

Letter writing, known as dictamen in the Medieval and Renaissance periods, was formatively dependent upon the theory of oral rhetoric of the ancient world, some reflections of which are still apparent today. Three oral rhetoric precepts were applied by letter writers: inventio, locating material for three kinds of letters; dispositio, organizing letters into an introduction, body, and conclusion; and style, applying ornateness along with clarity and correctness to prose. Representative English, Italian, and German letter writing practitioners carried the oral tradition along.

Some Influences of Greek and Roman Rhetoric on Early Letter Writing¹

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IN AN EARLY TWENTIETH century dissertation, Paetow (1910) included this chapter heading: Rhetoric: The 'Business Course' at Medieval Universities. Paetow asserts that rhetoric, defined particularly as written communication, was a significant core course in Medieval schools where the letter, in great measure, depended on a classical, oral heritage.

Business letters even today reflect—though dimly—that heritage, resting on oral rhetoric which changed to meet the vicissitudes of the social, educational, and political tenor of the Medieval and Renaissance world.

During the Medieval period the church dominated society. Organized business was fledgling. Education was limited. As one of the seven liberal arts,² oral rhetoric was slowly replaced by written rhetoric. In contrast, rhetoric in the classical world was training in oral communication; it gave an orator the tools, philosophy, and logic to persuade. For Aristotle (1932) oral training meant discovering in each case what were the available means of persuasion.³ Cicero (1948, I.viii.30) suggested "There is to my mind no more excellent thing than the power, by means of oratory, to get a hold on assemblies of men, win their good will, direct their inclinations wherever the speaker wishes, or divert them from whatever he wishes." Quintilian (1943, II.xiv.5) maintained "The artist (orator) is he who has acquired the art, that is to say, he is the orator whose task is to speak well. The work is the achievement of the artist, namely good speaking."

Rhetoric changed during the Middle Ages: parts of oral rhetoric spun off, supplying both theory and models for written communication, resulting in the theory of *ars dictamen*, or the art of letter writing.⁴ Importantly, of the six parts in an oration, four—Exordium, Narratio, Confirmatio, and Conclusio—along with three major theoretical precepts—Inventio, Dispositio, Elocutio—influenced the theory and practice of teaching letter writing before modern times. (Divisio and Refutatio, two of the six parts of an oration, dropped by the wayside.)

Thus teachers of the ancient world, as exemplified in the writings of some Greek and Roman oral rhetoricians, directly influenced the teaching of letter writing (dictamen) for business and for personal written communication. Our structure for the following discussion is a brief survey of (1) some classical theories of oral rhetoric and (2) simultaneously noting those theories' reflection in written communication as seen in selected Italian, German, and English epistolographic works where theories and models for letter writing were influential.

BACKGROUND

As the Medieval world began to respect the literacy of its people and as fledgling commercial ventures between and within countries gathered momentum, there was an increasing need on both the political and commercial level for recording communication between groups or individuals. Oral communication left no record. Thus as transactions became more complex, the notaries of the day, and individuals, turned to the more permanent communication transaction—writing (Witt, 1982). The notarial profession, while still the major composers for business, church, and political clients, and often among the most literate, needed, as did a growing number of educated people, models and a theory for letter writing. That theory was found in oral rhetoric since classical antiquity did not have a fully developed theory of written composition.

Renaissance and Medieval scholars have been prolific in cataloguing the thousands of model letters and theoretical books and manuscripts. Research is just beginning on the history of business writing (Douglas and Hildebrandt, 1985). That task and other research is still unfinished (Wattenbach, 1853; Wattenbach, 1855; Haskins, 1898; Murphy, J., 1971; Wieruszowski, 1971; Witt, 1982).

Underlying some of the research is the theme that prescriptions for communicating orally in the ancient world later became the bane of students who learned compendiums of rules and models for writing. As public speaking except for church oratory went into an eclipse, *Memoria* [remembering one's arguments and thoughts within a presentation] and *Pronuntiatio* [delivering one's thoughts] dropped from the theory, not to reenter rhetoric until centuries later. Some letters were dictated orally to a scribe and in turn orally read to the recipient of the letter, linking somewhat further the written with the oral. But that oralness of the letter shall not concern us here, rather we will consider the overall influence of oral rhetorical theory on the written.

Charles Sears Baldwin (1924, p. 151-152) offers this conclusion: "At the fall of Rome the Trivium was dominated by *rhetorica*; in the Carolingian period, by *grammatica*; in the high middle age, by *dialectica* *Rhetorica*, except in *dictamen* and in some application of the larger ancient precepts of composition to preaching, is at a standstill." Paetow (1910), a bit more casually, notes that in the Middle Ages there never was a great demand for able public speakers and that oral rhetoric was systematically neglected.

