied upon the translation of Edward’s body from an *ambigua signa propria* to an *ambigua signa translata*.

\(^{184}\) The Diplomatic Correspondence of Richard II, ed. Edouard Perry (London: Offices of the Society, 1933), 75.


\(^{187}\) Translation, n. 9, OED Online, Oxford University Press, December 2020.
In the common understanding, the maladies of Edward’s body were understood as literal signs that represented his failures as a sovereign and the larger civil unrest that accompanied his rule and justified his deposition, which presented Richard with both a rhetorical problem and opportunity. Since the health of sovereign’s natural body and the body politic are semiotically intertwined, perversion of the natural body represents weakness in the realm, which necessitates the cleansing of the natural body through civil deposition. For Richard, Edward’s canonization would achieve not only a spatial translation but a hermeneutic translation. Edward’s body would no longer function as an *ambigua signa propria* but instead as an *ambigua signa translata*. The elevation of Edward’s violated body to sainthood would shift the interpretation of Edward’s deposition and death from a discursively justified act to a divinely recognized transgression of the natural law that governed relations between the king and his subjects.

Following his public visit to Gloucester, Richard made two separate payments related to the canonization of Edward, a payment on 10 July 1392 to William Storteford “for prosecuting the affair in the Roman Court respecting the canonization of Edward” and a payment on 26 June 1397 to Richard, Bishop of Coventry and Litchfield, for the same purpose.\(^{188}\) In addition to paying for the prosecution of the canonization case, Richard also funded the composition of a book, the *Book of Miracles of Edward, late King of England, whose body was buried at the town of Gloucester*, as a present to Urban on 24 April 1395.\(^{189}\) Unfortunately, this text has not been recovered, and Richard’s deposition in 1399 ended any further attempts to achieve canonization.

\(^{188}\) Frederick Devon, *Issues of the Exchequer* (London: Record Commissioners, 1837), 247-8, at 264.

\(^{189}\) Frederick Devon, *Issues*, 259.
While the textual archive on Edward’s canonization ends with Richard’s deposition, across two chronicles, Thomas Walsingham records Richard’s particular interest with the interpretation of violated bodies. In 1397, Richard took his revenge upon the Lords Appellant for the Merciless Parliament of 1388. He rescinded the general pardon that he was forced to grant in 1388 and charged the Earl of Arundel with plotting to imprison the king along with the Duke of Gloucester. The outcome of the trial was predetermined, and Arundel was sentenced to death by beheading. The *Annales Ricardi Secundi et Henrici Quart* describes that, after the execution, Arundel’s body remained upright long enough to recite the Lord’s prayer before falling to the ground. Following Arundel’s execution, Walsingham reports that Richard’s sleep was disturbed by visions of the earl’s ghost. Richard’s anxiety over the execution was further compounded “when he heard that the common people were regarding the earl as a martyr and making pilgrimages to his body” and claiming that Arundel’s head had been reattached to his body in death. Richard ordered the exhumation of Arundel’s body to confirm these stories as untrue and demanded that the abbey conceal the earl’s burial site. Just as in the case of Edward II, Richard’s actions here suggest a desire to ensure that his interpretation of ambiguous signs is the dominant interpretation within the realm, which uncoincidentally directly countered the barony’s earlier justifications for limiting his sovereignty during the Merciless Parliament. His exhumation of Arundel reiterates that Arundel’s body conceals no higher symbolic meaning but should be interpreted literally.

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192 Ibid., 210.
with his violation representing his treason against the crown’s prerogative to carry out its justice. Had Arundel’s head been reattached to his body, it would suggest that Richard was unjust in rescinding his previously pledged truth to the Lords Appellant and even that the barony is justified in constraining the sovereign authority of the king. To forward his political program, Richard relied upon controlling the symbolic and literal interpretation of ambiguous signs.

What, then, should we make of the deliberative rhetorical program enacted by Richard during the early years of his rule? While we cannot definitively prove that Richard read texts drawn from the enarratio poetarum and Fürstenspiegel traditions, surviving manuscript lists indicate that Richard himself owned an unidentified ars grammatica through which he was taught “‘lettrure,’ basic scholastic accomplishment,” most likely by Simon Burley who himself owned a copy of De regimine principum.\(^{193}\)

The rhetorical strategy that Richard employed during the attempted canonization closely recreates the strategies of reading embodied within these two genres. Like in the exempla that comprise the vernacular Fürstenspiegel, when Richard is confronted with an ambiguous figurative sign, Edward’s body, he attempts to leverage the ambiguity of the sign through the centering of his own interpretation, in this case, that Edward’s deposition and death represent an unnatural constraint imposed by an unjust barony. When viewed from this lens, Richard’s attempt at canonization resembles the interior reading practices and development of moral virtue expanded to a macro-scale. And, most suggestively, like Brutus and Virginius, Richard’s attempted canonization of Edward and

exhumation of Arundel leverage the interpretation of violated bodies to create a space for rhetorical and political intervention. Richard’s reinterpretation of Edward’s violated body from an *ambigua signa propria* to an *ambigua signa translata* is an act of hermeneutics put toward deliberative rhetorical ends that depends upon the ambiguity of the visual sign. If Richard’s suit were successful, he would receive divine sanction for this interpretation of kingship. The natural body of the king would be elevated to a saintly body that could not be constrained by the barony. Richard would finally be able to enact his ideology of majesty and absolutism. Further, divine sanction of Richard’s interpretation would also subvert the Lords Appellants’ justification for constraining his authority—that his young age and lack of experience made him incapable of interpreting truth. In short, Richard’s attempt at canonization is an example of leveraging the ambiguity surrounding figurative signs to achieve one’s own political goals.

Richard’s attempt at canonization was ultimately unsuccessful precisely because Richard committed the sin of interpretation that Augustine described. He sought to understand Edward’s body tropologically and allegorically when, in reality, his violated body was widely understood to be a literal sign of his shortcomings as a monarch. His strategies of interpretation could not exceed the personal and become persuasive within his contemporary political situation. Richard was ultimately unable to bridge the hermeneutic gap represented by Edward’s body because his interpretation was fundamentally untrue. Edward did not live a particularly pious life, and his deposition and death did not make him a martyr for the Christian faith. As scholars have noted, despite the cult of Edward II arising shortly after Edward’s death, the cult itself and the push for Edward’s canonization never held widespread popular support outside of the
area immediately surrounding Gloucester and relied almost exclusively upon royal patronage. The bid for canonization lacked popular and Papal encouragement and represented Richard’s aspirational political reality rather than the truth of the matter. However, beyond this, Richard’s failure as a rhetorician was also intimately connected to his lack of a moral disposition, which as we have seen, is necessary for any ethical rhetorician operating within a deliberative rhetorical paradigm characterized by the embodied nature of interpretation. When Richard was deposed in 1399, Richard’s inability to interpret the truth concealed by ambiguity once again served as part of the justification for the constraint and ultimately abdication of his sovereign authority. But, in these articles of deposition, earlier references to Richard’s youth and inexperience have been replaced by complaints against Richard’s moral character, most notably that he followed his appetite and will instead of reason and that he violated pledges of “trouthe.” The articles of deposition recorded in the Record and Process note that Richard was notoriously “so variable and dissimulating in both word and letter, and so inconstant in his behaviour” that he lacked the ability to govern and brought shame to England abroad. Further, Richard refused to accept counsel from his vassals and always centered his own interpretation of uncertain matters to the point that the lords “dared not speak the truth in giving their advice on such matters.” Most interestingly, however, the sixteenth item of the deposition demonstrates the very problem that plagued Richard’s

196 Ibid., 179.
attempts to achieve the canonization of Edward. The articles note that Richard acted only in accord “to his own arbitrary will” and that the interpretation of laws were found “in his mouth, or, at other times that they were in his breast” which resulted in Richard being “led astray by his own opinions.”\textsuperscript{197} Richard’s failure as a monarch was characterized, among other things, by his failure to consider rhetorical interpretations beyond his own. When faced with discursive constraints, Richard turned toward non-textual methods of persuasion that were more open to rhetorical intervention. Richard’s appeal to natural law and divine legitimation attempted to subvert the discursive construction of kingship. However, he simply lacked the virtue of \textit{caucio} as defined by Giles of Rome and consequently could not lead the realm to proper moral action. Richard did not necessarily fail because his rhetorical strategies were untenable; rather, he was simply a poor rhetorician who failed to compose his definition of kingship as “a name of his own devising, expressive of kingliness and absolute regal power.”\textsuperscript{198} Richard’s ideology of majesty depended upon the absolute supremacy of his interpretation of ambiguous signs; however, when this interpretation violated the most basic tenets of hermeneutic theory and when his interpretations did not descend from a moral disposition, it was inevitable that Richard’s rhetorical attempts at subverting the discursive constraints placed upon his sovereignty would fail.

\textbf{Conclusion}

At the outset, this chapter aimed to examine how the incorporation of recovered Aristotelian texts and the move toward composition in vernacular languages shifted

\textsuperscript{197} \textit{Record and Process}, 177-8.
definitions and depictions of rhetorical practice toward conceptualizing rhetoric as a reasoned capacity of interpretation that functions as an epistemological category in its own right to create a space for intervention within broadly conceived political discourse. Drawing upon the inherited tradition of Aristotelian virtue ethics, Gower developed a theory of deliberative rhetoric that was specifically adapted for use by a benevolent monarch. By positioning rhetoric not as an art of creating belief but rather of revealing truth, Gower adopts a deliberative rhetorical paradigm with a sovereign who possesses a moral disposition and grammatical-rhetorical training that his subjects lack at its hermeneutical center. As a fundamentally embodied act, interpretation of this sort was subject to the dangers of sensory perception, so sovereigns were required to possess a chaste disposition that allowed their judgment to be tempered by reason rather than desire. In fact, a sovereign’s authority and efficacy as a sovereign fundamentally descends from his capacity to gloss ambiguity and disseminate his interpretation throughout the realm in a manner that always forwards common profit rather than individual desire. When the sovereign fails in this duty, civic discord emerges, and it becomes incumbent to replace the sovereign with someone what can productively interpret ambiguity in line with his own moral disposition.

