

JOHN O. WARD, *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: The Medieval Rhetors and Their Art 300-1300, with Manuscript Survey to 1500 CE*. International Studies in the History of Rhetoric. Volume 10, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2018, xvii+706 pp. (incl. index), \$239.00, ISBN 978-90-04-36805-7.

James J. Murphy's *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* is the most impactful contribution to our study of medieval rhetoric in the Twentieth Century.¹ The reason why Murphy's book receives this high praise is that his major contribution was revealing and explaining how the classical traditions of ancient rhetoric were transformed into the three medieval arts of rhetoric. That is, Murphy argued that classical rhetoric is best understood as having four traditions: the Greek theoretical tradition of Plato and Aristotle, the Roman civic tradition of Cicero and Quintilian, the Graeco-Roman tradition of the Second Sophistic, and the Graeco-Roman tradition of poetry and grammar. The body of Murphy's *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* identifies and explains how these four ancient traditions became what he calls the three medieval arts of rhetoric: *Ars poetriae* or prescriptive grammar and verse-writing; *Ars dictaminis* or the art of letter-writing; and *Ars praedicandi* or the art of preaching. The attention given to this transformation has nurtured a significant body of subsequent scholarship.

John O. Ward's *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* does not duplicate Murphy's work; rather, Ward complements Murphy's work by explaining how and why classical rhetoric continued in the West from 300-1300 CE. That is, the traditions of ancient rhetoric were transformed into the medieval arts of rhetoric but aspects of the traditions of classical rhetoric themselves also continued in the Middle Ages in the West. As a consequence, we can better understand rhetoric in the Middle Ages as having both the extant remains of classical rhetoric as well as the development of the medieval arts of rhetoric at the same time. Of course, not all works from the classical period survived and not all works of the classical period were widely used. The heart of the contribution of Ward's work explains what classical works survived and were used during the Middle Ages at the same time as the medieval arts were also being employed.

The foundation of Ward's *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* was his two-volume 1972 doctoral dissertation from the University of Toronto Graduate Centre for Medieval Studies. Over his career, Ward continued on

¹ James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from St. Augustine to the Renaissance*, University of California Press 1974.

the line of work developed initially in his dissertation and the result is this volume. Ward meticulously, diligently and exhaustively traces the use and impact of works of ancient rhetoric that survived into the Middle Ages, particularly in the West. Ward reveals the depth and breadth of those ancient works of rhetoric, particularly the work by an unknown author called the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Cicero's *De inventione*. Ward's scholarship traces and explains the extant works but also how they were used and appropriated in the Middle Ages. In this sense, the scholarship of Murphy and Ward elegantly complement each other. Murphy provides readers with the features of medieval rhetoric and Ward explains the use and impact of the surviving manuals of classical rhetoric. I am sure Ward's *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* will be regarded as much a significant contribution to this century's scholarship as Murphy's *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* had been in the latter century.

In order to appreciate Ward's *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* readers must first understand its pattern of arrangement. As mentioned earlier, the foundation for *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* is Ward's 1972 doctoral dissertation. Besides making corrections and inserting essential new material, Ward makes every effort not to disrupt the coherence of his foundational work (xv). At the same time, Ward also arranges his work to provide readers with subsequent research contributions, as well as his own in-depth commentary. Ward accomplishes this apparently incompatible dual objective by providing new and expanded footnotes that he sees as the major "improvement" because they provide the reader with insights while not disrupting the coherence of the body of the work. I believe that Ward made a wise choice in arranging *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* in such a pattern. The footnotes, in one respect, are not integrated into the body of the work but they are clearly identified for those who wish to shift to a more detail statement that is intended to enrich what was originally written. On those occasions when Ward moves from his earlier view, he is careful to acknowledge the change and to provide his reason for making such a change. In this manner, the reader is witness not only to his evolving point of view but, and of equal importance, why he altered his earlier view. Footnotes are arranged both by chronology but also by importance because the sequencing of the new footnotes is driven by their relevance to the topic (xv-xvi).

