Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text by Suzanne Reynolds
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When Donna Anna makes Don Ottavio swear vengeance over the body of the dead father, we are right back at the grave of Agamemnon, and Mozart probably knew it. He was, as Nicholas Till has shown (in *Mozart and the Enlightenment* [New York, 1993]), a man of rather wider literary culture than he is typically given credit for. Perhaps that is why Don Ottavio could never be more than a brother to Donna Anna. Be that as it may, the denser web of links to antiquity lends more strength to Kerrigan's final insight that the opera mocks the logic of retribution. Don Giovanni eludes the endeavors of the "reagents" to contain him: there is grandeur in the repeated "no" that he hurls at the Stony Guest.

A reviewer must find fault (or have his revenge) somewhere, but my criticism of this particular chapter should not obscure my admiration for a very wide-ranging and learned book.

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Medieval Reading: Grammar, Rhetoric and the Classical Text. *Suzanne Reynolds.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xvi+235.

Medieval Reading is a treasure of a book. It is so well executed, in every regard, that it defies even my most Beckmesserly mode as a reviewer.[1] It is also so economical, even understated, that it may go undervalued and underappreciated unless recognized as an important addition to an ongoing intellectual project, the collaboration (in effect) of many of the best and brightest scholars. For *Medieval Reading* continues the series of outstanding monographs that comprise the Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature. Without waving the banners of "new historicism," "new philology," or "the new erudition," the works in this set are, like Reynolds's (the twenty-seventh volume since 1987), all philological, historicist, erudite, and new, in the best senses of each of these words. At the risk of importing a rhetoric these authors positively eschew, they represent a consolidating stage in the now well-advanced revolution in the way we study medieval textual cultures, indeed, in the very "what" and "why" of that enterprise. For example, literacy and its technologies are possible subjects, "literature" only a construction with differing signification depending on historical context and all its variables. Latin and the vernaculars hold shifting places in a

1. Minor blemishes are limited to referring to the *Ecloga* [singular] *Theoduli* as "*Eclogues* [plural] of Theodolus" (p. 11), two or three typographical errors, of which "Mecenas" for "Maecenas" (p. 159, n. 30) is the most significant, and virtually nothing else.

diachronic matrix of potential value. Works themselves hardly exist above and beyond the sum of their codicological instantiations; each book, with its set of glosses (among other defining characteristics), is an artifact of both production and use, each analyzable in terms of historical moment, the latter multiply so.

In this regard, Reynolds joins those who turn to the interpretive technologies (e.g., commentaries, glossing) of medieval schooling to reconstruct at least certain medieval modes of reading. Reynolds's particular contribution is to ground the use of a classical text fully in contemporary grammatical pedagogy. Despite an argument dense and relatively technical in patches (but never obscurantist), *Medieval Reading* is thoroughly readable. (The verso of the title-page indicates that it is "based on" the author's doctoral dissertation for the Warburg Institute, but nothing about the book smacks of a thesis.) Reynolds supports her argument with abundant evidence, yet avoids the overkill that plagues so many first books. She is rightly confident of her control and judgment, not defensive even as she breaks new ground, cautious where caution is called for. Indeed, a key element of her conciseness is her command of vast scholarship in multiple European languages. Her notes are helpful and up-to-date, generous (in both senses) yet focused and selective. (Nor has she overstuffed the rich "Select Bibliography" [pp. 207–29, including "Secondary Materials," pp. 212–29].) Reynolds ably draws on the works of Michael Clanchy, Tony Hunt, Mary Carruthers, Rita Copeland, and Alastair Minnis (to name only a few), distilling the essential for her purposes in her text; readers are encouraged, I might even say inspired, to go to these other works from her notes, so that she writes her own study very much into the texture of that renovating project I described above.

The strategic decision that permits both the persuasive force of the book and its economy is this: she has subordinated her presentation of materials drawn from thorough analysis of glosses (including construe marks) on Horace's *Satires* in a healthy sample of manuscripts to her account of the function, form, and rationale of grammatical and rhetorical instruction in the medieval schools. She considers what the significance of her choice, well calculated for her purposes, of classical text—literally "pretext"—means, yet does not refuse apposite material from comments on, say, Ovid or Vergil. She does not attempt to present what another scholar might have termed "Horace's *Satires* in the twelfth century." She does, however, in her brief introductory survey to that field (pp. 13–15; so brief that it does not even nod at Ludwig Traube's characterization of cc. 10–11 as the *aetas horatiana*), offer a valuable corrective, pointing out that we are quite wrong to keep repeating the common "wisdom" that only the hexametric Horace was studied. The *Odes* were read and glossed.

