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Grammars and Rhetorics

Ian Cornelius
icornelius@luc.edu

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“Grammars and Rhetorics,” in *The Encyclopedia of Medieval Literature in Britain*, eds. Siân Echard and Richard Rouse (John Wiley & Sons, 2017)

Ian Cornelius
Loyola University Chicago, USA

Grammars and Rhetorics. What is called “western civilization” is, perhaps, a fusion of the Roman imperial state and an Abrahamic religion of salvation. Both components of this geminate cultural form depend profoundly on the written word; western societies have therefore required, at minimum, a continuous supply of literate servants, and this need was met during the Middle Ages by the teaching of Latin. Latin was the language of the western church; it was also the language in which secular authorities across most of medieval western Europe conducted their core literate activities. The treatises developed for and employed in the teaching of elementary and advanced Latin literacy are here termed grammars and rhetorics. By their shifting shapes and contents, they track deep changes in the social conditioning of literacy and social demands upon it. These treatises also sustained and informed specifically literary practices of reading and writing.

Inheritance and Innovation: An Overview

The topic requires a continental perspective. In the European cultural orbit, the study of language and provision of formalized instruction in its use were pioneered in Greece beginning in the fifth century BCE – a historical ancestry visible in the words “grammar” and “rhetoric” themselves. The ancient Greek word *grámmata* (plural of *grámma*, “letter”) means “documents” or “literature.” The skill proper to literary reading was termed *grammatiké*. Prized as an element of Greek cultural identity, literary studies also prepared the student for subsequent training in the language of political enterprise. From Plato forward, *rhētoriké* named the skill proper to public speaking, while a *rhētōr* was a public speaker, or someone who taught this skill. The Greek literary curriculum attained its definitive form in the third century BCE. In the following century that curriculum was adopted in Rome, where it became the basis of a newly articulated bilingual (Greek–Latin) pedagogy that persisted, in attenuated form, through the fifth century CE.

The foundations of Latin rhetoric were laid down in the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, the treatises of Cicero, and Quintilian’s *Institutio oratoria*, all products of the great flowering of rhetorical study in Rome in the first centuries BCE and CE. Acutely aware of the criticisms leveled at rhetoric, the Roman rhetoricians announced their disciplinary aim as the formation of “a good man skilled in speaking” (*vir bonus dicendi peritus*). The ethical component received fullest treatment in Cicero’s dialogues and in his prologue to *De inventione*. The technical component – to teach effective speaking – was easier to schematize. Rhetoric taught how to find ideas adequate to an occasion, arrange them, express the ideational arrangement in effective language, commit that language to memory, and deliver the remembered composition before an audience (*inventio, dispositio, elocutio, memoria, and pronuntiatio*, respectively). Students would

practice *elocutio* in short composition drills on set topics (*progymnasmata, praeexercitamina*); longer exercises in declamation pro and contra (the *suasoria* and *controversiae*, again on set topics), afforded training in the whole five-step process.

Preparation for this study was supplied in the Roman grammar schools. There students were drilled in matters of correct usage and introduced to the semi-artificial language of literature. These two charges were summed up as *recte loquendi scientia poetarumque enarratio* (“knowledge of correct usage and interpretation of the poets”). The method was analytic-synthetic, grasping language as a system of constituent parts. The letters of the alphabet were classified according to the quality of their speech sounds. One then showed how letters form syllables in combination, and how syllables group into feet, which give structure to the prose clause and poetic line. Grammar-school students already knew how to read: they now developed a conceptual relation to written language. A second series of divisions operated over the lexicon: words were classified into eight “parts of speech” (noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, participle, conjunction, preposition, and interjection) and their properties enumerated. The concepts and vocabulary elaborated in these first two exercises were then applied to actual verbal constructions in the stream of discourse. Deviations from ordinary usage would be identified, named, and assessed. These three analytic series – bearing upon the syllable, the lexicon, and the utterance, respectively – correspond to the three parts of Aelius Donatus’s *Ars maior*, one of the most influential grammatical treatises of the early Middle Ages. The first part (henceforth *Ars maior* 1) treats letters and syllables. The second, *Ars maior* 2, treats the parts of speech. *Ars maior* 3 elaborates the vocabulary that students would employ in analysis of literary texts (*enarratio poetarum*) and assessment of their own trial compositions.