The arrangement of *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* is also governed not by a treatment of the medieval "arts" of rhetoric—as is the case with Murphy's *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*—but by providing the "backdrop" of (predominantly) Ciceronian rhetoric (2). Until the Twentieth Century, rhetoric in the West was dominated by Latin rhetoric and that classical tradition is overwhelmingly Ciceronian. Ward, in essence, arranges his four main chapters with Ciceronian rhetoric as the "field" upon which medieval rhetoric played out. Chapter One explains medieval rhetoric by also

presenting modern rhetoric. This approach helps readers to see rhetoric from the lens of the Middle Ages and not view the reality of that time through our own contemporary perspective. With the field established, Chapter Two presents a treatment of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, as well as the works of Cicero and Quintilian from the point of view of the rhetorical interests of the Middle Ages. Ward established that, unlike the orientation of earlier historians of this period, *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* will concentrate on the use, application and modification of classical rhetoric from the perspective of instruction and the application of classical works as texts. This orientation on use and application is the ordering principle for Chapter Three, which covers the topic from late antiquity to the Eleventh Century, as well as Chapter Four, which covers the later Eleventh Century to the Thirteenth Century. While these four chapters are clearly the body of *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, I was struck by the Chapter 5 Conclusion, and I will elaborate on why I was so impressed with that final chapter (as well as the subsequent back material) later in this review. The pattern of arranging chapters and materials is far from the norm but, as indicated above, when readers understand why *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* is ordered in such a manner, they will appreciate not only Ward's motives but also how well he realized his objectives of arranging the volume in order to maximizing its contributions for readers.

Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages is a substantial piece of scholarship in many other ways. As mentioned earlier, the foundation of this volume was Ward's dissertation but that work —itself a significant contribution to our field— was, in Ward's own view, improved by substantial and highly detailed footnotes (xv). The term "footnote" hardly seem appropriate to capture what Ward did to enrich his initial study. The footnotes are lengthy and insightful analyses of major points. These additions do not diminish the coherence of the original contribution but rather complement the earlier observations based upon a career of research and reflection. That said, the "reading" of this work is different than the conventional manner in which we are accustomed to reading a book. That is, rather than a straight-line progression from start to finish, I found myself returning and re-reading parts that were developed by the subsequent footnotes and commentary. However, it did not take me long to learn how to read this work in such a back-and-forth manner. The change in my own reading pattern was well worth the learning, for I could see a range of observations that had a synergy; as I went back to reading sections I felt I had the benefits of Ward pondering his own initial research and providing his insights over time and with reflection. Not many pieces of research give the reader the benefit of not only the author's thoughts but also the author's thoughts (again) over time.

Understanding Ward's rationale for the arrangement of *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* provides the backdrop of his treatment of

the “Ciceronian” tradition of classical rhetoric. Two treatises of classical rhetoric dominated the Middle Ages in the West: Cicero’s *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Historians of rhetoric often downplay the value and impact of these works, particularly when contrasted with other classical treatises on rhetoric—such as Cicero’s *De oratore* and Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratoria*—often implying in their accounts that if such works as these had survived, then *De inventione* and *Rhetorica ad Herennium* would not have been held in such high esteem and would likely not have continued to be used for centuries. Such assumptions have been expressed so often that they have become a commonplace in our discipline. Yet, as Ward shows, such assumptions do not provide an accurate explanation of the centuries-long sustainability of these works. What historians of rhetoric should be focusing on—and what Ward did in fact focus on—is why and in what ways Cicero’s *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* continued to be the major works on rhetoric, influencing medieval thought and expression for one thousand years. As Ward makes clear, these two works endured for centuries not because of antiquarian sympathies but because of their inherent worth and utility. As Ward reveals, the themes of uniting wisdom with eloquence, the relationship of rhetoric with dialectic, their utility as textbooks all contributed to the enduring use of Cicero’s *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* by scribes, scholars and students. Ward’s meticulous treatment on the use of these classical Latin texts, and his enlightening observations about the commentaries on these works, explain their enduring contributions.

Ward’s well warranted observations are especially important for the history of rhetoric because, in his analysis, Ward explains why works from the classical period that fostered rhetorical humanism existed in an absolutist Christian culture that otherwise rebuffed the secular objectives of classical ideals. Cicero’s *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* persisted because—even in such a culture—these works demonstrated a utility that could not be dismissed. Ward explains thoroughly why, and in what ways, these classical treatises were pragmatically useful and, in doing so, *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* provides insights to the mentality of a culture’s views on rhetoric that we heretofore did not fully grasp nor thoroughly recognize. Ward’s contribution, moreover, explains the climate of the culture; his scholarship also helps to provide new and insightful perspectives that laid the foundation for Renaissance rhetoric. That is, Ward’s observations on the endurance of these works of classical rhetoric not only accounts for their impact during 300–1300 CE, but explains—better than any work I have read—the forces that were at play that shaped the *trecento* and *quattrocento* rhetoric that contributed to the development of Renaissance rhetoric.