The three major examples analyzed, Gower’s “Lucrece” and “Virginia” and Richard’s attempted canonization of Edward, all suggest that the reading practices operant within the Fürstenspiegel genre were put to use beyond the immediate contexts of literary reception. In all three cases, authoritative figures attempted to leverage the ambiguity of the violated body as a visual sign to create a space for rhetorical and political intervention, but their successes or failures within this space depended not
necessarily upon their oratorical skills but instead on their habituation toward virtue. Indeed, the centering of one’s interpretation of ambiguity became a significant and productive rhetorical strategy in late medieval England. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this act of interpretation as a rhetorical practice closely imitates the rhetorical translation practices of vernacular authors. In short, we should understand, then, that the rhetorical practices that modern scholarship has identified as operant within medieval literature were also inflected within medieval political praxis.
CHAPTER IV
A “WERKYNG MERVEILOUS”: LYDGATE’S SOCIAL POETICS

By the mid-fifteenth century, rhetoric’s position within the Aristotelian division of sciences had more or less followed the classificatory arc begun with the recovery of Aristotle in the twelfth century and predicted by John Gower in the fourteenth century. As Rita Copeland has argued, the vernacular authors of the fifteenth century, such as John Lydgate and Stephen Hawes, drew upon a sub-tradition of earlier vernacular writers, such as Dante, Brunetto Latini, and Gower, who recognized rhetoric as a branch of science governing ethics and politics.\(^\text{199}\) Copeland has shown elsewhere that the history of medieval rhetoric is in many ways characterized by continual efforts to discipline the amorphous body of rhetoric into existing epistemological frameworks.\(^\text{200}\) Across these two pieces of scholarship, Copeland persuasively traces a vernacular sub-tradition in which authors legitimize their very acts of composition by repositioning rhetoric’s role away from concerns of proper Latinity and organization and back toward the inventive and productive force that rhetoric possessed in Aristotle. Although Copeland has identified the intellectual and academic tradition that precipitated the positioning of rhetoric in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, her analysis elides the concomitant cultural


shifts that simultaneously worked to legitimize rhetoric as a productive social practice—namely, the increasing institutionalization of rhetoric as an educational curriculum within the king’s curia. As rhetorical education became an institutionalized component of the prince’s education, the ideological role of rhetoric within the king’s household and the politics of the realm likewise shifted to encompass the performative aspect of politics that was absent in the moral-ethical definitions of rhetoric found, for example, in Gower.

For a writer such as John Lydgate, who obtained patronage from the courts of Henry IV, Henry V, and Henry VI, the shift of the institutional status of the rhetoric within the prince’s curia paralleled the increasing importance of rhetoric within the educational paradigms of the fourteenth and fifteenth century, in which vernacular education came to supplement the traditional Latin-based grammatical education of the primary and secondary school. As a child who attended the monastery school at Bury St Edmunds and eventually joined the monastery as a novice in 1385 at the age of 15, Lydgate was intimately familiar with the course of grammatical, rhetorical, and logical education as it was practiced in fourteenth and fifteenth century England. At the same time, having received patronage from three consecutive English kings, Lydgate was uniquely qualified among his contemporaries to trace how the elevation of the institution

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202 Lydgate was especially close with the court of Henry VI and, as Schirmer has argued, functioned essentially as a “poet laureate” of England who worked to advance the political cause of Henry VI, specifically through the composition of poems praising Henry’s coronation in Paris and London and his pilgrimage to Bury St. Edmonds, 138-46.
of rhetoric affected political theory and practice. While the general claim that Lydgate and, more broadly, fifteenth century England understood rhetoric, poetics, and politics to be intimately connected is not new, these primarily legalistic and juristic readings of medieval culture have passed over how the development of English civil law regulating language was accompanied by a cultural shift in pedagogical practice that emphasized both vernacular and rhetorical practice in education. In the fifteenth century, as rhetoric emerged from under the shadow of the broader category of logic to achieve its own institutional status within education, it likewise broke away from its overlapping association with virtue and ethics and took on an increased attention to style and performance.

Lydgate’s Fürstenspiegel, the Fall of Princes, translated from Laurent de Premierfait in the tradition of Boccaccio’s De casibus vivorum illustrium and composed from 1431 to 1438, provides an ideal case study for tracing how rhetoric’s shifting institutional and pedagogical status precipitated epistemological shifts within rhetorical practice. Written at the behest of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, the Fall of Princes is Lydgate’s most expansive (36,365 lines) and poetically accomplished work. In the De casibus tradition, Lydgate’s Fall traces the rise and fall in Fortune of great men and

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203 For example, see Mary C. Flannery, John Lydgate and the Poetics of Fame (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), who argues in her third chapter that medieval English law in the fourteenth and fifteenth century was preoccupied with the idea of controlling loose and wicked tongues that posed the threat of defaming the court and thereby regulated language and political discourse.

204 Ironically, the shift that can be traced within the English tradition from John of Salisbury to John Gower to John Lydgate, where logical invention gave way toward stylistic invention, made possible Renaissance condemnations of medieval rhetoric, like those of Ramus, who split the canons of invention, organization, and memory from the canons of style and delivery, and the trend within contemporary rhetorical historiography to diminish the contributions of medieval rhetoricians.

205 For a complete overview of the immediate political situation in which Lydgate composed the Fall of Princes, including the coronation of Henry VI as a child-king, see John Watts, Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), esp. Chs. 4 & 5.
women derived from Biblical and classical history. Unlike Fürstenspiegel within the Letter to Alexander tradition, the tales included in the De casibus tradition do not contain exegesis in the form of commentary, but rather in the form of dialogue between author and these illustrious figures; however, at Humphrey’s request, one of the major additions Lydgate made to his translation of Premierfait included the composition of “envoys” within the text that detail the moral failings that bring about individual changes in fortune and that reposition the text of the Fall more clearly within the admonitory tone of the Fürstenspiegel genre. Lydgate’s appropriations of and additions to the De casibus tradition function rhetorically to establish a poetic rendering in which narrative history and affective tragedy are mixed, resulting in the creation of an ethical framework in which sin and causality, not Fortune, are the primary determiners of an individual’s fate. Lydgate’s reorientation of the theoretical framework underpinning the De casibus tradition reveals his understanding of the Fürstenspiegel as a didactic genre.

As I will argue in this chapter, Lydgate’s definition of rhetoric and depiction of rhetorical practice in his translation reveals an ideal orator who assumes not only proper moral disposition but also a capacious understanding of the performative potential of rhetorical practice, specifically the canon of “Ellocucioun.” Lydgate’s depiction of rhetoric in the Fall has been assigned a negative reputation in modern scholarship, especially when compared to the vernacular discussions of rhetoric that preceded Lydgate, with Derek Pearsall concluding that Lydgate’s translation of Premierfait indicates “no independent movement, in his translation, toward Renaissance attitudes” of language.206 However, when Lydgate’s definition of rhetoric is considered within a

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constellation of “broader cultural processes,” his specific adaptations to rhetorical theory become more commensurable to the modern audience.\textsuperscript{207} In this chapter, I examine how rhetoric as a discipline taught within the secondary schools of medieval England became more professionalized over time at the same time that that rhetoric became legitimized as an object of study for the young nobility. Further, in line with the historical-theoretical framework that informs this chapter, I argue that Lydgate’s definition and depiction of rhetoric reflects the shifting position of rhetoric as a standardized discipline within the secondary schools of medieval England and its increasing professionalization within the king’s household. To make this argument, I will detail Lydgate’s definition of rhetoric in Book 6 of the \textit{Fall of Princes} and compare this description of rhetoric with the notion of authorship outlined in the prologue to Book 1 of the \textit{Fall}. Finally, to illustrate Lydgate’s definition of rhetoric in practice, I will analyze Lydgate’s exemplum on Cicero as an example of eloquence informing political practice.

\textbf{The Education of the Prince}

By the early fifteenth century, the increasing professionalization of the discipline of rhetoric precipitated a shift within medieval pedagogy that was in turn reflected within the king’s \textit{curia} and the course of education for the young prince. During the medieval period, the education of the prince, like the education of all who attended primary grammar schools, was characterized by the slow progression in reading, most often in Latin, from letter, to syllable, to word, to phrase. As the student learned strategies of

reading, he progressed from writing on wax *tabula*, to reading and memorizing elements of the *Psalter*, to finally reading, paraphrasing, and commenting upon the classical and patristic *auctores*. While this method of instruction endured for roughly three hundred years from the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, the relative positioning and relationship between grammar and rhetoric in the medieval primary school transitioned from one of close conflation to an increasing separation of the two disciplines. In the twelfth century classroom of England and Northern France, although grammar was ostensibly the primary discipline of study, Suzanne Reynolds has shown that interlinear glosses of school texts demonstrate that the study of *grammatica* was highly inflected by rhetorical knowledge and methodology, resulting in a “profound erosion of the boundary between grammar and rhetoric.” As a pedagogical tool, interlinear expository glosses served two specific functions within school texts. First, they provided grammatical treatment of unfamiliar terms and tropes that helped the student to comprehend literally a given passage of Latin. Second, they provided interpretive commentary that communicated the sense of a passage in a manner that students could easily grasp and explained the metaphorical meaning behind author’s use of particular tropes. Based upon her reading of these interlinear glosses, Reynolds concludes that “textual exposition” serves as the

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208 Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Tradition and Innovation in Latin Schools from the Twelfth to Fifteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 36-8. In this specific case, although Black has situated his discussion within the context of Italian schools, this general course of education was widely followed in the Latin West. Lydgate specifically reflects on a similar course of study in his *Testament*.


“‘master practice,’ [of medieval education] the template for both hermeneutic and inventional textuality.” In other words, the very act of grammatical exposition involved the use of rhetorical principals of invention that threatened the clear delineation between the art of grammar as concerned with congruity and exegesis and the art of rhetoric as concerned with invention and style.

The conflation of the disciplines of grammar and rhetoric within twelfth century school texts reflected a larger cultural anxiety concerning the proper interpretation of language. For medieval commentators, the conflation of these practices in school texts points toward the normalizing roles that these systematic arts played in the production and interpretation of language. If, as R. Howard Bloch maintains, the role of medieval grammar from the time of Priscian to the twelfth-century was “the delineation of straight paths, the creation of linear links between symbols, sounds, and letters as well as between words and the physical properties of things,” then the literacy practices developed in the classroom aimed at providing students with the knowledge necessary to properly order and determine linguistic signifiers, hence the emphasis upon explanatory interlinear glosses within school texts. As Brian Stock has argued, these pedagogical practices reflect the larger cultural shift that occurred during the medieval period as written textual

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211 Suzanne Reynolds, *Medieval Reading*, p. 130.
212 R. Howard Bloch, *Etymologies and Genealogies: A Literary Anthropology of the French Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 53. Expanding on Bloch’s treatment of signs during the medieval period, Eric Jäger argues that the issue of linguistic ambiguity can be traced to medieval discussions of the Fall that positioned the Fall as being precipitated by the transgression of natural signs and the improper use of rhetoric. E. Jäger, *The Tempter’s Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), see especially 2-11, 112. Interestingly, Ben Parsons has made a direct connection between depictions of the fall and medieval education. In his reading of Robert of Melun, Bishop of Hereford’s system of education, Parsons argues that “pain and learning are kindred, as both are conditions of a postlapsarian world...Schooling is required by the effects of sin on the mind in the same way that suffering and especially beating extend from its effects on the body; each one implies the other, as both are means of paying the same penalty for transgression.” Ben Parsons, *Punishment and Medieval Education* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018), 150.
culture subsumed oral culture as the predominant mode of thought, resulting in students
developing an “intellectual apparatus [that] was highly influenced by the structure of
language, providing [them] with beneficial aids to thinking such as grammar and
logic.”