Rhetoric thus lost its original reason for existence: training persons for oral discourse, in political arenas, in law courts, or in situations demanding a ceremonial statement. Hence lacking past models applicable to the enlarging nature of world business and political intercourse, the teachers (also called dictatores) of written communication took over three precepts of oral rhetoric and employed them in the service of letter writing or dictamen, to which we now turn.

PRECEPTS OF ORAL RHETORIC

Inventio⁵

The first of the ancient precepts was *inventio*, loosely translated as searching out the best available material in logical support of a proposition. Some additional meanings are these:

- Seeking plausible arguments
- Investigating the facts of a case
- Ascertaining whether the case turns on fact, definition, or quality

—Determining status of the case, similar to initial stage of today's concept of the scientific method.

At the forefront of this initial investigative process was a desire to seek logical relationships between evidence. Once the relationships were determined, the speaker-debater-presenter would have at hand the proof needed to orally support a position.

Searching out arguments, thoughts, ideas for dictamen demanded similar use of *inventio*: what arguments, what data must one collect before addressing a letter to persons of a high, same, or lower status? Erasmus (1521/1703) too in his *De Conscribendi Epistolas* is aware of audience and reader distinctions as is Blount (1654, p. 141) in his statement on *inventio*:

Invention ariseth from your business, whereof there can be no Rules of more certainty, or precepts of better direction given then conjecture may lay down of the seuerall occasions of all mens particular liues and vocations.

Day (1599/1967, p. 9), one of the earliest writers in English about appropriate business-church-government letters suggests that "Inuention first, wherein plentifullie is searched and considered, what kind of matter, how much varietie of sentences, what sorts of figures, how many similitudes, what approbations, diminutions, insinuations, and circumstances are presentlie needefull, of furthering to the matter in handling."

Other writers are oblique in their comments on *inventio*, but leave little doubt that collecting material for writing forceful letters paralleled the process demanded of an oration.

The ancients, for instance, felt that *inventio* applied to three kinds of speeches:

1) the demonstrative or epideictic—concerned with display of honor or dishonor before a public audience:

Let us now turn to the Epideictic kind of cause. Since epideictic includes Praise and Censure, the topics on which praise is founded will, by their contraries, serve us as the bases for censure. (*Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1945, 3.7.10.)

2) the deliberative—concerned with expediency or in expediency before a public assembly:

Deliberative speeches are either of the kind in which the question concerns a choice between two courses of action, or of the kind in which a choice among several is considered. (*Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 1945, 3.2.2)

3) the forensic—concerned with justice or injustice before a law court:

I now come to the forensic kind of oratory, which presents the utmost variety, but whose duties are no more than two, the bringing and rebutting of charges (*Quintilian*, 1943, 3.9.1).

Some dictamen writers of both the Medieval and the Renaissance world categorize their letters according to the above three types of speeches, that dependence varying from exact replication of words to paraphrase. One of the earliest imitators was an Italian, Alberich of Monte Cassino (1863/1961), an 11th century monastic writer whose types of letters somewhat parallel the types of speeches, and according to Rockinger (1863/1961) but disputed by Patt (1978) and Kristeller (1979), was the first theorist on dictamen since the ancient world.

That Alberich was somewhat influential for subsequent dictamen writers is however supported by Nickisch (1969, p. 17):

Im Mittelalter selbst ging von der romischen Kurie 'als von der vornehmsten Schule des Briefstils' der stärkste Einfluss auf die zahlreichen Sammlungen mit Brief- und Urkundenmustern (= formulae) aus, deren man sich zu unterrichtlichen und praktischen Zwecken bediente. 'Es kam dann nach dem Vorgan Alberichs von Monte-Cassino [1057-1086] und anderer Italiener ein theoretischer Teil hinzu, und es begann auf diesem Gebiet eine ausgebreitete literarische Tätigkeit.

In the Middle Ages the Roman Kurie, as the most noble school of letter style, exerted the greatest influence on the numerous collections of formulas for letters and documents which were used for teaching and practical purposes. Following the example of Alberich of Monte-Cassino [1057-1086] and other Italians, a theoretical part was added, and then an extensive literary activity started in this area.

Highly influential in written communication and exhibiting reflections of ancient rhetoric, was the great humanist scholar Erasmus (1521/1703) who stated that letters had three forms: deliberative, demonstrative, and judicial, to which he added a fourth category, the familiar. He further subdivided letters into narrative, nunciatory, mandatory, lamentatory, gratulatory, jocose, conciliatory, and laudatory.

Day (1599/1967) further applied oral rhetoric to written communication, his categories for letters paralleling Erasmus, ending with the same fourth category of the familiar and with almost identical headings.

Thus some influential authors on writing adopted the ancients' investigative process for locating content and their three major classifications of oratory. These became the later bases for letter categories, with added variations. Classification of letters was never identical subsequent to the ancients, but is parallel enough to suggest an oral rhetoric dependence.