Ward’s *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* also helped to provide answers to questions that I have long had about medieval rhetoric. The

sustained popularity of certain classical works over others did not make sense to me but, in reading Ward's work, I realized that my own lack of understanding was due to not understanding the value of certain classical works of rhetoric over others based upon medieval attitudes and preferences. I had not had a grasp of medieval mentalities over time. I had not understood how medieval attitudes toward classical works of rhetoric were shaped and how those attitudes evolved over the Middle Ages. For example, why, I had thought, were works such as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Cicero's *De inventione* so popular for so long and not other classical works of rhetoric, such as Cicero's *De oratore*, *Brutus*, *Orator*, or Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*? Ward's work made it clear to me that these latter works, while more substantial in their theoretical contributions to rhetoric, were not preferred because they were not as effective when they were used for teaching. One of the primary reasons why the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and *De inventione* were popular is that they could be used as texts to teach effective expression much better than the other works that were "lost." This shift of perspective has implications for our own historiography. Historians of rhetoric have chronicled their own history based largely upon rhetorical theory and not texts or teaching. From that perspective, the lack of attention to theoretical works of classical rhetoric in the Middle Ages appeared as a dark age gap in our history. In reality, in some forms and to some degree, the Middle Ages, as Ward points out, did copy and thereby preserve many of the works of classical (Latin) rhetoric but theoretical works of rhetoric were not widely or popularly transmitted precisely because they were not emphasizing practice but rather theory. If, in today's culture, we wished to find the most effective way to teach basic oral and written communication, I suspect that basic introductory texts would again win out over sophisticated theoretical treatises that did not stress nor make application a primary objective.

Another advantage of *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* is the insights Ward gives us on Ciceronianism in the Middle Ages. (67). As Ward observes, "Cicero remained very much a key authority and a model for civic involvement and persuasive speech in the fifteenth hundred or so years after his death, not only in the area of philosophy-for-the-layman . . . but also in his own arena of excellence, oratory and, especially, rhetoric" (67). Quoting Murphy, Ward reveals that there is a belief among some scholars that "the history of Ciceronianism remains to be written" (19). This observation raises a fascinating point. Just as our study of Renaissance rhetoric has been greatly enriched by studying the impact of Cicero, so also may we benefit from new insights by studying with greater attention Cicero's impact on the Middle Ages. In short, "the study of *De inventione* and *Ad Herennium* in the Middle Ages" clearly "needs recent research" (19). Ward's *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* goes a long way to addressing this need and his excellent contributions toward a more complete understanding of Cicero in the Middle

Ages only underscores the importance of calling for more research. Ward has contributed on this topic in terms of *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* but perhaps the other works that constitute Cicero's *Rhetorica* may not in fact be lost but only less readily available. We know, for example, that Cicero's *Hortensius* made a substantial impact on St. Augustine, as he himself says in his *Confessions*, and there may well be other such works of Cicero that call for our attention.

Ward's work sheds light not only on the impact of rhetoric but how rhetoric itself impacts, and is impacted by, other disciplines. The study of rhetoric and philosophy, rhetoric and religion, and orality and literacy are three such combinations that are examined in this work and seeing the dynamic interaction of such disciplines provides a frame of reference for how classical rhetoric was regarded in the Middle Ages. Further, we can see the breadth and depth of *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* not only by the content of the text itself but secondarily and indirectly by the extensive Bibliography (488-678), the appendices (463-87) and the range of topics, individuals and texts chronicled in the Index (679-705).

Ward's Conclusion not only synthesizes his own observations but, in my opinion, reveals the contributions of this excellent scholarship. Ward has shown, as discussed earlier, how the *trecento* and the *quattrocento* are important for the history of rhetoric in the Middle Ages. The emphasis of the importance of those centuries is treated here not so much as a way to forecast Renaissance rhetoric but rather to see the consequences of classical rhetoric from 300-1300, a period of time in our history that has only been dimly understood before Ward's contribution. Specifically, Ward has revealed that classical rhetoric was "kept alive" during the Middle Ages not so much for the motives of the antiquarian —although that was a factor to some degree— but more significantly and importantly because of the utility of classical rhetoric (458-59). Classical rhetoric "continued to be of use to medieval people because they continued to be confronted by situations that required persuasion at a non-technical level" (459). In addition to its pragmatic utility, classical rhetoric also provided the educational objective of civic training to attain the ideal of uniting "wisdom and eloquence" —a concept that grounded Cicero's *Rhetorica* that was, in turn, inspired by the rhetoric of Isocrates. What Ward has demonstrated in his work is that classical rhetoric persisted both because of its pragmatic benefits and its civic idealism. These co-existent traits of utility and idealism provide an explanation of why Cicero's *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* were emphasized and why they continued in a religious culture whose absolutism was often intolerant of pagan works. It should be apparent that Ward's *Classical Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* stands as a major contribution to our field and an excellent companion that can rightly stand shoulder the shoulder with, and as a complement to, Murphy's *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*.

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