Donatus taught in the middle of the fourth century CE, a placement indicative of historical asymmetries between the paired disciplines of grammar and rhetoric. Although grammatical studies developed in Rome simultaneously with rhetoric, the ancient grammars are almost wholly lost, presumably because decommissioned in a process of continuous curricular renovation. New treatises tended to draw heavily on earlier ones, and this fact encouraged superannuation, so long as the basic pedagogical system endured. The subsequent breakup of the Roman Empire interrupted ordinary processes of pedagogical reproduction and lent retrospective authority to the classroom tools then in use. Medieval grammatical studies were founded on textbooks composed around the Mediterranean basin between the fourth and sixth centuries, and Donatus’s name became synonymous with grammar.

Rhetoric followed a different track, in two senses. First, the new treatises composed and compiled in late antiquity failed to eclipse the treatises of the classical period (though they came close). Second, whereas medieval grammatical studies were coextensive with Latin literacy, the study of rhetoric was comparatively limited. Cicero’s *De inventione* and other classical and late antique treatises always commanded attention in certain quarters, but the particulars (that is, which texts were available, and where) shifted from one century to the next, and the stream of transmission was very thin between the sixth century and the eleventh. If there were rhetoricians in Roman Britain, their books were subsequently lost. With a few exceptions, treatises of rhetoric then remained unavailable on the British Isles until the twelfth century.

Though an unequal pair, grammar and rhetoric were contiguous in concept; they are rightly treated together. From the classical and late antique discipline of grammar, medieval students and teachers derived the following:

- elementary instruction in the forms of the Latin language;
- a conception of language as a rational and divisible system;
- an enabling introduction to the artificial language of Latin quantitative verse; and
- a practice of slow, close, and meticulous reading.

Rhetorics supplied schematizations and practical advice bearing on higher-order aspects of composition:

- a stadial, or sequenced, conception of literary craft (from *inventio* to *pronuntiatio*);
- an anatomy of compositions (they have a beginning, middle, and end, each involving its own strategic choices);
- a notion of graduated levels of style (high, middle, and low); and
- the basic idea that verbal skill may be learned.

Grammars and rhetorics alike supplied a typology of expressive devices (the grammatical schemes and tropes; the rhetorical figures). Finally, the most important medieval innovations were these:

- grammars addressed to the new problem of teaching Latin as a foreign language;
- language study refocused on the Bible and interpretation of it;
- the replacement of a bilingual Greek–Latin pedagogy with bilingual pedagogies in which Latin was paired with a local vernacular;
- philosophical inquiries into the mechanics of signification; and
- instruction in new, nonclassical varieties of Latin verse and prose, and in genres unknown to or underserved by classical rhetoric.

These phenomena were distributed unevenly over a period of 11 centuries. To unpack the array and expose individual developments to visibility, we need to examine the chronology.

After Empire (Beginnings to 600)

The Roman historian Tacitus claimed that the British nobility, subjugated by Roman military might, clamored to have their sons educated in the Latin language. Although Tacitus's ethnographic writings are sharply inflected by ulterior motives (the virtuous barbarian points up the dissolute Roman), teachers of Latin grammar and rhetoric probably did offer their services in Britain, as they did in other imperial provinces. Evidence of grammatico-rhetorical training must now be pieced together from the archeological record (literate artifacts include verse epigraphy

and mosaic scenes from the *Aeneid*) and some few surviving writings and life trajectories. The career of Pelagius (fl. 380–418) unfolded in the Mediterranean world, but his purpose in leaving Britain for Rome – to study rhetoric and law – would have been practicable only after a thorough grammatical training, which he must have acquired in Britain. Gildas (fifth/sixth century) may have received parts of his education in Gaul, but he wrote for a British audience; his *De excidio Britanniae* implies that the traditional Roman education remained relevant in some British circles well after the Roman colonial project had failed (Lapidge 1984).

The grammatico-rhetorical attainments of Pelagius and Gildas are confirmed by comparison with St. Patrick, a third member of the Romanized British aristocracy: his writings lack the grammarian's concern for standard usage. By emphasizing that he lacked formal education, Patrick implies that higher attainments were possible, but he also illustrates the rift that Christianity introduced into late antique Latinity. Christianity could not repudiate *grammatica*, but it could and did repudiate the literary and secular curriculum that had previously housed *grammatica*. Henceforth, this discipline would need to acknowledge the priority of the Bible over the pagan poets and orators. Though ideological at heart, curricular change also responded to political disarray, resource scarcity, and migration.