Under this model, the normativizing role of grammar and rhetoric worked to
provide students with a common language of linguistic interpretation and composition.
The curricular structure of medieval primary schools and grammatical instruction
“functioned to perpetuate and reproduce the most fundamental conditions for textual
culture, providing the discursive rules and interpretive strategies that constructed certain
texts as repositories of authority and value.”

The broader category of grammatica, with its focus on invention, “discursive rules,” and hermeneutics, “interpretive strategies,” was
comprised by the disciplinary aims of both rhetoric and grammar. For example,
commentaries on the tradition of verse fables used to teach Latin grammar and
composition in primary school classrooms across late medieval Europe, but particularly
in England, exposed pupils to methods of allegorical interpretation and rhetorical
invention that provided students with the basic literary skills necessary for commenting
on and composing the more difficult texts that comprised rhetorical education at the level
of the secondary school and the university.

As students learned to read and interpret

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214 For a contemporary discussion of the normativizing role of grammar, see Alan of Lille, *The Plaint of Nature*, trans. J. Sheridan, (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1980). In Alan’s conception, grammar serves a heteronormative role that disciplines language within a moral and congruous framework. In contrast, Alan understands poetry to be a destabilizing force that allows for the subversion of grammar through its use of figurative language and tropes, which, for Alan, is framed through the lens of sexual deviancy.
the classical and patristic *auctores*, they also developed a basic rhetorical knowledge that would allow them to harness the productive and inventional power of rhetoric in their own glossings.

By the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the rhetorical principles studied indirectly in the grammar school curriculum came to be a more standardized part of medieval education. According to Robert Black, in Italy, while twelfth and thirteenth century schools saw rhetoric “touched on in a cursory way and superficial fashion when reading the school authors,” which might provide students with a knowledge of rhetorical terminology, “by the fourteenth century it seems that introductory rhetoric had come to represent a normal complement to the secondary grammar syllabus.”

In contrast to the grammatical education focused upon the interpretation of literal and allegorical meaning, the rhetorical curriculum developed during this time period drew heavily upon the dictaminal tradition, with students translating vernacular letters into Latin so as to learn “how to give their Latin prose composition the elegance which was lacking in their earlier strictly grammatical efforts.” In fourteenth century England, Christopher Cannon has summarized this curricular development as the elevation of “grammar into something like a literary technique” with “grammatical concepts and terminology…shaping the material of allegory, metaphor, and image.” In the monastic grammar schools of England that Lydgate would have attended, rhetorical translation was not confined to prose letters but also included the translation of vernacular English poetry

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that students would render into polished Latin prose or poetry.\textsuperscript{220} Over time, the literacy practices developed in medieval primary and secondary schools transitioned from providing students with a general methodology for interpreting texts toward equipping students with an orientation toward language that allowed them to stake their own claims to authority through the act of rhetorical invention. What resulted was a set of pedagogical exercises in which students aimed not necessarily to transpose the literal meaning of a Latin composition but rather to compose translations that were “unbounded by the formalities of logic and grammar” and that utilized rhetorical tropes, particularly amplification, to achieve their own aims.\textsuperscript{221} The rhetorical education provided by these primary and secondary schools in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries gave students the opportunity and skillset to leverage rhetorical style as a practice that could allow for intervention through rhetorical stylistics.

The shift in medieval educational practices was not confined to the medieval classroom but was also reflected in the household of the king, the \textit{curia}. Rather than sending their children to the public grammar schools, the English nobility preferred to educate their children within the household, with the educational curriculum being led by two professional members of the king’s \textit{curia}, the “master” who socialized children into the nobility, and the grammar and rhetoric teacher, most often during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries a literate chapel clerk who held no formal position within the household who was charged with teaching sons, and occasionally daughters, Latin

\textsuperscript{220} Christopher Cannon, \textit{Literacy}, p. 83.
However, as R. F. Green has demonstrated, by the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the position of the grammar and rhetoric teacher became professionalized within the English court through the granting “of an officially recognized title.”

Additionally, a cursory review of the books owned by the English aristocracy reveals a preponderance of grammatical and rhetorical texts, including both Latin grammars and Latin *artes poetriae*, as well as historical texts and mirrors for princes, the most common of these being Giles of Rome’s *De regimine*. Beyond the royal court’s authorization and professionalization of the prince’s grammatical and rhetorical education, in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries, the establishment of “humanism” as an ideology and the circulation of Italian humanists, with their focus on Latin eloquence, across European courts further improved the reputation of rhetoric as a professionalized discipline within the king’s household. As David Rundle has shown, for English audiences specifically, Italian humanism was closely associated with two interrelated concepts, “providing political philosophy for prinedoms” and “promoting particular forms of classicizing eloquence for their virtue in persuading their audience to

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223 Richard F. Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 85. For Green, these two sides of the prince’s education are distinguished as “noriture,” the mastery of courtly etiquette, and “lettrure,” which denotes basic literacy. The distinction drawn here between a prince’s education in etiquette and socialization and literacy can be found throughout the *Fürstenspiegel* tradition, which often divides education into natural philosophy, ethics, and economy. Within the *Fürstenspiegel* genre, the prince’s education in literacy is understood as that which vivifies the prince’s social education.

224 Green, *Poets*, 85-91; 137.

certain moral lessons.”226 These two concepts, of course, are shared with the
Fürstenspiegel tradition.

When considered in conjunction with the larger cultural shift in medieval
education, the professionalization of the discipline of rhetoric within the king’s household
suggests two major considerations when analyzing Lydgate’s definitions and depictions
of rhetorical practice in his Fürstenspiegel. First, the increasing exposure of rhetoric as a
discipline that students outside of the university would study precipitates a shift in the
manner in which rhetoric authorizes itself. In contrast to writers like John of Salisbury
and John Gower, Lydgate does not feel compelled to closely marry rhetoric to a more
established discipline such as philosophy or ethics; instead, his additions to Premierfait
focus upon acts of amplification and rhetorical performance. For Lydgate, the idea of
rhetorical performance refers to the concept that effective oration and composition must
be accompanied by eloquence, which he defines as rhetorical stylistics put to the end of
persuasion. Second, the elevation of rhetoric to a defined discipline within the king’s
household suggests that, by the time of Henry VI’s childhood, rhetorical performance
was something understood as necessary for effective governance. In other words, these
cultural shifts indicate that, by the time of Lydgate’s composition of the Fall of Princes,
rhetoric had begun its transition from a capacity used to govern internal deliberation to a
capacity focused more clearly upon expression. When interpreted through the lens of
rhetoric’s status in pedagogy and the royal court, Lydgate’s poetry provides evidence for
the increasing recognition of rhetoric as a systematic discipline that does necessarily rely
on accepted fields of study, such as philosophy and ethics, for disciplinary legitimation.

226 David Rundle, “Humanist Eloquence,” 78; 85.
Lydgate’s Appropriation of the De casibus Tradition

Unlike the Fürstenspiegel analyzed earlier, John Lydgate’s Fall of Princes follows the De casibus tradition rather than the Letter to Alexander tradition of the broader Fürstenspiegel genre. While written ostensibly for princes, the De casibus tradition, like the Fürstenspiegel genre, appealed to a broad range of readers interested in classical and Biblical history and provided these readers with advice drawn from the accreted exempla.227 However, following Boccaccio,228 texts within the De casibus tradition do not create an ethical framework based upon virtue and vice but rather seek to educate readers by a presenting a comprehensive history of the classical and Christian worlds. This historical framework is, in turn, comprised of the biographies of notable men and women who have risen and fallen according to the turn of Fortune’s wheel. As Green has shown, the education of the aristocracy within the household often relied upon the employment of “useful ‘ensamples’ from the past,” which, by their claims to veracity, were inherently more didactically persuasive than fictive literary examples.229 The history writing of the De casibus tradition, however, did not employ straightforward narrative writing in the manner described by twelfth-century theorists such as Hugh of St. Victor. Throughout the De casibus, Boccaccio varied his material by including digressions and disputations with the characters whose lives he narrates.230 As the De casibus was translated into the vernacular, first by Premierfait and later by Lydgate, each author made

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227 Walter Schirmer, John Lydgate, 208.
228 Marco Petoletti details Boccaccio’s personal zibaldone, in which Boccaccio transcribed and translated classical and medieval sources that informed his composition of the De casibus. Marco Petoletti, “Boccaccio, the Classics and the Latin Middle Ages,” in Petrarch and Boccaccio: The Unity of Knowledge in the Pre-modern World, ed. I. Candido (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018), 226-43.
229 Richard F. Green, Poets, 161.
additions and amplifications to the text to suit the political and cultural contexts in which they wrote and to bring the historical record into the present. Through these adaptations, vernacular authors such as Lydgate were able to project “an image of authority that was public and textual, yet also exclusive” insofar as their adapted compositions appropriated classical learning within a Christian understanding of history to produce a teleological rendering of governance in which princes must stoically bear the whims of Fortune. For Lydgate, the historical narrative of the De casibus tradition came to function as a contested site in which aesthetics, politics, and Christian ethics interacted and grappled with classical and Christian views on the course of history.