If the two methodological advances prior to *Medieval Reading* could be described as the move, first, from "influence" to "reception," and, then, to reception according to the functions or uses that can be read out of the commentaries on a given text or author, Reynolds has taken the logical next step: to put medieval usage or practice first—it is our topic—for which the codices of any given text provide the evidence. So, "the central project of this book is to examine how for one period (the twelfth century), glosses on one school text (Horace's *Satires*) draw on, diverge from, and redefine the technical grammatical practice of which they form a part" (p. 28). From this perspective there emerges a telling tension within the system of *auctor*-based grammatical instruction: grammar is normative, but the mark of *auctoritas* (she risks calling it "literariness" [p. 123]) is departing from grammatical norms for the sake of eloquence and ornament (emphasized at, e.g., pp. 18–19, 122, 125).

Given the "deep structure" of *Medieval Reading*, it makes sense (even if it is somewhat artificial) for Reynolds to adapt sequences of topics in grammatical and rhetorical treatises of the period to partition the book into twelve (unequal) chapters. In the brief "Introduction" (pp. 1–3), Reynolds foregrounds the historically contingent nature of reading and formulates a characteristically elegant solution to a methodological dilemma. Glossing "poses a serious challenge to our prevailing notions of the 'reader', an individual with their [*sic*] own desires and motivations. The glosses I examine here are the traces of pedagogic discourse, of a reading undertaken by a *magister* (teacher) for his pupils and which is shaped by their needs and their level of literacy. This reading involves not two but three parties—text, teacher, and pupils" (p. 2). (Reynolds, wisely no doubt for her argument, focuses primarily on glosses and does not look systematically at longer comments. These would add further complexities and force more consideration of potential fourth parties, i.e., earlier commentators, though of course any amount of diachronic tradition can be synchronized for the moment in the person of the teacher.)

The history of *grammatica* as an educational practice, and in particular the role the reading of *auctores* assumed in this tradition, provides the material of "Part I: Contexts for Reading." Its two chapters, "Learning to Read: The Classics and the Curriculum" and "Reading and the Trivium Arts," serve as handy *vade mecum* into the dense thickets of medieval grammatical education. The former begins with a close analysis of excerpted passages from Alexander Nequam's late-twelfth-century treatise *Sacerdos ad altare accessurus*, which provides a useful framework on which to hang a brief but suggestive description of a boy's (well-noted) progress from learning the Latin alphabet to the recognition and pronunciation of Latin words. It is interesting that

while Reynolds rightly emphasizes the "resolutely masculine anthropology" (p. 8) of Nequam's scheme, in the very brief patch of Donatus's *Ars minor* which she cites (p. 10), students are reminded that the noun *sacerdos* is common: there is both a *hic* and a *haec sacerdos*. This is not the only point where the system itself provides information that could be opened up and exploited for broader analysis. (A quibble on p. 22: the *accessus* is not quite a "reading [of] the poets" comparable with "paraphrase," as Reynolds seems to suggest, at least not without further analysis; one would also need to consider cases of disjunction between the aims proposed in an *accessus* and the reading actually performed.)

Chapter 4, on "Origins and Mythologies: The Invention of Language and Meaning," serves as point of departure for "Part II: Reading Practice." Opening with a rare overt gesture to modern literary criticism ("every culture has the urge to mythologise, or, to use Barthes' words, to 'transform history into nature'" [p. 45]), Reynolds suggests links between her work and some of the broader avenues of discourse in both the humanities and social sciences. She moves quickly, however, to a detailed and nuanced history of grammar and signification. This overview (relatively generous yet still concise) sets up Reynolds's own progression in the following chapters from "words" to larger utterances (see esp. p. 59). Reynolds cagily refrains from arguing that all pedagogues who proceeded in this fashion did so in conscious agreement with theoreticians such as Adelard of Bath or Peter Helias. Practice can focus theoretical inquiry as well as vice versa. Indeed, at more than one juncture in Part II, Reynolds shows how some of the more advanced grammarians articulate their views in explicit distinction to what they call, usually dismissively, the *doctrina puerorum* (e.g., pp. 106–8; an intermediate stage of *iam provecti* is sometimes recognized [e.g., pp. 151–53]).

In the following chapters, Reynolds programmatically adopts "the scheme of medieval grammar—the letter, the syllable, the word and the phrase—to construct a taxonomy of glossing strategies and to test glossing against grammatical theory" (p. 2), but expands it by crossing and addressing the problematic and sometimes contentious boundary between the disciplines of *grammatica* and *rhetorica*. Hence we move from chapters 5 and 6, "Reading Word by Word 1: The Role of the Vernacular" and "Reading Word by Word 2: Grammatical and Rhetorical Approaches," to chapters 7 and 8, "From Words to the Phrase: The Problem of Syntax" and "Government: The Theory and Practices of a Grammatical Concept" (which is particularly helpful in explaining the distinctions between *congruitas*, *determinatio*, and *regimen* [pp. 98–100]). In chapter 9, "Rival Orders of Syntax: Vernacular, Natural and Artificial," she considers a particular aspect of syntactical analysis, before

moving, in chapter, 10, "From the Phrase to the Text: Grammatical and Rhetorical Approaches Again."