Missionary Grammar (600–800)

The first migration of significance was the migration of Christianity itself. When Patrick and other British missionaries brought the new faith to the Irish and the Picts, they encountered circumstances fundamentally different from those that attended the introduction of Christianity into Roman Britain in the third century. Ireland and Scotland had remained free from Roman domination; accordingly, there was no stratum of Latin-speakers who might provide a linguistic foothold for the new religion. This was a novel situation for all parties involved, but it was replicated two centuries later, when Irish and Roman missionaries set about converting the Germanic peoples who, in the interim, had settled over much of what is now called England. The landmark dates here are the Roman Church's mission to Kent in 597, the Irish mission to Northumbria in 634, and the arrival of Theodore and Hadrian at Canterbury in 669. Like the fifth-century Irish, the seventh-century Anglo-Saxons had to be taught Latin from scratch.

The existing Latin grammars were inadequate to this task, for they were designed to initiate Roman 12-year-olds into metalinguistic awareness. The child's game of pointing at things and naming them was folded back onto the language itself: its parts could be isolated and named, and their qualities enumerated. The student's language – the one he or she learned in the nursery and, more recently, learned to recognize in written form – was revealed to consist of such things as proper and common nouns, inchoative and frequentative verbs, the three degrees of the preterite, and so on. Donatus declined only a single verb in full, for that was sufficient to show native speakers of Latin what their teacher meant by, for example, the pluperfect tense. Irish and Anglo-Saxon clergy-in-training needed something else entirely. They needed to see the full array of conjugations for at least one verb from each of the four major inflectional classes, plus full

conjugations of each of the irregular verbs. Likewise, they needed to see examples of each of the five major inflectional classes of Latin nouns.

The paradigms omitted by Donatus could be found in other late antique grammars. In the fifth and sixth centuries, Continental grammarians had begun collecting the missing information and interpolating it into Donatus's *Ars minor* (the shorter of his two treatises, corresponding in content to *Ars maior* 2). These same Continental grammarians also refocused grammatical instruction on Christianity: *ecclesia* ("church") replaced *musa* ("muse") as an example of a feminine noun; some illustrative quotations from the Roman poets were replaced with quotations from the Bible and Christian poets. Though begun on the Continent, this cultural retrofit was perfected on the British Isles, yielding a new kind of grammar textbook, focused on the inflecting parts of speech and on the vocabulary of the Latin church (Law 1982, 53-56). The elementary grammars are mostly anonymous. One is by the Anglo-Saxon cleric Tatwine (d. 734); another was compiled by his compatriot Boniface, probably before 716.

Donatus's treatises remained useful at higher stages of study, but his terse expositions needed elucidation. This, too, began on the Continent. Within decades of composition, the *Ars maior* had become the object of minute exegetical attention, comparable to the commentaries on the *Aeneid*, other school texts, and the Bible. Insular scholars studied the late antique commentaries and produced new ones. It is a challenging genre. The commentators' repeated questions ("What did Donatus mean by this?") echo the catechetical mode of the *Ars minor*, but also sound like a teacher's efforts to awaken students to a topic that involves much rote memorization. Similarly, the commentators' habit of volunteering bits of Hebrew or Greek could be justified as preparation for reading the Church Fathers, but also sounds like an effort to break the monotony of expounding Latin grammar.

The restlessness that might be engendered by grammatical studies is never so evident as in a collection of writings issued sometime in the second half of the seventh century under the name Vergilius Maro Grammaticus. Where commentators on Donatus sought to instill correct usage and an arsenal of technical vocabulary, Vergilius's fabulous parodies inspire something akin to critical thought. Why is this language, which absorbs so much of our time, formed just so and not otherwise? It is possible that Vergilius worked on the Continent; however, the flowering of grammatical study in seventh- and eight-century Ireland and England is evident in an array of other texts, extending well beyond the elementary grammars and commentaries. These include the Old Irish *Auraicept na nÉces* (The scholar's primer) (the earliest grammatical description of a west European vernacular), Bede's *De schematibus et tropis*, and treatises on Latin prosody and verse forms.

De schematibus et tropis is a lucid presentation of the grammatical devices of expression and ornament, transposed into a wholly Christian field of reference. Bede's treatment derives from *Ars maior* 3, but, where Donatus drew illustrative quotations from the Roman poets, Bede quotes the Bible. Moreover, Bede recognized that the replacement of illustrative quotations was insufficient on its own: before the grammatical vocabulary of style could serve as a tool of scriptural exegesis, grammar would need to acknowledge the unique signifying powers of the Bible. Bede addressed this problem in his celebrated treatment of allegory. After first supplying

the basic grammatico-rhetorical definition of this trope (according to which allegory says one thing and means another) he issued a caveat that allegory can occur in events (*factis*) as well as text (*verbis*). Historical events, too, can refer beyond themselves. An exposition of the four senses of scripture follows and closes out the treatise. From the rudimentary matter of grammar, Bede's *De schematibus et tropis* ascends into theological semiotics.