Lydgate’s addition of “envoys” that explain the moral revealed by the historical biography complicates the historical worldview posited by the De casibus tradition. At the same time, however, the moralizing language of the “envoys” is necessary for creating an ethical framework in which the sovereign can be both held accountable for his actions and engage in the didactic project of the Fürstenspiegel genre. In the prologue to the second book of the Fall, Lydgate departs from the De casibus tradition’s positioning of Fortune as the preeminent cause for the fall of prominent figures; instead, in line with the Fürstenspiegel genre, the ethical or unethical behavior of princes precipitates their political position within the world:

For ther weelfare and ther abidyng longe.
Who aduertisith, dependith nat on chaunce.
Good liff and vertu maketh hem to be stronge,
And hem assureth in long perseuerauwce;
Vertu on Fortune maketh a diffiaunce.
That Fortune hath no domynacioun

231 For example, in Premierfait’s translation from Boccaccio’s Latin to his own French prose, he included additional scholarly reference that simultaneously ameliorated the critical aspects of Boccaccio’s original treatment of the nobility and flattered the nobility’s own learning. See, Jessica Winston, “Mirror,” 386.
232 Larry Scanlon, Narrative, 134.
Wher noble pryncis be gouerned be resoun. (FP 2.50-6)\textsuperscript{233}

So long that a prince is “gouerned by resoun,” he is not subject to the whims of fate. Instead, he can rely on “Vertu” to determine his own fate. As Paul Budra has shown, by blunting Fortune’s role in history, Lydgate repositions the historical exempla within the framework of tragedy that Chaucer developed in his own treatment of the \textit{De casibus} tradition, \textit{The Monk’s Tale}.\textsuperscript{234} In the \textit{Fall}, Lydgate relies upon this poetic and ethical framework both to justify his amplifications of Boccaccio’s and Permierfait’s original texts and to reposition his own work into the didactic genre of the \textit{Fürstenspiegel}.

Although the prologue to the second book of the \textit{Fall} inverts the traditional historical worldview of the \textit{De casibus} tradition, Lydgate’s actual rendering of the tales that comprise the \textit{Fall} challenges the framework of sin and causality that he proclaims as informing the whole of his text. Despite Lydgate’s claim that Fortune does not dominate the lives of princes, he draws upon many exempla from Boccaccio in which virtuous characters suffer a reversal in fortune through no explicit fault of their own. According to Maura Nolan, the whole of the Lydgatean poetic project revolves around the creation of an artistic aesthetic that attempts to provide “the illusion of a certain transhistoricity” through the juxtaposition of sources that create both logical and temporal inconsistencies, which prompt the reader to move affectively from pity to joy and back again as they grapple with understanding a world in which both chance and virtue contribute to a ruler’s success.\textsuperscript{235} Lydgate’s appropriation of the \textit{De casibus} tradition and his creation of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{233} All citations for the \textit{Fall of Princes} are taken from, John Lydgate, \textit{Lydgate’s Fall of Princes}, vols. 1-4, ed. Henry Bergen, (Washington D.C.: The Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1923).
\item \textsuperscript{234} Paul Budra, \textit{A Mirror for Magistrates and the De casibus Tradition} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 42-8.
\item \textsuperscript{235} Maura Nolan, “‘Now Wo, Now Gladnesse’: Ovidianism in the ‘Fall of Princes,’” \textit{ELH} 71, no. 3 (2004): 531-58, at 537. See also, Maura Nolan, \textit{John Lydgate and the Making of Public Culture} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 149.
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an ethical framework through which to view history compel him to attempt to reconcile two “contradictory visions of history: that history is providentially ordered, and that it is radically contingent and unrelated to human merit.”236 As Andrew Galloway has argued, Lydgate’s attempt at reconciling these contradictory views draws upon classical rather than medieval learning in an attempt to guide “political culture toward worldly prosperity yet Stoic ethics,” which positions him as the father of vernacular humanism in the English tradition.237 Although scholarship has examined the historical, literary, and ethical foundations that inform Lydgate’s treatment of history as aesthetic and moral tools, there has been less discussion of how Lydgate’s definition and depiction of rhetoric in the Fall resonates with his larger poetic and political project. As my reading below will argue, Lydgate’s understanding of rhetoric as a performative art reliant on rhetorical tropes posits a sovereign who leverages rhetoric to achieve his own social aims through the performance of eloquence and, in this manner, to guard against the vagaries of Fortune.

236 Andrew Galloway, “John Lydgate and the Origins of Vernacular Humanism,” The Journal of English and Germanic Philology 107, no. 4 (2008): 445-71, at 449. Paul Strohm has argued that the tension between the admonitory and exemplary tone of Lydgate’s Fall of Princes and the vagaries of Fortune found in the De casibus tradition reflect a larger cultural shift in the form of advising kings that occurred between the Ricardian deposition and the Lancastrian succession. In defining the “Lancastrian style” of admonitory literature, Strohm claims that it is defined by “a quality of unease, a kind of nervous reciprocity in which the adviser at once experiences a closer identification with his monarch, and a heightened uncertainty about the spirt in which even the most complicitous reassurances will be received.” Paul Strohm, England’s Empty Throne: Usurpation and the Language of Legitimation, 1399-1422 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 174. Similarly, Nigel Mortimer argues that Lydgate’s inclusion of exempla that are “explicitly tragedies of innocence” challenges the framework that Humphrey seeks for Lydgate to establish through his addition of envos explaining the moral of each exemplum (186). The effect of pity that these tragedies engender in the reader work, instead, to establish a Lydgatean poetical theory of tragedy that positions both Fortune and individual will as productive historical forces. That is, Lydgate’s rewriting of Premierfait returns agency to Fortune and consequently produces an ethical framework in which innocent individuals can and are punished capriciously through no fault of their own. Nigel Mortimer, John Lydgate’s “Fall of Princes”: Narrative Tragedy in Its Literary and Political Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Lydgate’s Definition of Rhetoric

Although rhetoric as a systematic disposition for approaching composition informs the whole of Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*, Lydgate follows Boccaccio and Premierfait in providing his fullest treatment of rhetorical theory and practice in the sixth book following the historical exemplum of Cicero, as a digression against those “[Iangelers and] diffamers of Rhetorique” (*FP* 6.3277 ff). As is typical of discussions of rhetoric in the *Fürstenspiegel* tradition, Lydgate defines rhetoric, situates it within an existing classificatory system—drawn from Boccaccio—explains its constituent parts—taken from Premierfait—and details its efficacy within civil society. Although Copeland has argued that Lydgate grapples with two conceptions of rhetoric—one inherited from Boccaccio and Premierfait in which rhetoric is defined through its civic embodiment in the orator and one inherited from Chaucer in which the poet as rhetorician pleases the royal court through figurative language—I want to suggest that Lydgate draws upon his conception of authorship as an extension of the rhetorical figure of amplification to reconcile poetic performance and political efficacy.\(^{238}\) That is, rather than rhetoric and poetics “subsum[ing] the political,” as Copeland suggest, for Lydgate, rhetoric is the systematic art the supplements the political through the amplification provided by rhetorical stylistics and thereby engenders the sovereign with the capacity to intervene in the political sphere.\(^ {239}\)

Lydgate’s treatment of rhetoric in the *Fall* is fairly conventional and follows his immediate sources, but his additions and amplifications to Boccaccio’s and Premierfait’s prose demonstrate an understanding of rhetoric that is skeptical of attempts to tie


\(^{239}\) Rita Copeland, “Lydgate,” 73.
rhetorical practice to academic philosophy and rather imagines rhetorical efficacy as
intimately tied toward eloquent performance rather than the expression of truth. As Kellie
Robertson has argued, in his Reson & Sensuallyte, Lydgate consciously breaks away
from academic conventions that conflate reason with natural philosophy, which results in
a theory of sensuality in which poetic eloquence, rather than philosophical logic, “reveals
that which is inaccessible to mere sensual analysis.” Following Boccaccio, Lydgate
places rhetoric within the “rac[i]ounal” division of philosophy, which determines “What
men shal uiode & what thing vndirfonge” (FP 6.3295-6). From this initial classification,
rhetoric assumes neither the close association with logic found in Scholastic treatments of
rhetoric nor the overarching subsummation to morality and ethics found in fourteenth
century commentators such as Gower. Instead, in this instance, rhetorical knowledge for
Lydgate functions as a capacity that guides individuals to correct practical action, much
in the same way the poet compiles historical exempla to demonstrate the consequences
that emerge from improper action. As one third of philosophy, rhetoric is not something
naturally possessed but rather a systematic art that requires four components on the part
of a successful rhetorician: a natural wit; systematic study; a virtuous disposition; and an
agreeable nature (FP 6.3295-7). Following Premierfait, after defining rhetoric, Lydgate
proceeds to explain its constituent parts, reiterating the five canons of rhetoric, which he
renders as “Inuencion,” the possession of “A sikir grounde foundid on resoun,”
“Disposioun,” which helps the orator to avoid digression, “Ellocucioun,” the capacity to
conveniently convey expressions to one’s audience, “Pronunciacion,” the property of

240 Kellie Robertson, Nature Speaks: Medieval Literature and Aristotelian Philosophy (Philadelphia:
University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 303. In her discussion of Lydgatean poetics, Robertson concludes
that Lydgate posits a philosophical system in which “the tongue of the poet, rather than the eye of the
natural philosopher, is the more reliable instrument of ethical transformation” (304).
joining rhetorical “craft onto nature,” and “Remembrance,” which involves communicating each part of an oration as intended (FP 6.3321-60). Despite his initial treatment of all five canons of rhetoric, as Lydgate proceeds on this digression of rhetoric, he focuses primarily upon the relationship between rhetorical style, as represented by the canon of “Ellocucioun,” and eloquence’s didactic and civic functions.

In perhaps the largest of Lydgate’s additions to Premierfait, he adds a metaphor to the canon of “Ellocucioun” that encapsulates how style operates within the larger discipline of rhetoric. Drawing on rhetoric’s traditional association with the technical and mechanical arts, Lydgate analogizes the canon of “Ellocucioun” as “Like a keruer that first doth tymbir hewe, / Squier & compass cast features & visage, / With keruyng tool makth [up] a fair image (FP 6.3337-9). Though the canons of invention and arrangement provide the raw material for composition, in this case the “tymbir,” it is the canon of “Ellocucioun” that acts as the “keruyng tool” that allows the technician to translate this raw material into a commensurable form, here, the “fair image,” but, in rhetorical practice, the oration adapted to one’s audience. In other words, the canon of style is that which vivifies language and turns it into something that can actively intervene within the social and political spheres. The metaphor that Lydgate adds to Premierfait’s definition style shares striking resonances with Lydgate’s discussion of vernacular authorship that opens the whole of the Fall in the prologue to Book 1. The prologue opens with Lydgate commenting upon Premierfait’s act of translating Boccaccio, and he expounds upon how the act of vernacular translation shares similarities with the technical art of pottery:

In his [Premierfait’s] prologe affermyng off resoun
Artificers hauyng exercise
May chaunge and turne bi good discrecioun
Shappis, formys, and newly hem deuyse,
Make and vnmake in many sondry wyse,
As potteres, which to that craft entende,
Breke and renew ther vesselis to a-mende (FP 1.8-14)

For Lydgate, authorial proficiency descends from the ability to reshape existing material by applying one’s “discreciou[n]” to “deuyse” new forms, whether those be new methods of argumentation or new strategies of expression. Lydgate’s rendering here of rhetorical style as a mechanical art draws upon a long tradition within rhetorical theory that described the poet and rhetorician as a type of builder.241 The recognition that the poet conceives of a form or image, the verba, within the memory before then crafting that image into the actual composition, the res, reflects a Neo-Platonic understanding of poetic composition.