Dispositio

Arguments discovered through using the methodology of *Inventio* now had to be arranged; that was called *Dispositio*, the second ancient precept. Some modern readers argue that arrangement can occur simultaneously with data collection. Perhaps so. But the oral rhetoricians discussed arrangement of ideas separately, as did dictamen writers, for in so doing the tidy divisions and subdivisions beloved by Renaissance writers could be maintained.

Variations of *dispositio* still appear in current texts under the rubric of organization. Surely modern terminology has changed, yet the classical concept of organic unity as supported by Plato (1927) finds expression in the idea that written communication may possess an introduction, body, and conclusion, remnants of an earlier time: a time when oral rhetoric laid the foundation for subsequent writing theories, specifically in dictamen.

Of the three ancient concepts of rhetoric, organization (*dispositio*) receives the most attention by subsequent writers and theorists. One could speculate that *dispositio* was easier to grasp than the complexities of logic with its enthymemes, its syllogisms, its *topoi*; that one could illustrate the structure of a business letter better than the investigative process; or, that students could imitate—and teachers could judge—more easily specific parts of letters and orations. The innumerable sidenotes in sections of the dictamen books, notably Erasmus' *De Conscribendi Epistolas* (1521/1703), suggest that it was easier to prescribe rules of organization than consistent rules for logic.

A brief discussion of *dispositio* as viewed by the ancients is necessary before reviewing the conventional parts of an oration and the omission of some parts in selected dictamen writers.

Cicero (1948, 1.31.142) has Crassus say, "I learned that he (the orator) must first hit upon what to say; then manage and marshall his discoveries, not merely in orderly fashion, but with a discriminating eye for the exact weight as it were of each argument; . . ."

Not so parallel was Aristotle (1932) who proposed that a speech had two parts: you state your case, and you prove it. While Aristotle is succinct, another view was that idea arrangement was more complex, lucidly stated in this analogy of Quintilian (1943, 7.Pr. 2):

Nor is it without good reason that arrangement is treated as the second of the five departments of oratory, since without it the first (*inventio*) is useless. For the fact that all the limbs of a statue have been cast does not make it a statue: they must be put together; and if you were to interchange some one portion of our bodies or of those of other animals with another, although the body would be in possession of all the same members as before; you would none the less have produced a monster. Again even a slight dislocation will deprive a limb of its previous use and vigour, and disorder in the ranks will impede the movement of an army.

Dispositio was the logical and precise method of persuading receivers of a message through four distinct divisions: *exordium*, *narratio*, *confirmatio*, and *conclusio*. *Divisio* and *refutatio* appear to have been omitted in dictamen theory books.

Exordium

No precise English word replaces the Latin term *exordium*. Let it suffice that it means that which is spoken first—the commencement, introduction of thought selected to attract the audience, oral or written. A main thrust of Cicero (1948) was that in the arrangement of a speech the strongest point should come first, antedating by many centuries the controversy of the primacy-recency argument in modern communication.⁶ Quintilian (1943) suggested that in the *exordium* one prepares an audience so that it will listen to the rest of the speech.

In Medieval times vocabulary differences occurred from ancient concepts of the introduction, but beneath the variant headings is still discussed the prime purpose: adapting the written material to the reader, be he of the church, business, or government.

The 11th century Italian, Alberich, (1863/1961, p. 10) substitutes *salutatio* for *exordium*, but the intent in a letter is the same as for an oration, adapting and persuading the receiver to the sender's point of view: "Salutio est oratio salutis affectum indicans a personarum situ non discordans" (the salutation is the part of the discourse setting a tone of greeting not at odds with the disposition/situation/circumstance of the recipient). A similar belief occurs in the *Ars dictandi of Orleans*, (1863/1961, p. 103) "Salu-

tacio est brevis oratio que salutis affectum continet et a statu personarum non dissidet" (the salutation is that brief part of the discourse which conveys a tone of greeting and which does not depart from the situation of the recipients). Other Italian authors and fragments of works have statements similar to the preceding, along with exemplary letters for imitation. The *Candelbarum* (C.S. Baldwin, 1928/1959) suggests that the exordium should always be in the third person, its order determined by the rank of the sender to that of the receiver.

Little doubt exists that dictamen depended on the ancients, gained momentum in Italy and later carried over to Germany. Wrote Nickisch (1969, p. 204):

Aus deren lateinisch-humanistischer Tradition ergab sich die enge Bindung an die antike Redelehre. Da man den Brief als einem Teil der Rhetorik auffasste, wurden für ihn charakteristisch rhetorische Stilmittel obligatorisch: das Dispositionsschema und der grossangelegte, vielfach untergliederte Satz.

Out of its Latin-humanistic tradition resulted the close ties to the rhetoric of antiquity. Since the letter was considered a part of rhetoric, style elements characteristic of rhetoric, became obligatory: the disposition-plan and the artistically designed sentence which was divided into many parts.