Perhaps surprisingly, the Anglo-Saxons also composed treatises on Latin prosody and verse forms. In the fourth and fifth centuries, Christians who studied Roman poetry in the traditional grammar schools sometimes employed the classical measures for poems on Christian subjects; by doing so, they ensured that versification would retain some continuing presence in the reorganized curriculum of the Christian schools. Metre figured among the subjects taught by Theodore and Hadrian in Canterbury late in the seventh century. Aldhelm, who was briefly a student there, excelled in this area: he wrote a substantial corpus of poetry in dactylic hexameters, plus instructions for composition in this form. In both respects, he was a pioneer among non-native speakers of Latin, as he himself recognized.

Aldhelm's efforts were soon joined by Bede's more versatile *De arte metrica*. By combining instruction in prosody and verse forms, Bede's textbook provides a concise, unitary treatment of the principles and variety of Latin quantitative verse – the first of its kind (Leonhardt 1989, 76–77). In a second development, Bede registered the existence of nonquantitative or “rhythmical” Latin poetry. Although attested since the fourth century, nonquantitative Latin verse was ignored or treated with hostility by earlier grammarians. Bede's reason for granting it a mention was, however, the same as the principle governing his selection of quantitative forms: he taught those verse types used by Christian poets. His resolute focus on Christian writers was a third innovation in the teaching of Latin poetry, and fully consistent with his practice in *De schematibus et tropis*.

By the middle of the eighth century, then, Irish and Anglo-Saxon grammarians had built up an array of books supporting comprehensive instruction in the language of the Bible and the western church. Though they lacked exposure to ancient rhetoric, Insular clerics possessed elementary grammars tailored to the needs of non-native speakers of Latin, detailed commentaries on Donatus's textbooks, a conspectus of stylistic devices tailored to the needs of Biblical exegesis, and treatises on Latin poetry. When Insular clerics departed for the Continent to convert Germanic peoples there, they took these books with them.

Losses and Recoveries (800–1100)

Toward the year 800, two independent historical developments brought this great cycle of curricular innovation to a close. At the court of Charlemagne, scholars including the English expatriate Alcuin set the Insular productions aside in favor of older and more authoritative treatises. The most important of the new recoveries were the *Partitiones duodecim versuum Aeneidos principalium* and the *Institutiones grammaticae*, both by the early sixth-century grammarian Priscian. A third work by Priscian, consisting in an elementary conspectus of the inflecting parts of speech, had served early Irish and Anglo-Saxon scholars as a valuable

supplement to Donatus. Engagement with Priscian's *Partitiones* and *Institutiones* would now trigger a comprehensive revision of elementary and advanced grammatical studies.

Almost simultaneously with these developments in the Carolingian territories, the Anglo-Saxon institutions of learning were being destroyed. A Scandinavian expedition sacked the monastery at Lindisfarne in 793. Though grammatical study seems to have weakened already before the Viking raids (Gneuss 1990, 5), the raids and subsequent migrations interrupted the laborious practice of Latin literacy instruction over much of England for several generations. Many libraries were lost.

With the salient exception of Bede's *De arte metrica* and *De schematibus et tropis* (those texts remained in use for centuries to come), the cultural problem of literacy training would henceforth be answered with other books. When English libraries were restocked in the tenth-century Benedictine reform, they were restocked with the grammatical literature that had developed on the Continent in the intervening period. This was a literature profoundly influenced by Priscian.

As its title suggests, Priscian's *Partitiones* consists in a detailed grammatical analysis of each word in the opening line of each of the 12 books of the *Aeneid*. Such analysis can, of course, be no more than exemplary, but it affords considerable opportunity for pedagogical generalization, and it has the advantage of being concrete: it models situated, puzzle-solving attention to Latin inflectional forms and syntax. The *Partitiones* presumably reflects Priscian's classroom procedures in Constantinople, where students – native speakers of Greek – shared some of the same needs as medieval speakers of Germanic and Celtic languages. Priscian's concrete, situated formal analysis helped spawn a new pedagogical genre, the “parsing grammar” (Law 1997, 135–36). Parsing grammars remained a pillar of elementary grammatical instruction throughout the remainder of the Middle Ages.