The end of authorial translation lies in adapting accepted learning into contingent cultural situations and thereby making old writing understandable to contemporary audiences. Through the presentation of an individual’s moral standing in relation to their historical actions, Lydgate introduces the affective mode of pity into his depiction of history, which, in turn, imbibes the poet with the authority to interpret history within an existing ethical framework, in this case, one designed to bring about good governance. According to Mary Flannery, Lydgate’s treatment of characters in the Fall, specifically his rendering of their fama, engenders a poetic voice that is charged “with weighing the repute and accounts of texts, authors, and characters” and then compiling, organizing, and adapting these sources to present specific instantiations of history and reputation.242 In the same manner that the potter may use his wheel to constantly shape, reshape, and

unmake the unformed clay, the author may use language, especially the rhetorical figure of amplification, to reinterpret history and put it to new uses. These adaptations to the historical record consist of both the organizational framework around which one interprets history and the actual rendering of the historical narrative through the author’s amplification using rhetorical stylistics. In line with the Fürstenspiegel tradition, for Lydgate, history becomes the raw material that must be adapted to educate the prince under ethical frameworks.

As the prologue to Book 1 continues, Lydgate supplements a conventional medieval discussion of the recovery of classical learning by identifying the poet as having a specific and heightened sensory perception that allows him to improve upon pre-existing compositions through the influence of eloquence. The logical end of Lydgate’s analogy between the poet and the potter culminates in the poet possessing a vision within the intellect that allows him to alter and amplify constructed text so as to render an image that already exists within his mind. As Lydgate describes it, this “inward siht” allows the poet to “Deuises newe” through the act of “Fantasien,” that is, the operation of the imagination (FP 1.17-8). In line with Chaucer’s treatment of old texts in the Parlement of Foules, Lydgate employs the metaphor of separating the wheat from the chaff to describe the poet-translator’s relationship to classical learning; however,

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243 Such a claim of Lydgate’s notion of the rewriting of history to create new ethical frameworks is supported by Dominique Battles’s reading of Lydgate’s Siege of Thebes. Battles argues that Lydgate dramatically alters his inherited historical framework in which the Theban tragedy is precipitated by the violent and incestuous nature of the Theban aristocracy. Instead, Lydgate adopts “an optimistic mode of historiography,” in which he introduces “precedents for inspired leadership and civic harmony.” Dominique Battles, The Medieval Tradition of Thebes: History and Narrative in the Of Roman de Thèbes, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate (London: Routledge, 2004), 174.

unlike Chaucer, Lydgate describes the poet-translator’s intervention in starkly rhetorical and sensory terms:

Thei may off newe fynde and fantasies,
Out of old chaff trie out ful cleene corn,
Make it more fresh and lusti to the eie,
Ther subtil witt and ther labour applie,
With ther coloures agreable off hewe,
Make olde thynge for to seeme newe (FP 1.23-8).

In contrast to earlier treatments of rhetoric, Lydgate does not consign the poet-translator as rhetorician to the explicit rendering of truth, though that, of course, is implied by the rhetorician’s virtuous disposition and agreeable nature. As Robert R. Edwards has argued, the figure of the author posited by Lydgate is one who remains loyal to the original meaning of a text but who, at the same time, enlivens this text with “received materials by compilation, rhetorical amplification, and moralization.”245 The poet-translator’s gift lies in his capacity to use language, the “coloures agreeable,” to reinvigorate classical learning by increasing its sensory appeal, insofar as it makes older texts “more fresh and lusti to the eie.” In this manner, rhetoric and language take on a didactic role, but, here, the process of education is as much to delight as it is to teach explicitly.

Further, Lydgate’s description of the author’s role in composition strongly resonates with the more advanced school-based practices of the medieval English secondary school, in which students translated vernacular and Latin prose and poetry into refined Latin compositions of their own. Compared to the earlier grammatical school practices in which translation found its end in transcribing literal meaning, these later acts

of rhetorical translation focused upon the development of eloquence through the art of amplification. As Christopher Cannon has argued, for Lydgate, these schoolroom practices “provided rich resources for meaning-making and ornamentation in poetry” and engendered a grammatical disposition that understood literary forms as created through “aggregation, by the patching together of otherwise distinct and separable parts.”

Drawing from Premierfait’s comments on his own translation of Boccaccio, Lydgate records the author’s task of amplification as “to a-menden, correcten and declare; / Nat to condemn off no presumpcioun” (FP 1.86-7). In particular, the poet-translator is charged with amplifying the rhetorical effects of classical and historical stories that are “bare” due to their composition “Vndir a stile breeff and compendious” (FP 1.89-90). Since these historical exempla contain a didactic element, they must be “prolonge[d] whan thei be vertuous” (FP 1.91). Here, the amplification concerns adding not only additional references to classical texts of learning, which both Premierfait and Lydgate bring to Boccaccio’s text, doubling its original size, but also rhetorical flourishes that “supporte” the original exempla by making them more engaging to the reader (FP 1.88). Despite Lydgate claiming that his own writing his without “rhetorik,” (FP 1.230), his aureate poetics obviously reveal this claim to fall within the topos of modesty.

The rhetorical notion of authorship communicated at the opening of the Fall further resonates with the originary myth of rhetoric found in the digression of Book 6. As an adaptation of the Ciceronian myth passed down through Brunetto Latini, rhetoric here certainly possesses a civilizing force, but the weight of that force is found not in its capacity to precipitate cooperation through communication but instead in the ability of

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246 Christopher Cannon, Literacy, 158; 180.
eloquence to make expression conveniently commensurable. Man’s use of language distinguishes him from animals since man can “vttre his conceit onli be langage,” but rather than birthing civilization, language is rendered as that which ameliorates the appetitive desires of man (FP 6.3378). It is through language that “The soule be grace repressith al outrage, / Namli whan resoun hath the souereyne / To bridle passiouns of sensualite” (FP 6.3379-81). As the discussion on rhetoric continues, eloquence is depicted as the counterpart of prudence, which Lydgate emphasizes by paring “eloquence” and “prudence” as rhyming words. According to Lydgate’s translation of Premierfait, eloquence is “youen” to man as “A thyng couenable in especiall / Whan that it is conveied by prudence” (FP 6.3382-4). Prudence informs the enactment of eloquence, but eloquence, on its own, gives expression to the marvels of natural creation and the intention of the soul that could not be communicated without eloquent language. For Lydgate, language as a communicative capacity must be accompanied by rhetorical ornamentation to reach its highest potential. In this conception, eloquence does not run the risk of producing pleasing language that leads the audience away from truth by appealing to sensory desires. By positioning eloquence as governed by prudence, Premierfait and Lydgate expand the possibilities afforded to rhetorical ornamentation and expression.

Beyond its ability for rendering truth, Lydgate praises rhetoric and eloquence for their pedagogical potentials. As foreshadowed by the role of language in pacifying sensuality, rhetoric is also ascribed with the pedagogical role of teaching virtue so that the individual may discipline themselves under ethical frameworks and, crucially, keep their body in measure: “That bi langage and bi eloquence / A man is tauht in vertu to be
stable / Of soule eternal, of bodi corumpable” (*FP* 6.3405-7). This didactic aspect of rhetorical practice extends beyond explicit teaching and also includes the elements of inductive reasoning that contribute to persuasion. Citing the examples of ancient rhetoricians, Lydgate explains that political persuasion is achieved through “wise exaumplis & prouerbis pertinent” as well as “sugrid langage & vertuous dailiaunce,” which are described as “Woordes pesible embellished with pleasuance” (*FP* 6.3457; 6.3467; 6.3468). Across each of these examples, Lydgate emphasizes that the logical aspects of rhetorical invention must always be accompanied by rhetorical flourish, what he deems “prudent eloquence” (*FP* 6.3472). It is only when eloquent language supports historical example that inductive persuasion can occur. When eloquence does not vivify language, the result is catastrophic for the political state. Lydgate concludes the digression on rhetoric by citing the example of those “braynes people” who attempt political oratory but lack the systematic study of rhetoric as an art and are therefore “bareyn of eloquence” (*FP* 6.3476-7). As this last example demonstrates, when language is uttered without eloquence, it loses the civilizing effect described earlier in the digression. According to Lydgate, the lack of eloquence causes individuals to revert to the state of animals as they utter “ther speche as nakid folk & bare” (*FP* 6.3478). In a final bit of playful poetic license, Lydgate strips these citizens’ language of its rhetorical flourishes and their bodies of civilizing garments.247

The whole of Lydgate’s discussions of rhetoric and authorship suggest that he conceives of rhetoric as more firmly concerned with stylistic issues; however, it would be

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247 Compare this scene to the Peasant’s Revolt as described by Gower in the *Vox Clamantis*, 1.178, where Gower depicts the peasantry as turning into beasts through the influence of rhetorical ornamentation that pleases the senses.
reductive to suggest that Lydgate’s rhetoric privileges “Ellocucioun” at the expense of the other four canons of rhetoric. Rather, for Lydgate, rhetorical style, amplification, and ornamentation are necessary accompaniments to all orations and compositions insofar as these rhetorical features are the carving tools that translate the raw material of language into a civilizing and productive force. As I will demonstrate over the analysis of the exemplum of Cicero that closes this chapter, when this framework is translated into the political sphere, rhetorical amplification and embellishment serve as tools that allow for political performance to achieve its social aims.

**Prudent Eloquence: The Case of Cicero in Governance**

As the historical exemplum that introduces the digression and defense of rhetoric in Book 6, Lydgate’s treatment of Cicero reveals how eloquence, understood here as effective “Ellocucioun,” is necessary for political praxis. While Cicero’s life is treated fully in Book 6, Lydgate specifically references Cicero in the prologue to Book 1 and thereby engenders a didactic framework that informs the whole of his *Fürstenspiegel* project. The prologue closes with Lydgate praising the learning of the young Henry VI and his uncle, Humphrey, who commissioned Lydgate to translate the Premierfalt’s text into English for the edification of the children of the English nobility. Before introducing and flattering his patrons, Lydgate references the historical examples of Cicero, an eloquent rhetorician, who provided an education to Caesar, whom Lydgate reveres as the politician who restored Alexander’s empire and began the Age of Steel:

For in the tyme off Cesar Iulius,  
Whan the tryumphhe he wan in Rome toun,  
He entre wolde the scoole off Tullius  
And here his lecture off gret affeccioun;  
And natwithstandyng his conquest & renoun,  
Vnto bookis he gaff gret attendaunce
And hadde in stories ioye and gret pleasance (FP 1.365-71).