Analysis of the interpenetration of grammar and rhetoric is productive of an insight I find both terribly helpful and widely applicable in medieval (and not only medieval) exegesis, namely, that etymological explanations so popular with grammarians are used "in an essentially rhetorical way, as a place of invention" (p. 82). They serve also, I would add, as mnemonic aids. In chapter 10, which is presented as having a special relationship to chapter 6 (its running heads read "Grammatical and Rhetorical Approaches: II," responding to the earlier chapter's ". . . Approaches: I"), Reynolds shows how certain types of allegory fit into grammatical, rhetorical, and even literal readings. "*Grammatica*'s foundation is the letter, and the letter of the literary text is by definition figurative; any reading that describes the grammar and rhetoric of such a text must confront and embrace figurative language" (p. 134). Reynolds expects to contribute to the revision of the assumption that "allegorical interpretation" is "the dominant exegetical model, even a dominant *mentalité* of the Middle Ages" (p. 134). I would have hoped that there is not much life left in this straw man, but anyone seeking to follow Reynolds into the complexities of the "literally figurative" will certainly want to consider one foundational text she does not seem to mention: Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram.*

In the penultimate chapter, "Naked Intention: Satire and a New Kind of Literal Reading," Reynolds seeks to characterize the particular type of reading Horace's *Satires* elicited even as the trajectory of her own argument calls on her to present materials about *integumentum* and *fabula.* This makes for a peculiar linkage, since, as she candidly admits, the *Satires* are rarely accompanied by "*fabula* glosses" (p. 142). Indeed, "the anti-integumental definition of satire was an essential part of [the] tradition" of "naked" satire (p. 145). Reynolds maintains her synchronic focus on interpretive practices of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, but even if that explains her not referring to Sheila Delany's work on "the naked text," primarily focused on later, vernacular strains, reflection on so provocative an image might have included the tradition of Jerome's *belle captive,* an exegetical figure (from the so-called Old Testament) whose stripping gives Christians a way they could—if you will permit me—"have safe text" with pagan authors.[2]

This would have further eased the transition to Chapter 12, "Literacy: A New Model for the Classical Text in the Middle Ages?" which begins with Jerome's own question, "What does Horace have to do with

2. *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1994), preceded by "The Naked Text: Chaucer's 'Thisbe', the *Ovide moralisé,* and the Problem of *translatio studii* in the *Legend of Good Women,*" *Mediaevalia* 13 (1987): 275–94.

the Psalter?" (*Epistles* 22.29). This final chapter is an all too short-breathed conclusion to so well-calculated and well-executed a book. While more than merely *Q.E.D.*, so lapidary a formulation as "Literacy is, in the end, what triggers the anxiety" (p. 151) begs for some look forward to the increasing anxiety—about "pagan" texts, that is—in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But being left begging for more, and after so rigorous a schooling, is no bad state for a reader at the end of *Medieval Reading*.

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Public Reading and the Reading Public in Late Medieval England and France. *Joyce Coleman.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Pp. xiv+250.

Joyce Coleman's admirable first book is a sweepingly revisionist, highly original work of criticism and intellectual history. It has two distinct yet interlocking aims: to offer a richer picture of late medieval reading practices (despite the title, predominantly English ones, especially as exemplified in Geoffrey Chaucer's poetry) and to deconstruct the ways in which literacy has been theorized and subsequently incorporated into medieval studies. Arguing that some of the research so influential to medievalists is flawed or incomplete, she offers corrective paradigms drawn from anthropology, folklore studies, and sociology. Finally, Coleman employs a nuanced "ethnographic methodology" (p. 109) to survey elite reading practices between the late fourteenth and the early sixteenth centuries, suggesting new ways to think about reading and about authors' relationships to their texts and audiences.

Coleman's first task is to convince medievalists to assess what may seem self-evident concepts—literacy, illiteracy, reading, orality—which, she charges, have been carelessly and inaccurately applied. Well-grounded in cross-cultural and historical studies of orality and literacy, Coleman dexterously negotiates the claims of Jack Goody and Ian Watt, the classicist Eric Havelock, and Walter Ong, demonstrating in detail how medievalists have been especially indebted to their work, at the cost of critically weighing their claims (and more recent developments in the field). She is especially reluctant to accept the admittedly controversial hypotheses of Havelock, Goody, and Watt that the development of alphabetic script and the acquisition of literacy transformed thought processes and cultural institutions in classical Greece; likewise, she challenges the idea that literate culture is so