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## Christian Plain Style: The Evolution of a Spiritual Ideal

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scrutiny, it is the search itself that Plato portrays as exemplifying the life of philosophy.

Roochnik says he is motivated, in part, by the belief that Plato's dialogues "can benefit us in these hypertechnical times" (p. xii). How Plato's writings can benefit us in this regard is unclear, though he appears unsettled by the rise of postmodernism *nee* rhetoric. Roochnik notes that "philosophy v. rhetoric is a fundamental dispute" that animates the entire book (p. 181). According to Roochnik, rhetoric is not a *technê*, rhetoric is distinct from philosophy, and Socrates was rhetorical but not a rhetorician. In sum, book offers a marvelously clear and thorough explication of the platonic case against rhetoric with which most readers of this journal are probably all too familiar.

EDWARD SCHIAPPA  
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Peter Auksi, *Christian Plain Style: The Evolution of a Spiritual Ideal* (Montreal:McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995).

Professor Auksi contends that there has been no broad study of the Christian plain style in the West, and he proposes to fill the gap by tracing this stylistic ideal from its prehistory in classical rhetoric, through its biblical beginnings, its foundations in Paul and Augustine, its treatment by church fathers, and its fortunes in the middle ages to its culmination in the English Reformation, and particularly the seventeenth century. Such an ambitious study is indeed needed, and Auksi's text at least moves in the direction of its goal.

Auksi's overall claim, made in his title and at intervals throughout, is that simplicity "evolves" as an ideal in Christian art, and particularly in Christian discourse. His numerous examples, however, demonstrate just the opposite. Rather than proving causal links between venous stages of an evolution record, Auksi shows that all the theorists ultimately derive their authority from Christ, Paul, and Augustine. It is the example of Christ, the statements in the Pauline epistles and *De doctrina christiana* to which Auksi's theorists always return. Even the terms

he employs suggest the recursiveness of their enterprise: "renewal or reform" (p. 178), "return *ad fontes*" (p. 238), "restored or recovered" (p. 268). They also return to a finite number of scriptural commonplaces about the proper employment of classical rhetoric, likening it to the spoils of Egypt refashioned to godly use by the Israelites or to the captive heathen woman who may be married once her head is shaven and her nails pared. Christian plain style proves to be a changeless ideal which is constantly being rediscovered rather than a mutation in the history of rhetoric. That there are no dinosaurs in this fossil record other than Christ, Paul, and Augustine is worth noting.

Auksi's study unfortunately is compromised by its historical vagueness or even inaccuracy. In spite of the wide readership intended by his broad study, he provides little information as to the particular historical situations of various texts. Thus, for instance, he mentions the Byzantine iconoclastic controversies without any overall framework of dates of parties (pp. 84-86). Indeed, historical figures are inconsistently introduced. We hear for instance of Thomas of Celano (p. 107), but not when he lived nor why his account of Francis of Assisi is important. Throughout, examples are cited in no observable order, as when John Wilkins's late preaching manual is introduced before William Perkins's, albeit "the first and best" (pp. 289, 296).

Auksi's terminology also sometimes ignores historical realities. The vexed term "puritan" goes undefined, and is often used either as if it represented a denomination separate but equal to the established Church of England, although there was but one church through the early 1640s in which many "puritans" were also "Anglicans", or as an unexamined synonym for the more enthusiastic sects, as the term was sometimes used at the time. But one asks an historical study to distinguish polemical labels from actual loyalties. Indeed, Auksi's occasional readiness to take his sources at face value leads him to some rather startling factual errors. He says, for instance, that Robert of Melun (f. 1150) "understands Plato's style" (pp. 100-101), when only a translated portion of the *Timaeus* was available to him.

Auksi does however provide tantalizing glimpses into the more interesting ramifications of his discussion, such as the importance of ethos to the plain style (e.g. pp. 181-189) and the

discrepancy between ideal simplicity and actual practice, as for instance among the Byzantine iconoclasts who were also patrons of secular art. At the least, this study on the tensions between modes of discourse suggests interesting directions for further study.

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Carole Levin and Patricia R. Sullivan eds, *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women*, (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1995) xiv + 293 pp.

This is a collection of essays by different authors on women who either wrote against, or were victimized by, misogynists. It closes where it begins, with Carole Levin and Patricia Sullivan associating Hillary Clinton and four queens: Isabel, Catherine de Médicis, Elizabeth I and Mary II (pp. 7, 275-81). It is a connection made in other papers, but here it is supported by another between the Republican Rev. Pat Robertson and John Knox (pp. 4-5).

Where these title essays are destined to be short-lived, the critical essays sandwiched between vary enormously in subject and approach, are learned, and bear re-reading. But as there is no apparent theme to the entire book, and the organization is simply chronological, I try to group the material here into meaningful clusters. Only Jane Donaworth, choosing examples from Madelaine de Scudéry, Margaret Cavendish, Margaret Fell, Bathusa Reginald Makin, and Mary Astell, especially in Part 2 of *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* (1697), deals with the call for a revival of classical rhetorical education for women. Throughout the rest of this book "rhetoric" has other meanings. Daniel Kempton explores how Christine de Pizan teaches women to survive male oppression by 'dissimulation' or hypocrisy in *Cité des Dames* (1405) and *Trésor de la Cité Des Dames*. "Rhetoric" means "cant" or "slander" in the demonising of Anne Boleyn that Retha Warnicke describes; in the reiteration of allusions to women as breeding stock that Jo Eldrige Carney identifies in Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*; and in the representation of women as commodities to