This reference to the relationship between Cicero and Caesar serves a dual purpose in the prologue. First, it establishes a didactic framework in which successful politicians devote themselves to learning and allow themselves to be instructed by those who possess prudent eloquence—this being, of course, the ground upon which the Fürstenspiegel genre is planted. Second, it calls particular attention to the lives of Caesar and Cicero, a historical episode that was of great interest to Lydgate in particular.248 Interestingly, in the historical exempla on Caesar and Cicero found in Book 6, any sense of rivalry between the two is elided, despite Lydgate acknowledging that Cicero warred with Antony and Octavian following the death of Caesar; instead, Caesar and Cicero are depicted each as paragons of governance and eloquence, and Rome approaches its zenith as a civilization when the two work together. By foreshadowing this important moment in both the history of the world and the composition of the Fall as a whole, Lydgate emphasizes the necessity that political speech be accompanied by stylistic competency. Indeed, in the portrait of Humphrey that follows the quick digression on Cicero and Caesar, Humphrey is explicitly praised as an aristocratic leader whose accomplishment in letters has refined his political sensibilities.

248 For example, Schirmer notes that Lydgate’s expansion on the life of Caesar represents his most substantial amplification of Premierfait’s text in Book 6 of the Fall. Walter Schirmer, John Lydgate, 219. Lydgate also treated the life of Julius Caesar in his only surviving prose work, the Serpent of Division. As Maura Nolan has argued, the Serpent of Division and the Caesar exemplum in the Fall are paradigmatic examples of the tension that exists within Lydgate’s appropriation of the De casibus tradition between “exemplarity and contingency” (116). Nolan demonstrates that Lydgate and Premierfait attempt to reconcile these two traditions through the “aesthetic of virtuous prolongation—of amplification—” which allows these authors to create a moral framework that subsumes the influence of Fortune on historical lives (119). Maura Nolan, “The Art of History Writing: Lydgate’s Serpent of Division,” Speculum 78 (2003): 99-127.
When Lydgate turns to his discussion of Cicero as a political and rhetorical figure, he again reiterates the close connection between his notions of authorship and the rhetorical act of amplification—the same rhetorical act that Cicero puts to effective use during his life in politics. At the opening of the exemplum, Lydgate translates a long digression from Boccaccio (49 lines), in which Boccaccio laments his inability to match Cicero’s eloquence as he details his life. Toward the end of this digression, Lydgate renders a direct quotation from Boccaccio that serves as a rationalization for the type of amplification that Lydgate employs throughout the *Fall*:

But for to yive occasioun  
Which in rhetorik haue mor experience  
Than haue I, & mor inspeccioun  
In the colours and craff[t] of eloquence—  
Them texcite to do their dilligence,  
Onto my writing whan they may attende  
Of compassioun my rudnesse to amende (*FP* 6.2989-96).

In this quotation, Boccaccio’s rationalization of future authors’ amplification of his own work rests not upon their capacity to elevate the truth-value of his writing. Instead, Boccaccio desires that his inheritors elevate the “rudnesse” of his language through their use of “the colours and craff[t] of eloquence.” Much like the notion of authorship that Lydgate establishes in the prologue of Book 1, authorial presence is not denoted by the act of invention or arrangement but rather by the amplification of style. As Maura Nolan has argued, in this moment, for Lydgate, style transcends its earlier associations with rote exercises and enters the conceptual level, “a mode that can be entered and exited” by the authorial voice at will.249 For a project of narrative history writing, in which truth has been determined and accepted *a priori* by the reality of the historical record, the act of

authorship is confined to the elevation of particular ethical frameworks through the amplification of language. As Lydgate renders Premierfait’s French prose into English verse, his amplifications serve to establish a theory of political practice in which political efficacy is intimately connected with eloquence and style.

In the historical exemplum on Cicero, Cicero’s rise as a politician is precipitated by the eloquence of his oratory during the Catiline conspiracy, which provides a fitting example of the relationship between style and political performance. After detailing the general plot of the conspiracy, Lydgate explains that Cicero successfully prosecutes the conspirators with “prudence & werkyng merveilous” (*FP* 6.3050). Just like in the broader discussion on rhetoric, prudence and eloquence are presented as counterparts of one another, with prudence determining the content of an oration, its ethical framework, and eloquence providing the necessary sensory stimulation that guides the audience toward accepting the truth. In contrast to Gower’s treatment of the Catiline conspiracy, Caesar is conspicuously absent, and Cicero’s successful prosecution depends not upon his plain rendering of truth but rather the “merveilous” speech that he provides. In particular, Lydgate’s use of the term “merveilous” is important to understanding the role of eloquence in the practice of politics. Although “merveilous” carries the meaning of wonderful or miraculous, in late medieval English literature, the term also connoted the overwhelming of the sensory perception. Cicero is certainly prudent in his speech prosecuting the conspiracy, but the rhetorical weight of his performance is found in the eloquence of its construction. The example of Cicero presented here supports and expands J. Allan Mitchell’s claim that Lydgate’s uptake of the rhetorical tradition presented by Gower reflects “a broader transition away from rhetorical science toward
After successfully prosecuting the conspiracy, Cicero is elevated to the position of patron of Rome and becomes the “champioun” of the city (FP 6.3078). In his capacity as governor, he enacts a government based upon “knihthod & polycie” that maintains Rome through the operation of prudence (FP 6.3080). During this time, Rome approaches its cultural zenith, with Cicero ascending to the symbolic level, as the “sunne” that illuminates Rome and the rest of the world (FP 6.3081-4). Despite the earlier description of Cicero’s focus upon “knihthod & polycie,” it is not the governmental or political machinations of Rome that illuminate the world but rather the “bemys… / Of his rhetoric & his eloquence” (FP 6.3083-4). The relationship between politics and rhetoric that is metonymized in the person of Cicero is one in which political action is subsumed under the broader category of rhetoric.

When Cicero does engage in political action, Lydgate is careful to detail that the political fruit borne by his orations are as reliant upon rhetorical performance as they are upon logic and reason. In detailing Cicero’s defense of two criminals, Lydgate inverts the typical hierarchical relationship between logic and style by emphasizing that it is “With so excellent flouryng fair langage / With such resouns concluded at the fyn” that Cicero’s speech acquits the criminals. Although this ordering does preserve the rhyme royal scheme of the Fall, in this particular model of oration, the question of stylistics supersedes the question of logic and reiterates Lydgate’s definition of rhetoric in which style and ornamentation are necessary supplements to the factual elements of a composition. As Cicero puts his oratorical skill to more direct political questions,

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Lydgate again emphasizes that it is the style of Cicero’s speech that heals the division of the Roman state following the civil war between Caesar and Pompey:

Thoruh his langage this saide Tullius
Reconsilede bi his soote orisouns
To the lordship & grace of Iulius,
Princes, kynges of dyuers regiouns (*FP* 6.3130-3).

Once again, no reference is made to the overriding logic or political concerns that may have motivated Cicero’s speech on unification. Instead, the sweetness of his orations motivates the populace to accept Caesar as their new ruler. Cicero’s orations here produce the same civilizing effect that the broader category of eloquence has on the human condition, as defined in the defense of rhetoric that follows the Cicero exemplum. This political moment encapsulates the broader argument that Lydgate forwards through his translation of Premierfait. Rhetorical practice and political practices are co-constitutive, but eloquence, the act of amplification, is the vivifying force that makes political action possible through the creation of assent. As the historical life of Cicero closes, Lydgate exemplifies Cicero’s eloquence and the political goodwill that it provided him throughout his life: “His langage made hym stonde in grace / And be preferrid during al his lyff” (*FP* 6.3153-4). The effective rhetorician imagined by Lydgate is neither the grammatical interpreter of Salisbury nor the ethical moralizer of Gower. Lydgate’s rhetorician is one who understands the affordances of style and leverages those affordances to achieve political persuasion.

**Conclusion**

Compared to the earlier treatments of rhetoric in the *Fürstenspiegel* of Salisbury and Gower, the definition and depiction of vernacular rhetoric found in the *Fall of Princes* decisively separates rhetorical practice from its close association with
philosophy, logic, and ethics. This is not to suggest that Lydgate as an author and theorist understood rhetoric as unconcerned with these issues. He fully defines rhetoric as fundamentally governed by prudence, but, as a vernacular translator, he pays attention generally to the cannon of “Ellocucioun” and specifically to the role of amplification in rhetorical ornamentation in the establishment of authority. As I have suggested, Lydgate’s conservative reorientation of rhetoric under the epistemological category of rational science reflects the extent to which rhetoric had become professionalized both within the secondary schools of late medieval England and the king’s curia. Lydgate’s specific interest in the rhetorical figure of amplification likely descended from the school exercises that he completed as a student at Edmund St. Bury’s in which he would have been charged with creating his own refined Latin prose and verse compositions from vernacular exemplars. Indeed, the primary concern of Lydgatean poetics involved the elevation of vernacular English through aureate stylistics.