Nickisch (1969, p. 23) further includes two letters, each illustrating in an exordium audience adaptation of an employee (farmer) to his employer (owner), concluding with the following statement:

Die beiden Schreiben sind deutlich erkennbar nach dem Dispositionsschema aufgebaut. Gleich die Art des Exordiums verrät, wie die Verfasser bestrebt waren, es dem Stande und der Würde des Empfängers gemäss einzurichten. Der Grundherr muss sich mit einer recht kurzen und nicht sonderlich unterwürfigen Exordialformel zufriedengeben, indes die für den Legaten oder Bischof bestimmte erheblich umfanglicher, uppiger und sehr viel devoter ausfällt.

It is clearly recognizable that both pieces are composed according to the dispositio plan. The character of the exordium immediately indicates how eager the authors were to write according to the social position and the dignity of the recipient. The landowner must be satisfied with a rather short and not particularly reverential formula of the exordium, while the formula intended for the legates or the bishop is definitely more voluminous, flowery, and much more reverential.

Erasmus too suggested rules for letter writing and included examples of the exordium in his *De Conscribendis Epistolas*, strongly influencing German dictamen theory (Stockhausens, 1751). The Englishman Day (1599/1967, p. 11) echoes Erasmus when he suggests "the first place is Exordium, a beginning or induction to the matter to be written of, which is not always after one sort or fashion, but in diuerse maners: . . ." Two additional English works, or translations, carried the exordium theory along with examples in Fullwood's (1568) *The Enimie of Idleness* and Fleming's (1576) *A Panoplie of Epistles*.

In short, the oral exordium of the ancient world, amended in the Renaissance, is the forerunner of today's business letter salutation and opening paragraph.

Narratio

Second, the ancients suggested that a statement of the facts (narratio) followed the exordium and was a logical review of the subject on which he (the listener) would have to give judgment.

Cicero suggests the narratio should be stated in a plausible, lucid, and brief manner, with the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* urging adaptation similar to that of Quintilian.

Alberich's *Rationes dictandi* (1863/1961) indicates that the classical meaning of narratio was accepted in this early Italian work on letter writing. Somewhat parallel statements occur in the *Ars dictandi* (1863/1961, p. 109) document:

Narratio uero expositio est rerum gestarum uel ut potius se geri uidebuntur. Quam profecto ad cause mittentis conmodum breuiter et aperte flectere debemus.

Narration is the exposition of things as they were done or perhaps as they might be perceived to be done. We certainly ought to make this section concise and clear for the benefit of the one who is putting forth the case.

In English, Day (1599/1967, p. 11) follows his predecessors, unimaginatively carrying forward in circumflex style the same idea: "Then Narratio, or Propositio, each seruing to one effect, wherein is declared or proposed, in the one by plaine tearmes, in the other by inference, or comparison, the verie substance of the matter whatsoeuer to be handled."

We today would consider the narratio part of a letter's main text or body, as well as proof, the third part of dispositio.

Proof, Confirmatio, Peticio

The Renaissance scholar Donald Lemen Clark (1957, p. 117) clarifies the third part of *dispositio*. "When we consider proof in rhetoric, we must be careful to remember that rhetoric does not concern itself with scientifically demonstrated truths, about which there is no debate, but with such contingent and approximate truths as lead to differences of opinion."

Thus some ancients founded proof on probability, to which they added *ethos*: the character, intelligence, and good will of the speaker; and *pathos*: arousing the emotions in the listener.

The logical web of proof and reasoning and syllogisms need not detain us long; such an analysis and interpretation has been grist for communication scholars for a long time, such as Shorey (1924); Palmer (1934); McBurney (1936); Solmsen (1941); Bitzer (1959); Lanigan (1974); Conley (1983); and many others.

Proof for the ancients included arguments in support of a proposition: proofs outside the art of rhetoric (*inartificial*: witnesses, rumors, laws, previous courts, contracts, torture, oaths) and proofs suggested by the speaker himself (*artificial*: discovering arguments arising out of the speech itself, e.g., status or the analyzing of the issues implicit in any subject). For Aristotle (1932, 1.1) this latter aspect of rhetoric was preeminent, moving deductively on the wheels of the enthymeme of which he says, "The enthymeme, again, is a kind of syllogism Consequently, the person with the clearest insight into the nature of syllogisms, who knows from what premises and in what modes they may be constructed, will also be the most expert in regard to enthymemes . . ."7

Dictamen writers simplify their discussion of proof, beginning with Alberich (1863/1961) who writes of *peticio* (also called proof and *confirmatio*) and omits almost all of the ancient discussion of logic. A parallel approach is also found in the *Ars dictandi* (1863/1961).

Proof or *peticio* is also discussed by some German dictamen writers, if one could infer from a 16th-century example noted by Nickisch (1969, p. 35) which exemplifies *peticio*, preceded by a clarifying sentence:

Ausser der Salutatio und der Conclusio besteht der Brief insgesamt aus zwei Sätzen, von denen der eine die Narratio und der andere die Petitio darstellt. Der Briefschreiber hat sich also streng an das Dispositionsschema gehalten.