Priscian's most important work was, however, the *Institutiones grammaticae*, a massively detailed and copiously illustrated description of the Latin language, disposed into 18 books. The first 16 books, which fill 600 pages in the modern printed edition, treat approximately the remit of Donatus's *Ars maior* 1 and 2: sound, letters, syllables, and the eight parts of speech. This section would eventually come to be called *Priscianus maior*. The last two books, later termed *Priscianus minor*, are half again as long as the preceding 16, and they are devoted to a single topic: “what Greeks call syntax.” For medieval Latin grammarians, *Priscianus minor* was a revelation. Aspects of Latin syntax receive passing notice in other grammars, including those of Donatus, but the final two books of the *Institutiones* offered the first systematic treatment of the ways that nouns, verbs, and the other parts of speech relate to one another in meaningful Latin utterances.

The riches of the *Institutiones* were counterbalanced by its bulk. How was one to approach such a work? Some of the earlier Insular grammarians had known the *Institutiones*, but it seems that Alcuin was the first medieval scholar to grasp the full text and recognize its importance. He compiled excerpts (these attend especially to syntax) and he drew liberally from earlier sections in his elementary grammar, the *Dialogus Franconis et Saxonis de octo partibus orationis*. These two texts by Alcuin did not circulate to the British Isles, but the style of engagement instanced by

them was widely employed in grammatical literature of the ninth and tenth centuries. Scholars made abbreviations and collections of extracts; often, extracts were inserted into the familiar framework of Donatus's treatises.

The grammar of Ælfric of Eynsham (probably composed about 993–95) belongs to precisely this line of engagement. The doctrine transmitted by Ælfric derives principally from Priscian's *Institutiones*, but Priscian's text is severely abbreviated and shuffled into the order of Donatus's *Ars maior*. The labor of redaction was mostly complete in Ælfric's source, but Ælfric simplified further, yielding an elementary textbook with a double emphasis: Latin inflectional morphology and the technical vocabulary of grammatical study. This is utterly conventional. What sets Ælfric's grammar apart is its language: it is the first grammar of Latin written in a vernacular, and it makes notably inventive use of English as a pedagogical medium. Ælfric illustrated Latin grammar with reference to analogous or paraphrastic constructions in English, and he supplied a full complement of English grammatical vocabulary, often closely modeled on the Latin terms. The aim was evidently to supply speakers of English with a foothold in Latin at an early stage in their study of that language. By its existence, Ælfric's grammar probably testifies to the weakened state of Latinity in England at the end of the tenth century; however, it also exemplifies the precocious and inventive uses that the Anglo-Saxons made of their written vernacular. Ælfric's grammar displaced other elementary grammars in English schools in the eleventh century (Law 1997, 215), and it continued to be used in the following one.

At more advanced levels, eleventh-century students would study Priscian's *Institutiones* or abbreviations of that work, Bede's treatises (these had now received the attention of commentators), and other grammars of both ancient and modern provenance, including the parsing grammars developed by Carolingian scholars. A notable addition to the advanced grammatical literature is the *Questiones grammaticales*, composed by the French Benedictine Abbo of Fleury during his brief residence in England (985–87). Byrhtferth of Ramsey, who was among Abbo's students, would later include extracts from grammatical literature (rendered into English) in his rambling and compendious *Enchiridion*, a treatise devoted primarily to the calculation of dates in the church calendar. The largest of the Englished excerpts is from Bede's *De schematibus et tropis*, and Byrhtferth's translation shows that he used a copy of Bede's text bearing Carolingian glosses.

Byrhtferth's glossed copy of Bede and his brief tuition by Abbo show the extent to which the study of Latin in England at the turn of the eleventh century was supported by Continental scholarship. The Norman Conquest ensured that Continental influences would remain salient. It also gave fresh impetus to grammatical studies: unlike the Anglo-Saxons, the eleventh-century Normans did not use their own vernacular in writing. At the time of the Conquest, the sole written language of the Normans was Latin – which, accordingly, was the language shared by educated strata of the two populations. The conquerors implanted Norman clergy throughout their new possession, and the word *latimer* (initially “someone who knows Latin”) came to mean “translator” or “interpreter.” Under these conditions, the teaching of Latin flourished. Ælfric's grammar continued to be used (two surviving copies were glossed in Anglo-Norman French) but, as the decades passed, Donatus's *Ars minor* and its supplements resumed their role as the usual

elementary Latin grammars in England. Teachers could again manage without a vernacular textbook.