The example of Lydgate, then, I hope, demonstrates that the relationship between the definitions of rhetoric found in medieval Fürstenspiegel and the broader culture of medieval rhetorical practice did not follow a singular path of influence. Unlike the academic and scholastic influence present in Salisbury and Gower, Lydgate’s definition of rhetoric is indebted much more to the basic literacy practices found in secondary schools and to the rise of vernacular authorship, as represented by figures such as Chaucer. As a result, the rhetorical-political actor depicted by Lydgate is more concerned with matters of rhetorical performance than with firmly grounding rhetorical practice within existing philosophical and ethical frameworks. As rhetoric became increasingly professionalized as a discipline and legitimized as a suitable course of study for the
young nobility, rhetoric itself no longer needed to cling so tightly to culturally accepted forms of knowledge, such as philosophy and ethics, for purposes of legitimation. By the mid-fifteenth century, in the figure of Lydgate as poet-translator, we see the logical conclusion of rhetoric as defined in the Fürstenspiegel. Unshackled from its torturous treatment in the inherited Aristotelian tradition, rhetoric is free to focus upon the stylistics of performance that return rhetoric to its civic function of persuading the political state.
CHAPTER V

THE FÜRSTENSPiegel AND MEDIEVAL RHETORICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY

At the outset of this dissertation, I argued that the field of medieval rhetorical historiography has long overlooked the rhetorical contributions of the Fürstenspiegel genre because its discussion of rhetoric often draws upon literary exempla in favor of meta-rhetorical treatises that explicitly treat rhetorical theory and figures. Further, I suggested that the field’s preference for analyzing these types of texts within a tradition of inheritance, adaptation, and innovation often divorced rhetorical theory from rhetorical practice. When reading through rhetorical historiography, one may get the impression that rhetoric during the medieval period was practiced exclusively in schools and universities rather than royal and legal courts. However, the case studies presented here demonstrate that the rhetorical practices and depictions of rhetoric found in medieval English Fürstenspiegel reflected the broader medieval culture of rhetorical practice that extended beyond academic spheres of influence. The rhetorical practices of the Fürstenspiegel genre exemplify the rhetorical culture that Richard McKeon described:

In application, the art of rhetoric contributed during the period from the fourth to the fourteenth century not only to the methods of speaking and writing well, of composing letters and petitions, sermons and prayers, legal documents and briefs, poetry and prose, but to the canons of interpreting laws and scripture, to the dialectical devices of discovery and proof, to the establishment of the scholastic method which was to come into universal use in philosophy and theology, and

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finally to the formulation of scientific inquiry which was to separate philosophy from theology.²⁵²

The intent of this dissertation is not to relitigate what McKeon correctly claimed 80 years ago but rather to argue that the Fürstenspiegel serves as a tradition in which medieval rhetorical, hermeneutical, ethical, and political questions intersect. For the field of medieval rhetorical historiography, the Fürstenspiegel can provide a gateway for analyzing the constellation of relations that constitute medieval rhetorical culture.

Although the rhetorical case studies here certainly conceive of rhetoric in significantly different ways, the commonalities found in their treatments of rhetoric have implications for the field of medieval rhetorical historiography and its understanding of deliberative rhetoric as a productive and intervening force in medieval society. To summarize, this dissertation makes four interventions in medieval rhetorical historiography that productively supplement ongoing conversations in the field. For the remainder of this conclusion, I will detail these interventions and suggest potential areas for future research that extend the project of this dissertation.

I: The Fürstenspiegel tradition traces the recovery of Aristotle

As texts that grapple directly with Aristotelian theory, both in their fictional historical framework and in their discussions of natural science and ethics, Fürstenspiegel provide a productive object of analysis for considering the relationship between the recovery of Aristotle and the development of rhetorical theory. In the same manner that Rita Copeland has argued that Aristotle’s Rhetoric was primarily taken up in medieval England for its interpretation of the emotions and depiction of social psychology,²⁵³ the

case studies presented in this dissertation suggest that, within political and pedagogical contexts, Aristotelian theory did not influence the writers of Fürstenspiegel through its specific treatment of rhetorical theory but rather provided a scientific and ethical framework upon which authors could translate their rhetorical theory into actual practice. The Aristotelian theory found in Fürstenspiegel provides an excellent political and literary complement to Charles Brigg’s discussion of the commentary tradition on Aristotle’s Rhetoric in the medieval university from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. As Briggs has demonstrated, in these commentaries, exegesis focused less upon the “formal elements” of rhetoric articulated by Aristotle and more upon “its fundamental role in moral psychology, practical theology, and political science.”

Indeed, of the three rhetoricians presented in this study, only John of Salisbury drew directly upon Aristotelian rhetorical theory—the discussion of induction found in Book 8 of the Topics—in his own depiction of rhetorical practice. While John of Salisbury certainly engages with Aristotelian theories of language throughout the Metalogicon, his lack of access to Aristotle’s Rhetoric leads him to reconcile Ciceronian definitions of rhetoric with Aristotelian dialectical-rhetorical methodology. As a consequence, John of Salisbury subordinated rhetoric along with dialectic under the larger category of logic, producing a theory of rhetoric that possesses no substantive discipline of its own but rather provides a scientific methodology for engaging in other disciplines.

When later authors such as John Gower and John Lydgate engaged with Aristotelian thought, they incorporated Aristotle primarily as an ethical and political theorist. In part, this reflects the emerging sub-tradition of vernacular rhetoric that emerged through the influence of Dante and Brunetto Latini, which Gower drew upon and which, through Gower’s influence, Lydgate would later draw upon. At the same time, however, Gower’s and Lydgate’s uptake of Aristotle as it relates to rhetorical theory is primarily associated with the manner in which rhetorical speech and composition affects the sensitive part of the soul. For Gower, the danger of rhetorical practice is found in its potential for exciting individuals to pursue their own desires rather than common profit. In the case of Gower, his repositioning of Aristotelian theory as an ethical framework upon which rhetorical efficacy must be measured reveals his deep ambivalence about rhetoric as a political practice. In his discussion of rhetoric, Gower emphasizes that the orator’s expression of plain truth proceeds from his virtuous disposition, based upon the cardinal virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. For Lydgate, eloquence provides a fundamentally civilizing force that accesses the sensitive part of the soul to soothe animalistic nature. Contrary to Gower, Lydgate understands eloquence as necessary for the development of both reason and persuasion. Although he still conceives of a close relationship between rhetoric and ethics, as evidenced by his emphasis on prudent eloquence, in Lydgate, Gower’s overarching Aristotelian framework and epistemological elevation of rhetoric has receded in importance in favor of an emphasis on stylistics and performance.

As these examples demonstrate, the medieval inheritance of Aristotle did not necessarily proceed in a straightforward and chronological matter. Even as later authors
had access to the full Aristotelian *Organon*, they did not necessarily take up the Aristotelian texts that are most commonly associated with rhetorical theory. Within the *Fürstenspiegel* tradition, John of Salisbury’s treatment of the first four books of the *Organon* was not widely taken up by the authors who followed him in defining and depicting deliberative rhetoric, even though there is ample evidence that Gower, in particular, was familiar with John’s *Policraticus*.\(^{255}\) Instead, once the *Nicomachean Ethics* was recovered, it became the primary Aristotelian text associated with the *Fürstenspiegel* genre, primarily through the influence of the widely circulating *De regimine principum*.\(^{256}\) Alongside the study of Aristotle within the schools and universities of the Latin West, analyzing the uptake of Aristotle within the *Fürstenspiegel* tradition offers a glimpse of Aristotelian theory as it was put into practice. Future work in this direction should aim to explore how and why particular Aristotelian texts fell in and out of favor within this political genre. Doing so will open an avenue toward understanding more completely how the recovery of Aristotle inflected political questions of the later medieval period, most prominently the dispute between hierocratic and democratic theories of the establishment of government.

**II: *Fürstenspiegel* reveal rhetorical practice to be intimately connected to the virtue of prudence**

In line with the Ciceronian conception of rhetoric that persisted into the medieval period, the *Fürstenspiegel* authors considered here viewed prudence as both a rhetorical norm and the virtue that governs rhetorical practice. As Jordan Loveridge has argued


\(^{256}\) Charles F. Briggs, *Giles of Rome’s De Regimine Principum: Reading and Writing Politics at Court and University, c.1275-c.1525* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 11.
through his reading of Thomas Aquinas, “rhetoric and deliberation function as parts of prudence in that each seeks to close a divide between singular and universal reasoning, thereby enabling individuals to make particular choices.”

When Ciceronian and Aristotelian definitions of rhetoric became translated into the lens of practical action that informed the composition of Fürstenspiegel, rhetorical practice became even more closely associated with virtue ethics since prudence was the virtue that allowed the sovereign “to rule over those of lesser understanding.”

Despite prudence clearly informing medieval conceptions of rhetoric, the relationship between rhetoric and prudence has been relatively understudied in medieval rhetorical historiography. The definitions of rhetoric in medieval Fürstenspiegel provide ample evidence not only that prudence governed rhetorical practice but also that the relationship between prudence and rhetoric was taken up in different ways across the medieval period.

Across the Fürstenspiegel analyzed in this dissertation, prudence functions as a capacity that makes rhetorical intervention possible by confirming the individual’s movement toward virtuous action, in this case promoting the common profit of the community above individual desire. John of Salisbury associated rhetoric with prudence even beyond the perceptual framework established by Aristotle and Cicero. For John, prudence governs rhetorical practice, but prudence itself is developed as the individual applies the Aristotelian rhetorical-dialectical methodology to contingent situations. By applying a systematic method for determining the truth, the rhetorician trains the capacity of discernment that aids prudence in confirming the impulse toward virtue. According to

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Gower, prudence is connected with rhetorical practice by governing the process of internal deliberation. For Gower, the possession of prudence and its concomitant virtue of chastity functions to prevent the rhetorician from employing ornamented speech that produces excessive sensory pleasure within the audience. At the same time, Gower also recognizes the potential for rhetorical practice to develop prudence in the individual. To account for the prince’s lack of experience, Gower employs exempla that provide the prince with the opportunity to practice connecting contingent situations to universal principles, which he places under the epistemological category of rhetoric. In Lydgate’s rhetorical system of “prudent eloquence,” Lydgate presupposes that a prudent nature accompanies rhetorical practice. Consequently, Lydgate’s discussion of rhetoric reorients prudence from the theoretical foundation that informs rhetoric to the capacity that allows for the reemergence of stylistics as a major component of rhetorical practice. These conceptions of the relationship between rhetoric and prudence suggest that virtues such as prudence were not completely static categories during the medieval period but rather were leveraged to fit within the rhetorical and political paradigms forwarded by individual authors.

Viewing prudence less as an all-encompassing category and more as a component of rhetorical practice provides new avenues for analyzing medieval conceptions of rhetoric. In particular, Chaucer’s Tale of Melibee, in which Dame Prudence counsels her husband Melibee, has not been fully considered as a rhetorical text despite containing many of the hallmarks of the Fürstenspiegel genre. Although David Wallace has argued that Chaucer incorporates knowledge of the artes dicendi and tacendi in his depiction of
rhetoric in the *Tale of Melibee* and the *Manciple’s Tale*,\(^{259}\) his discussion of rhetoric within these tales elides the extent to which the virtue of prudence determines the course of rhetorical practice both inside and outside the domestic sphere. As it pivots toward considering the *Fürstenspiegel* as an explicitly rhetorical genre, the field of medieval rhetorical historiography must also trace how the Aristotelian ethical categories that informed medieval definitions of rhetoric were treated differently according to the needs of individual authors. The medieval uptake of prudence suggests the presence of a rhetorical tradition that did not merely reflect classical learning but actively engaged with it.