Not including the salutation and the conclusion, the letter consists of altogether two sentences. One of them is the narration, the other the petition. It is obvious that the writer followed the plan for disposition precisely.

Another German scholar, Steinhausen (1889/1968, 1, 103)—German scholars were in the forefront of scholarship on the Medieval and Renaissance theory of dictamen—firmly suggests that German *writers* of letters depended on some Italian theorists, who organized a letter with precision:

Der Brief, der oft mit einem wohlgestalteten Leibe verglichen wird—dieser Vergleich findet sich vom Mittelalter an bis zu dem Ausgang des 17. Jahrhunderts,—wird genau in bestimmte Teile zerlegt.

The letter, which often is compared with a well formed body—this comparison can be found from the Middle Ages to the end of the 17th century—is divided into specifically determined parts.

Day (1599/1967, p. 11) is brief concerning proof: “Then Confirmatio, wherein are amplified or suggested many reasons, for the aggrauating or proof of any matter in question.”

A detailed analysis of proof as handled by the ancients is diluted in Medieval and Renaissance books on letter writing. Support for ideas is part of a discussion on style, with logic subsumed more under dialectic and the study of law. By comparison, a consideration of style and its inordinate verbiage replaces the intricate Aristotelian discussion of logic.

Conclusio, Peroration, Epilog

Organic unity demands a conclusion or ending, to orations and to letters. Some ancients offered the following concerning only the conclusion:

The Epilogue is made up of four elements. (1) you must render the audience well-disposed to yourself, and ill-disposed to your opponent; (2) you must magnify and depreciate; (3) you must put the audience into the right state of emotion; and (4) you must refresh their memories. (Aristotle, 1932, 3.19)

Conclusions, among the Greeks called *epilogoi*, are tripartite, consisting of the Summing Up, Amplification, and Appeal to Pity. We can in four places use a Conclusion: in the Direct Opening, after the Statement of Facts,

after the strongest argument, and in the Conclusion of the speech (*Rhetoric ad Herennium*, 2.30.47).

There are two kinds of peroration, for it may deal either with facts or with the emotional aspect of the case . . . the repetition and grouping of the facts serves both to refresh the memory of the judge and to place the whole of the case before his eyes, and, even although the facts may have made little impression on him in detail, their cumulative effect is considerable (*Quintilian*, 1943, 6.1.1).

Alberich suggests that letters—as orations—should end with a conclusion: “*Conclusio quidem est oratio qua terminatur epistola*” (1863/1961, p. 21) (the conclusion is that part of the discourse by which a letter is ended). Similar wording is found in the *Ars dic-tandi* (1863/1961, p. 368) document, “*Conclusio est terminalis oratio tocius epistole, per quam ostenditur quid donmodi vel inconmodi debeat sequi*” (the conclusion is the end of the discourse of the whole letter, through which it is made clear what advantage or disadvantage ought to be expected); with the German Ludolf (1961) agreeing in his brief statement “*Conclusio est oratio sum-man intencionis explicans*” (the conclusion is the part of the discourse explaining the sum of the intention).

Nickisch (1969, p. 22) concludes his discussion of German letter writers of the 17th and 18th century in this manner: “Ich fasse zusammen: Grundlage für alles Briefschreiben sollen die Rhetorik und das ihr zugehörige Dispositionsschema sein.”⁸ (I summarize: The foundation for the writing of all letters shall be rhetoric and its corresponding plan for disposition.) Steinhausen (1889/1968) also supports the preceding generalization in his review of letter writers of the 16th and 17th century.

When the theory of dispositio reached England, the conclusio concept was still there, perhaps arriving there via Erasmus (1521/1703)—who spent several years in Britain—and Day (1599/1967, p. 11), whose ideas continue to parallel those of Erasmus: “Lastlie, peroratio, in which after a brief recapitulation of that which hath bene vrged, the occasions thereof are immediatlie concluded. These are not altogether at all times vsed, but some or the most of them as occasion serueth, either admitted or reiected.”

Divisio is neglected in the Medieval and Renaissance world of teaching letter writing. The term means a laying out, a preamble of the main points the writer will make. I have not been able to determine why dictamen theorists omitted divisio. Some modern business writing teachers have revived the concept under discussions as forecast, structural preview, or direction setting.

Medieval and Renaissance writers also gave little exposure to the precept of *refutatio*, the art of refutation or rebuttal. Quintilian, for example, says that refutation demands the same discipline as when determining proofs, with Cicero proposing that defense is harder than accusation. Refutation is absent in later dictamen writers. Current debate and discussion texts, more so than business communication texts, continue discussions of refutation.

Elocutio

Style-Lexis-elocutio⁹ was the third part of the ancient precepts or canons of oral rhetoric. Few precepts received as much emphasis in subsequent centuries where it dominated, indeed overwhelmed, both the academic world and the world of textbook writers.