An Expanded Field (1100–1450)

The twelfth century was a golden age of grammatical study. Although the greatest centers of learning were in northern France, connections with the Continent remained strong, and many English scholars crossed the Channel to study. The most important curricular innovations were quickly transmitted to England, where they seeded further important contributions.

Innovation was concentrated at intermediate and advanced levels of study; to appreciate these developments, one must recall that a student who had absorbed the *Ars minor* and associated texts would still need to master an enormous mass of miscellaneous lexical and morphological detail, most of which resisted systematization: defective and deponent verbs and heteroclitite nouns, for example. That detail could be conveyed in list form, but unstructured lists are difficult to remember. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, teachers increasingly cast the most troublesome points into metrical form, either as “memory verses” embedded within prose grammars, or as independent verse treatises on specialized topics (Law 1999). That which could not be systematized could be versified. At the end of the twelfth century, Alexander of Villa Dei composed a *summa* of this material, titled the *Doctrinale*. This text quite explicitly picks up where the *Ars minor* leaves off. Prized as a concise intermediate Latin grammar, the *Doctrinale* was widely used for the remainder of the Middle Ages, and survives today in more than 400 manuscripts and nearly 300 printed editions.

After mastering the *Doctrinale*, a student would be ready for advanced study, and grammarians had in the meantime developed two new options for that. First, commentators on Priscian’s *Institutiones* had elaborated the theoretical content of that text and brought it into dialogue with Aristotelian logic, thus laying a foundation for the “speculative” or “modistic” grammars of the thirteenth-century universities. Latin grammar became a springboard for philosophical inquiry into the structure and function of language in general. This important development is best assigned to the history of philosophy.

The second development belongs directly to our subject: beginning about 1170, some teachers of grammar began writing textbooks with significantly expanded scope, aiming to teach literary composition in the Latin language. The most successful of these treatises was written in hexametrical verse c. 1208–13 by the English scholar Geoffrey of Vinsauf. Known as the *Poetria nova*, this text had a pan-European circulation, remained authoritative in the sixteenth century, and survives today in more than 200 manuscript copies. It and the other “arts of poetry and prose” are what modern scholars most often have in mind when they refer to medieval rhetoric.

Like speculative grammar, the arts of poetry and prose originated in encounters with much older texts – in this case not Priscian’s *Institutiones* and Aristotle’s logic, but rather Cicero’s *De inventione*, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, and Horace’s *Ars poetica*. All these texts were studied with new intensity in the twelfth century, and outfitted with comprehensive and detailed commentaries. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (newly rediscovered at this time) became the

preeminent source for classical rhetoric, while its catalogue of figures had an even wider influence. The title *Poetria nova* testifies to precisely this matrix of study: Geoffrey's treatise was received as a concise synthesis of the *Rhetorica nova* (that is, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*) and Horace's *Ars poetica*.

Geoffrey also wrote a prose treatise in the same genre. His efforts were preceded by Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars versificatoria* (c. 1175) and followed by Gervase of Melkley's *Ars versificaria* (c. 1215–16), John of Garland's *Parisiana poetria* (1220–35), and Eberhard the German's verse *Laborintus* (between about 1215 and 1280). None of these approached the popularity of the *Poetria nova*, but most were known in medieval England, while Geoffrey's prose treatise circulated only there.

As befits their origin in grammatical studies, the arts of poetry and prose focus on details of wording within relatively small compass: attention to larger units of composition is mostly limited to the question of where, and how, to begin a narrative. Each treatise teaches the figures and tropes, and most attend in detail to topical description. Teaching is illustrated with examples composed expressly for this purpose – a fact that testifies eloquently to the authors' fundamentally creative orientation. Illustrations are usually metrical, and this is probably how the *Poetria nova* began life: as a collection of model compositions, later supplemented with versified precept and drawn together into a coherent whole.

The *Poetria nova* and John of Garland's *Parisiana poetria* are the two most advanced treatises in this group, and the only ones to teach all five canonical stages of rhetorical craft, from *inventio* to *pronuntiatio*. The fullest syllabus is offered in the *Parisiana poetria*, which includes instruction in letter writing, prose rhythm, and rhythmical verse. This treatise was not well known in England, but it provides a valuable synopsis of the stylistic options available to writers on both sides of the Channel. After the mid-thirteenth century, scholars reverted from the composition of treatises to the composition of commentaries on them. The *Poetria nova* received especially full attention, testifying to widespread classroom use (Woods 2010).