**III: *Fürstenspiegel* consistently use historical exempla to depict rhetorical practice and enact rhetorical theory**

As these three case studies show, when *Fürstenspiegel* pivoted from discussing rhetorical theory to demonstrating actual rhetorical practice, they did not do so through the compilation of rhetorical figures and exempla but rather demonstrated rhetorical efficacy through literary narrative. The examples provided by these *Fürstenspiegel* strongly point to evidence of a medieval rhetorical tradition that extends beyond the three meta-rhetorical handbooks identified by James Murphy. Although Murphy has identified literary exempla as a constituent element of the *ars preadicandi* tradition,\(^{260}\) the rhetorical importance of exempla as the containers for rhetorical advice has been relatively understudied in medieval rhetorical historiography. As one of the premier generic conventions of medieval literature, the exemplum has been analyzed in modern


scholarship as a means for establishing doctrinal and cultural authority,\textsuperscript{261} as the means by which the ethical frameworks governing sovereignty were constructed,\textsuperscript{262} and as a tool for maintaining and challenging the unity both between author, text, and reader and the general unity of the political state through the use of fiction.\textsuperscript{263} In addition to the cultural, ethical, and didactic frameworks constituted by exempla, the historical exempla used by authors such as John of Salisbury, John Gower, and John Lydgate construct rhetorical frameworks—both in that they depict effective rhetorical practice and in that they themselves are rhetorical constructions adapted by their authors to articulate particular theoretical precepts.

The consistent use of historical, rather than literary or mythological, exempla by these three Fürstenspiegel authors to define and depict rhetorical practice points toward a culture of rhetorical counsel in which rhetorical and historical education are co-constitutive. Although Richard Firth Green has already detailed that the contents of the libraries of the English aristocracy were filled primarily by grammatical and historical texts,\textsuperscript{264} the field of medieval rhetorical historiography has traditionally interpreted the relationship between medieval conceptions of rhetoric and history through the lens of recovery, transmission, and influence instead of through an explicitly didactic framework. The turn within the Fürstenspiegel toward teaching rhetoric through historical example corresponds to the medieval practice of teaching rhetoric through

\begin{thebibliography}{1}
\bibitem{33} Elizabeth Allen, \textit{False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature} (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 67.
\bibitem{34} Richard Firth Green, \textit{Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 161.
\end{thebibliography}
exercitatio, the imitation of authors. In the same manner that medieval students learned rhetorical composition by imitating the literary examples found in their school texts, medieval princes developed their prudence by imitating the virtuous actions of their historical forebearers. For Salisbury, Gower, and Lydgate, the truth provided by the historical narrative bolstered their authority both as literary authors capable of adapting the historical record to reflect their own political systems and as teachers disciplining the sovereignty of the prince under ethical frameworks. This interplay between history and rhetoric in the Fürstenspiegel is fittingly represented by the marginal Latin glosses found in Book 7 of the Confessio Amantis. According to Janet Coleman, although Gower’s marginal glosses that purport to provide moral exegesis often complicate the moral communicated by the exempla found in the Confessio, when Gower glosses his historical sources, such as Livy, his exegesis always renders the literal truth of the historical record. The historical exemplum functions as a tool for teaching rhetoric precisely because the truth of its narrative is accepted a priori. The stability of the literal interpretation of the historical exemplum affords its author the opportunity to heighten the example’s allegorical and tropological senses, which, in this case, provides a rhetorical education.

The extent to which Fürstenspiegel authors used exempla to articulate rhetorical theory further erodes contemporary distinctions between literature and rhetoric as disciplines. According to Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, by the twelfth century in the Latin West, foundational concepts on composition held by rhetorical theory came to inform medieval definitions of literary genres insofar as “the articulation of form is

treated as a dimension of representation, not as a separate process.” As these case studies reveal, during the medieval period, stark delineations between grammar and rhetoric had become blurred. Though much recent scholarship in rhetorical historiography has challenged the notion that literary and the rhetorical were distinct disciplines, the case of the *Fürstenspiegel* decisively demonstrates that texts that are considered “literary” today clearly articulated rhetorical theory and depicted rhetorical practices. Expanding the historical archive studied by medieval rhetorical historiography to include nominally literary texts can supplement the field’s excellent work in recovering the textual traditions that constituted medieval rhetoric. For an archive in which records of rhetorical practice are limited or, in the case of chronicle histories, presented from a particularly biased perspective, the historical exemplum provides an object of analysis that scholars can draw upon to understand how medieval authors imagined classical rhetoric in practice. At the same time, through the careful review of the sources that informed medieval history writing, the field can also trace how medieval authors adapted these depictions of rhetorical practice to account both for the cultural and political systems dominant during the medieval period and its burgeoning rhetorical theory. In so doing, additional texts that have not necessarily been considered rhetorical, such as Salisbury’s *Historia Ponticalis* and Lydgate’s *Serpent of Division*, become open to consideration as rhetorical texts.

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IV: Fürstenspiegel provide politically and culturally specific instantiations of deliberative rhetorical theory

As the various parts of Aristotle’s corpus were being recovered, particular authors took up different aspects of Aristotelian theory according to the needs of the political theory their Fürstenspiegel expressed. The collected case studies trace instantiations of deliberative rhetorical theory that are specifically designed for the political systems forwarded by each Fürstenspiegel author. By situating rhetorical theory within the larger political aims of the Fürstenspiegel, Salisbury, Gower, and Lydgate collectively demonstrate what has often been overlooked in scholarship on medieval politics—namely, that, despite traditional beliefs that the rise of monarchism during the medieval period foreclosed the possibility for deliberative rhetorical practice, rhetoric itself was foundational to the development of political theory for these authors. Although medieval rhetorical historiography has recovered deliberative rhetoric as a practice during the medieval period, primarily through the act of counsel268 and the development of the communal voice,269 these treatments of deliberative rhetoric reflect a tendency within historiography to adopt a totalizing perspective when discussing the development of rhetorical theory.270 However, as this dissertation’s methodology indicates, when medieval rhetoricians are treated individually rather than as representatives of larger trends, it becomes possible to isolate the specific interventions made by each author to

deliberative rhetorical theory and to analyze how these adaptations were inflected within the political theory espoused by a given Fürstenspiegel. Further, by tracing these interventions within the broader medieval culture of rhetorical practice, it becomes evident that the definitions of rhetoric developed by Fürstenspiegel authors had purchase outside the pages of the text.

In short, although the theories of deliberative rhetoric found in medieval Fürstenspiegel share superficial similarities, their specific instantiations reflect their authors’ preferred modes of governance. For John of Salisbury, Aristotle provided a systematic methodology that served as an alternative to the theory of natural talent espoused by Cornificius and his followers. In the hands of a sovereign, Aristotle’s rhetorical-dialectical methodology allowed for the distinction between effective didactic criticism and flattery that worked to separate the sovereign from true self-knowledge. By employing this rhetorical-dialectical methodology, the sovereign learns to interpret the civic law in line with natural law and thereby subsumes a portion of his sovereignty under the Church. Given Gower’s absolutist tendencies, his marriage of plain rhetorical speech with Aristotelian virtue ethics allowed for a deliberative rhetorical system that centered the sovereign’s interpretation of contingent situations that may be difficult to comprehend for a populace who lacks the deliberative capacities of the sovereign. Gower’s skepticism of the sensual nature of language can be traced back to Gower’s negative experience with eloquence during the Peasant’s Revolt of 1381. At the same time, by requiring that rhetoricians possess a perfect orientation to virtue, Gower crafts a political system that limits the potential for a prince to turn to tyrannical and appetitive rule. Under the Gowerian model, the pairing of rhetoric with virtue reorients aim of
deliberative rhetoric toward the act of internal deliberation. Finally, by the fifteenth century, Lydgate leverages the increasing legitimacy of rhetoric as a discipline to construct a theory of deliberative rhetoric in which stylistics and ornamentation are necessary for effective political oration. In so doing, he reimagines the orator in the image of the poet, as a mechanical craftsman who amplifies the raw material of language according to the design of the ideal form held within his intellect. Through the example of Cicero and Caesar, Lydgate calls upon the English nobility to employ rhetoric to refine their political sensibilities. These three examples capture the expansive way in which rhetoric was conceived within the Fürstenspiegel tradition.

Although this dissertation is limited in its implications insofar as it only examines three Fürstenspiegel in the context of English politics and education within a relatively short period of time, the widespread circulation of the Fürstenspiegel genre in the Latin West provides an opportunity for considering local examples of the relationship between rhetoric and politics. The persistence of the Fürstenspiegel across temporal and political borders during the medieval period makes it an ideal genre for investigating specific uptakes of and adaptations to deliberative rhetorical theory. Even within the English tradition, this dissertation has not examined the definitions of rhetoric found in prominent Fürstenspiegel, especially the Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne, Thomas Hoccleve’s The Regiment of Princes, or John Trevisa’s middle English translation of Giles of Rome’s De regimine principum. By reading these texts against and across the political and cultural milieu in which they circulated, medieval rhetorical historiography can analyze how definitions and depictions of rhetorical practice shifted in response to moments of political crisis. For example, reading the composition of Hoccleve’s Regiment concurrent
with the Lancastrian attempt to legitimate their claim to the throne of England through textual means is an obvious avenue for future research on the relationship between rhetoric and politics. Through the careful comparison of the rhetorical theory found in Forstenspiegel and the immediate cultural and political situations surrounding their composition, we can move toward a conception of medieval rhetoric that extends beyond the theoretical discussions of rhetoric found in meta-rhetorical treatises and handbooks.

Concluding Remarks

The intent of this dissertation has never been to suggest that the medieval English Forstenspiegel under consideration here form a coherent or chronological development of deliberative rhetorical theory. Rather, I believe, the strength of this dissertation lies in accepting medieval theorists’ definitions and depictions of rhetoric in their own terms and in displaying the multiplicity of traditions that comprise the larger category of medieval deliberative rhetoric. While the Forstenspiegel genre, as a whole, attempts to create a normativizing historical and ethical framework, the rhetorical theories that populate the genre imbue its audience with multiple strategies for engaging in rhetorical invention and intervention. The continued and careful study of rhetoric in the Forstenspiegel can only enliven the scholarly conversation on medieval rhetoric by offering visions of rhetoric that are as individual as their authors.
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Publications

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Teaching Experience

Certifications and Awards

Faculty Favorite Nominee (2018-19)
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ENGL 203: British Literature I (Fall 2014)
• Sophomore level survey course for non-majors focused on prose before 1660; major authors include, Julian of Norwich, Thomas Malory, and Queen Elizabeth.

ENGL 102: Intermediate College Writing (3 sections)
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University Service

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Presenter, *Composition Program Orientation, Active Learning: Gallery Walk*, University of Louisville. Fall 2019

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