Cicero devoted most of his *Orator* to style, with about a third of his *De Oratore* to the same topic. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Book four, Aristotle's Book three, and Quintilian's Books eight and nine emphasize style almost exclusively.

Principles of Style

Aristotle's (1932) discussion of style early set the pattern for clear communication: be clear, correct, appropriate, and ornate, perhaps the forerunner of Business Communication's later 7 C's (Murphy/Hildebrandt, 1988).

Quintilian also supported clarity as the first essential of a good style, with the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* suggesting that clarity renders language plain and intelligible.

While the ancients desired clarity, they also wished to hold attention. Having determined what one will say, suggested Quintilian, the addition of brilliance will propel the thought along. How? By using either tropes, schemes, figures of thought, or figures of language. Little agreement exists as to where one category ends and the other begins. Quintilian pretends little ability to keep these categories separate; I make the same confession.

Clarity, correctness, and appropriateness appear in relatively stable forms subsequent to the ancients; ornateness too is virtually unchanged as an oral rhetorical form applied by most dictamen theorists. Italians saw the need for ornateness in clerical and papal curia letters, legal letters, and letters between cities' business people, even suggesting rhythmic cadences of phrases for important written communication. Alberich's examples of salutations leave little doubt that additionally the style of address must fit the social

hierarchy of the reader, as does the *rationes dictandi* by Hugo of Bologna, or the piece found in Orleans called the *Incipit summa dictaminis*. Boncompagno's *Candelabrum* of the 13th century was well received in Florence and elsewhere, in Book two devoting considerable space to the traditional stylistic figures now to be applied to letter writing.

If one can accept the conclusion of Nickisch (1969, p. 19), the dictamen theoreticians in Germany by the 17th and 18th centuries stressed clarity as the overriding ideal, although depending heavily upon the rules of rhetoric and formulary books to illustrate the theory. Slowly, by the 14th century in Germany, ". . . die deutsche Sprache mehr und mehr im Geschäfts- und Rechtslebel des deutschen Volkes Boden gewann." (. . . the German language gained more and more ground in the social and legal life of the German people.) I am led to believe that ornateness dropped out of German dictamen as the language of communication changed from Latin to German. There were rules but an analysis of the style of 17th century German letter writers by Steinhausen (1889/1968, 1, p. 50) concludes that writers adapted the style to the individual recipient, "Im Grunde immer dieselbe, wechselt sie im einzelnen nach den Verhältnissen des Schreibers und des Empfängers." (Basically always the same, it [the letter] changes in the particular cases according to the situation (position) of the writer and the recipient.)

In England ornateness for writing reached its zenith. There, Quintilian's legacy was firm. Indeed, scholars laud him as a most revered English grammar school author, whose influence, even on Shakespeare, was acknowledged to be far beyond the classroom (T. W. Baldwin, 1944). At Eton, around 1530, it was Erasmus' *Conscribendi Epistolas* that set the practice of letter writing, particularly arguments, proof of arguments, amplification, and other figures. Also, Cicero was to be emulated, copied, imitated—for stylistic purposes, with embellishments also to be learned from Erasmus' *De Copia* (1513/1963). Imitation became a pedagogical device at Eton, Ipswich, Cambridge, Bury St. Edmunds, Harrow, East Retford, and other English schools (D. L. Clark, 1948). C. S. Baldwin (1939, p. 41) wrote that letter exercises, and models, were often long, and Ciceronian: "Sometimes in effect essays, sometimes almost orations, they are sometimes themes. The favorite model is Cicero; and in extreme cases the letter seems to consist of style. It is hardly a letter; it is an exercise. . . ." The conclusion of D. L. Clark (1948, p. 186) ends with, "When it is understood how the Latin Epistle was taught as an exercise in the

grammar schools, it is not difficult to understand how the Latin Epistles of mature scholars naturally retained traces of school training in letter writing.

Dictamin theorists followed a similar pattern: there was first a discussion of style, often complete with the rhetorical figures, and then a lengthy series of formularies, or models, which students or writers of letters could emulate. The rhetorical figures were wholly dependent on the ancient world, now applied to letters in place of oratory.

Levels of Style

A triad of rhetorical styles existed in ancient writing: the grand, middle, and the plain, originally applied to oratory, later applied to literature, prose, poetry, and letter writing.

The grand style was used to move an audience to action, the orator making use of elevated diction, figures, and amplification (*Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 1945, 4.8.11):

A discourse will be composed in the Grand Style if to each idea are applied the most ornate words that can be found for it, whether literal or figurative; if impressive thoughts are chosen, such as are used in Amplification and Appeal to Pity; and if we employ figures of thought and figures of diction which have grandeur.

At the other pole was the mean, the low, or the plain style, the speech of everyday life. (D'Alton, 1931/1962)

In the middle, but not always clearly, stood the intermediate, theoretically borrowing from the grand or plain at the ends of the stylistic continuum. Lumped in this category were these orators who Cicero (1939, 5.21) demeaningly described as using "neither the intellectual appeal of the latter class (plain) nor the fiery force of the former (grand); akin to both, excelling in neither, sharing in both, or, to tell the truth, sharing in neither . . ." Others were not so derogatory, particularly the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* or Quintilian.