Two other new genres of rhetorical treatise appeared in the high Middle Ages, concerning the sermon and the letter, respectively. The first of the *artes praedicandi*, or arts of preaching, appeared near the beginning of the thirteenth century, and the genre's debts to grammatical studies are particularly clear in an early treatise by the Englishman Thomas Chobham. For instruction in the structure of sermons and the stages of the preacher's task, Chobham drew heavily from the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, *De inventione*, and *Ars poetica* – the same trio that informed the arts of poetry and prose. What Bede's *De schematibus et tropis* had done for grammatical stylistics, the *ars praedicandi* did for classical rhetorical theory: it adapted the concepts and terminology of a classical language discipline to the needs of contemporary Christianity. (The outlines of this adaptation had been worked out already in Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana*.) The *ars praedicandi* flourished in the later thirteenth century and throughout the following one; as the genre developed, it became increasingly independent of classical rhetoric.

The treatises on letter writing, or *artes dictaminis*, followed a different track: whereas the verse grammars, arts of poetry and prose, and arts of preaching each developed an English

tradition at an early stage, the letter-writing treatises arrived in England relatively late, as a mature discipline with a narrow scope and pragmatic outlook. The focus was on such details as salutation-formulae, prose rhythm, and the anatomy of the letter. Two branches of instruction developed in the second half of the fourteenth century, both of them centered in Oxford on the sidelines of the university. One group of teachers sought to reintegrate the *ars dictaminis* into a broadly literary and rhetorical curriculum. This approach was pursued especially by English Benedictines, who may also have produced an expanded version of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's prose rhetorical treatise (Camargo 1999). A second group of teachers took an opposite approach: they stripped the *ars dictaminis* to its formulaic essentials and taught letter writing alongside basic administrative skills such as accounting and the drafting of legal instruments.

The teachers of "business Latin" also taught French, which retained much of its former importance in the domains of law and commerce. Aspects French grammar – namely, pronunciation and the verb system – had received attention in England from at least the thirteenth century (Rothwell 2001). Fuller descriptions appeared early in the fifteenth century, joining an assortment of other materials for teaching and learning this language.

This is perhaps the place to record other developments in vernacular grammatical studies. *Gramadegau 'r Penceirddiaid*, the earliest treatise on Welsh grammar and versification, survives in several fourteenth- and fifteenth-century manuscripts; portions may be earlier, and the compiler's interests were clearly centered on poetry rather than grammar as such. By the end of the Middle Ages, then, three of Britain's vernacular languages had received grammatical attention – Irish, Welsh, and French. (So, too, had Icelandic, though outside the geographical orbit of this encyclopedia.) Each of the vernacular grammars was indebted to Latin grammatical literature, but they differed widely in scope and purpose: the French grammars are distinguished by their orientation toward basic language acquisition; the Welsh and Icelandic grammars by their interest in poetry. English would receive comparable attention only late in the sixteenth century.

Plague, Print, and Humanism (1350–1542)

Although the English language never received systematic grammatical attention, English nevertheless has an important place in this history, for it became the default language of elementary education. In John of Cornwall's *Speculum grammaticale* (1346), the Latin verbal system and some syntactic constructions are illustrated by paired Latin and English examples. The amount of English is not great, but it probably testifies to more extensive classroom use, as John Trevisa affirmed at the end of the fourteenth century. By the early fifteenth century, some rudimentary treatises of Latin grammar are themselves written in English. John Leylond (d. 1428) led the way; his elementary treatises are the first in English since Ælfric.

There were parallel developments in grammar-school composition exercises. These were typically pitched at the level of the individual sentence, aiming to build Latin vocabulary and syntax. Teaching in this area was supported by collections of Latin proverbs and model sentences; beginning in the fifteenth century, some such collections record paired English and Latin versions of each sentence. Termed *vulgaria*, these bilingual collections represent an

important pedagogical change: Latin composition was now being taught as an exercise in translation. Whereas the ancient and earlier medieval *praeexercitamina* taught students simultaneously to think and compose in Latin, the new practice of “making Latins” conceded that boys would be thinking in English.

Expansions in the pedagogical use of English may have been accelerated by the 1348/49 plague and by later recurrences of the epidemic, which must have inflicted significant disruptions on ordinary pedagogical reproduction. Similar disruptions at an earlier historical moment might have favored French, the prestige vernacular in England since the twelfth century. By the fourteenth century, however, English was the only language able to replace Latin in elementary pedagogical contexts across large portions of the realm.