The tripartite stylistic categories were carried along through the Medieval dictamen writers. *The Candelbarum* (c. 1213) suggests that humilis, mediocris, and sublimis are applicable to letter writing along with the admonition to avoid aridness, looseness, and inflation of the idea. That the three styles were discussed in other Italian works I have been unable to determine primarily because dictamen was slowly replaced with *ars notaria*, i.e., the art of writing public and legal documents, a forerunner of a notary.

The three patterns of style appeared for the first time in Germany in 1580 in a work by Abraham Sawr entitled *Penus Notariorum* (Nickisch, 1969, p. 33). One chapter discussed differences under the rubric of "Von zierlicher Red [sic] der Rhetoric," (ornamental language in rhetoric) with a distinct ancient ring in the categorization:

Dagegen: Der mittel Styl wirt geubt durch minder treffentliche Wort vnd Zierd—dann nämlich, wenn weniger gewichtige Dinge im Brief oder in einer Rede zu behandeln sind. Während also der schwere Stil sich dadurch auszeichnen soll, dass er den Inhalt so eindrucks- und kunstvoll wie möglich darbietet, und während das gleiche im mittleren Stil um einen Grad reduziert geschehen soll, möge man sich im dritte(n) Styl, der nider vnd demütiger Form ist, nach dem Vorbild der schlichttreuherzigen Umgangssprache richten.

In contrast: The middle style is characterized by fewer words of decorum—in cases where less important things are addressed in a letter or a speech. While the more ornate style shall be characterized by the fact that it presents the content as impressively and artistically as possible, and while the same should happen in the middle style, but reduced by a few degrees, one should follow the third style, which is lower and humbler in form, the example of the simple and trustworthy everyday language.

Sawr follows his definition with examples, suggesting that even in tone and expression the lower style, for example, should approach the ancient ideal of good oratory.

Sattler's *Thesaurus Notariorum* (1607/1969, p. 53) gives examples of stylistic limits—*die obere und untere Grenze* (upper and lower limits)—applicable to certain letters, which is the dominant inference Nickisch (1969, p. 72) draws for the first half of the seventeenth century, "Welche Stilart angemessen ist, bestimmt der gesellschaftliche Rang der Brief-partner." (Which [level of] style is appropriate, is determined by the social position of the letter-partner.)

English dictamen theorists were no less enthusiastic, giving a rhetorical nod to their ancient predecessors. Day (1599/1967, p. 10), for once, is succinct, suggesting that the tripartite concept of style was also noted in England:

Now is as much as Eloquution is annexed vnto the stile, which euermore is also tied to the argument and substance of euerie Epistle: it is to be regarded what stile maie generallie bee deemed meetest for the common habit, wherein each of them maie ordinarilie be published. In the recording whereof, we do find three sorts, especiallie in all kinds of writing and speaking, to haue bene generallie commended.

Sherry's (1550/1960) trilogy is the "greate, the small, the meane." Fleming (1576) in his *Panoptie* hints at an awareness of classical division when he discusses adapting to readers, as does Blount (1654) in his *Academie of Eloquence*, further suggesting that the term "fashion" replace style. One could presume that by 1654, and a bit earlier, the vestiges of the ancients began to fade, teachers of letter writing reacting to their immediate period; some individual and creative thinking began to replace the prescriptions followed for many years.

CONCLUSIONS

This brief survey suggests that letter writing—or dictamen or epistolography—was heavily influenced by the Greek and Roman oral rhetoricians. Both oral rhetoric and dictamen had a relationship of mutual influence and parallelism, less when immutable rules were the dominant goals. The more they both stressed clarity and precision the more they became parallel to meet the business communication needs of an emerging economic and political society.

Overlaying the entire ancient oral world were five precepts or canons (two dropped by the wayside in the Medieval and Renaissance period), often highly prescriptive and following a dense network of details, which later were to be practiced by students and notaries when writing letters. The remaining three precepts were discussed in this paper.

Inventio, the first oral precept, was the process of discovering material applicable to speeches such as demonstrative, deliberative, and forensic, with subsequent teachers of letter writing using the same investigative process for discovering content and similar categories for types of letters.

Dispositio, the second precept, meant organizing a speech. Dictamen theorists adopted four out of six parts of an oration and applied them to the art of letter writing. Thus (introduction—*exordium*; statement of facts—*narratio*; proof, evidence—*confirmatio*; and conclusion—*conclusio*), are seen in Medieval and Renaissance texts on letter writing in Italy, Germany, and England. Business communication experts today see reflections of that oral heritage in their discussions of introduction, body, and conclusion.

Style, a third ancient precept, caught the fascination of the Medieval and Renaissance teachers of letter writing, perhaps

reaching a crescendo in English stylists who sought through a myriad of schemes to embellish the written words of students. Yet while focusing heavily upon ornateness in writing, this precept gave seminal emphasis to clarity and correctness, forerunners of criteria sought in good business writing today.

Dictamen appropriated *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *style*, particularly in significant pedagogical letter-writing texts in Europe. Most of the manuals were similar in organization: theory preceded practice; explanations preceded examples; writer borrowed from writer, with the result that for years identical prescriptions appeared in the texts, until the realities of the world replaced mere copying or imitation of ancients such as Cicero or Quintilian.

Guided by the precepts of the past, we should recognize that written business communication has an ancient heritage; that it held a significant position as part of an earlier concept, rhetoric, one of the original seven liberal arts of mankind.

NOTES

¹ I wish to thank Professor Iris Varner of Illinois State University for translating and verifying the German quotations and Professor Glenn Knudsvig of the University of Michigan for doing the same with the Latin quotations. Five other colleagues also offered suggestions during preparation of the manuscript.

² The seven liberal arts were divided into two groups, one called the quadrivium and included arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. The other was called the trivium which included rhetoric, grammar, and dialectic or logic. As changes in education occurred, dictamen—an offshoot of rhetoric—joined the curriculum, as did subjects as physics, medicine, theology, and others. During the Medieval and Renaissance periods, there was no pristine separation between the arts of the trivium, traditional parts were either omitted, taken over, or amended as secular and theological learning institutions produced new scholars.

³ A fuller discussion of the philosophy behind Aristotle's definition is in Cope: "That which gives its peculiar and distinctive character to his [Aristotle] treatment of Rhetoric is, as he himself tells us, that he has established its connection with Dialectics, the popular branch of Logic, of which it is a 'branch' or 'offshoot' or 'counterpart' or 'copy,' which enables him to give a *systematic* and scientific exposition of it as a special kind of reasoning and mode of proof . . ." Cope, E. M. (n.d.). *An introduction to Aristotle's rhetoric*. Dubuque, IA: William C. Brown. (Original work published 1867). See also Solmsen, Fredrich (1941). The Aristotelian tradition in ancient rhetoric. *American Journal of Philology*, 62, 35-50, 169-190.

⁴ The term dictamen referred to either composition which was prose, metrical, or rhythmical in composition. Our use of dictamen focuses only on dictamen's meaning as written discourse in the form of a letter, either referring to its structure or models illustrating that structure. Properly, the

formulary or books of models letters were called dictamina, of which there are hundreds, illustrating letters for church, commerce, or personal written communication.

⁵ For a more detailed classical review of inventio, see the following Greek and Roman authors on rhetoric: Quintilian, *Institutes*, Books 3, 4, 5, and 6; Cicero, *De Inventione*; Cicero, *De Oratore*, 2.27.166ff; *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, 1.-3.8.15; and Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, Books 1 and 2.

⁶ See Cicero, *Orator*, 15.50 who, devoid of modern psychological terms, antedates the primacy/recency argument of this century: "And when he has gained attention by introduction, he will establish his own case, refute and parry the opponent's argument, choosing the strongest points for the opening and closing, and inserting the weaker points in between."

⁷ Briefly, while today more often finding its home in symbolic logic courses, the syllogism in Aristotle's time was a device to analyze and test deductive reasoning. Simply stated, syllogistic reasoning followed this pattern: if A is true, and B is true, then C must be true.

Premise A—All MBA students are mortal
 Premise B—John is an MBA student
 Conclusion C—Therefore, John is mortal

The enthymeme is an abbreviated syllogism, meaning that an argumentative statement contains a conclusion and only one of its premises, the other premise being implied. "John is an MBA student who consequently one day will die" is built on the unstated but highly verifiable premise of all MBA students being mortal. Conjunctive adverbs as consequently, hence, or therefore within a compound sentence suggest an enthymeme at work.

⁸ Perhaps the best analysis of dispositio in Italian works is found in Harry Bresslau's (1912-31) analysis of documentary writing. He notes that church and legal letters had these divisions: *Salutatio*, *Prologus* oder *Exordium*, *Narratio* und *Conclusio*; or *Salutatio*, *Captatio benevolentiae*, *Narratio*, *Petitio* und *Conclusio*. See Harry Bresslau (1912-31) *Handbuch der Urkundenlehre für Deutschland und Italien*. Leipzig: Klewitz, 2, 248 ff. (Original work published 1889).

⁹ One of the better analyses of style and dictamen in the Renaissance is in Wilbur Samuel Howells' (1956) *Logic and Rhetoric in England, 1500-1700*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Related to the above work is the classic statement on style and prose in the ancient world: Norden, Eduard. (1974). *Die Antike Kunstprosa vom VI Jahrhundert V. Chr. bis in die Zeit der Renaissance*. Berlin: Teubner. (Original work published 1898).

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