The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries are also distinguished, in Britain, as a period in which authors of basic teaching texts claimed few accomplishments outside of this domain. The analytic terminology developed by speculative grammarians in the thirteenth century now began to appear in elementary grammars; simultaneously, there was a pronounced movement away from the grammatical *summa*, in favor of shorter treatises on specific topics. The English and Latin works of John Leyland are exemplary of these trends, and so too is the textual history of the earlier *Doctrinale*: it continued to circulate whole, but was also broken up and digested into independent treatises. Treatises proliferated rapidly, in part because the introduction of paper into English markets reduced the cost of writing.

Grammars and rhetorics continued to proliferate through the end of the Middle Ages, but now under the influence of the printing press and Continental humanism. Beginning in the fourteenth century, Italian scholars had been seeking out and studying ancient texts previously unknown or neglected. As a project of cultural recovery, the Italian Renaissance constituted a third installment in a series, building upon Carolingian and twelfth-century initiatives. As in those previous renaissances, renewed attention to select ancient texts triggered a wave of curricular innovation that rolled through the schools of western Europe. The grammars and rhetorics then in use were perceived to be deficient insofar as they departed from the Latinity of favored ancient authors, especially Cicero. Textbooks needed to be replaced, and the works of ancient authors needed to be made available in accurate editions that could serve as models of correct style. These initiatives were greatly facilitated by the new technology of print.

Italian humanist grammatical writings reached English schools in the last quarter of the fifteenth century. Among the most important were Lorenzo Valla’s compendious guide to Latin usage (*Elegantiae linguae Latinae*), and the Latin grammars of Niccolò Perotti and Giovanni Sulpizio. Sulpizio’s *Opus grammaticum* was printed in England in 1494 and several times thereafter. The first rhetoric printed in England was also by an Italian: Lorenzo Traversagni’s strongly Ciceronian *Margarita eloquentiae castigatae*, printed by William Caxton in 1479.

At Oxford, teachers of grammar fused the new humanist pedagogy with indigenous forms of instruction. John Anwykyll produced a classicizing Latin grammar indebted to Valla and Perotti, alongside a unique collection of *vulgaria*: whereas previous grammarians had composed their own model sentences, Anwykyll drew his from an authentic classical source, the Roman dramatist Terence. Anwykyll taught during the mid-1480s at the newly founded Magdalen

College school; upon his death he was succeeded there by another curricular innovator, John Stanbridge, who produced revisions of Leylond's elementary grammatical treatises. Stanbridge corrected Leylond's Latin in accordance with new humanist standards. These treatises began to appear in print in 1505, and helped ensure that elementary teaching grammars for use in English schools would continue to be written in English.

Soon afterwards, the center of grammatical study shifted from Oxford to London, where, beginning in 1508, John Colet was engaged in refounding the St. Paul's Cathedral school. Colet instituted an emphatically humanist program of study and selected William Lily (a pupil of Stanbridge) to be the first master. The two men composed new grammars, in English and Latin, for use at St. Paul's. The Dutch humanist Desiderius Erasmus aided their project by revising Lily's Latin grammar and by contributing a guide to Latin composition – his *De copia*. These texts had illustrious afterlives. *De copia* became the most influential humanist rhetoric in sixteenth-century Europe, prized for concrete instruction in the crafting of verbal variety. Meanwhile, the two grammars supplied the basis for uniform textbooks issued by state edict. An advanced grammar, in Latin, appeared from the king's printer in 1540; it was followed two years later by an elementary grammar written in English. Both carried the express endorsement of Henry VIII. Thus, the monarch who subordinated the English church to state power also standardized the instruments of literacy instruction, central to the functioning of church and state alike. The royal grammars supplanted alternatives, supplied a model for the first grammars of English, and remained the basis for Latin language study into the eighteenth century.

SEE ALSO: Ælfric of Eynsham; Alcuin of York; Aldhelm; Anglo Latin; *Auracept na nÉces*; Bede; Benedictine Reform; Christianity in Britain; Classical inheritance; Continental influences; Geoffrey of Vinsauf; Glossaries; *Gramadegau 'r Penceirddiaid*; Hiberno Latin; Humanism; John of Cornwall; John of Garland; Late antique inheritance; Libraries and book collections; Literacy; Multilingualism; Reading practices; Schools and Education; Universities.

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