

THE POETRY OF THE *POETRIA NOVA*: THE *NUBES SERENA* AND *PEREGRINATIO* OF METAPHOR

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Geoffrey of Vinsauf's Poetria nova must be studied as a poem in its own right as thoroughly as it has been studied as a technical rhetorical treatise; although many scholars have acknowledged the brilliance of his style, few analyses thereof exist. This imbalance in criticism limits our understanding of his ideas and the appeal they held for medieval poets. This study, therefore, focuses on two images in the section on ornatus graves, or weighty ornamentation, the category of figures defined by its reliance on transumptio. In describing its moving effects, Geoffrey uses the imagery of a pilgrimage (peregrinatio) and of a "clear cloud" (nubes serena). Both help him explain how transumptive language at first displaces or hides meaning beneath something that is deceptively ordinary. When that meaning becomes clear to the reader, however, the recognition can be delightful, intoxicating, or even wondrously transporting. The images are not original to Geoffrey, nor are they drawn from the discourse of formal rhetoric. Rather, peregrinatio and the nubes serena have a rich history in liturgical drama, biblical commentary, and iconography where they signify a kind of spiritual transport remarkably similar to Geoffrey's conception of transumptio in terms of process and quality. Thus, the Poetria nova leverages the spiritual significance of the images to make a decisively literary point about the wondrous power of subtle, transumptive language. Only by recognizing the resonance of these images can we fully appreciate just how highly Geoffrey values transumptio. Approaching the Poetria nova with a poet's eye expands the range and scope of likely influences on the treatise and, more importantly, deepens our appreciation for his remarkable commitment as a poet to the affective potential of transumptive language.

Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* is one of the *artes poetriae*, a body of texts Douglas Kelly called the "arts of poetry and prose,"¹ and it survives in over

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¹ Douglas Kelly, *The Arts of Poetry and Prose*, Typologie des sources du Moyen Âge occidental 59 (Turnhout, 1991). For the text of the treatise, I have used the edition in Edmond Faral, *Les arts poétiques du XIIe et du XIIIe siècle: Recherches et documents sur la technique littéraire du moyen âge* (Paris, 1924), 194–262. All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine; references will be made throughout parenthetically by line numbers. There are three translations, which I address briefly later in the essay: Margaret F. Nims, trans., *Poetria nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf*, rev. ed. (Toronto, 2010); Jane Baltzell Kopp, trans., "Geoffrey of Vinsauf: The New Poetics," in *Three Medieval Rhetorical Arts*, ed. James J. Murphy

two hundred manuscript copies, over thirty of which are composed in English hands.² As Martin Camargo has recently shown, treatises such as Geoffrey's enjoyed a renaissance in England in the last decades of the fourteenth century, and not just in elementary classrooms (as had long been supposed). Camargo explains, for example, that Chaucer's "self-conscious engagement" with those texts would not have taken place at a rudimentary level during his elementary education but rather during his adult life, "in the context of discovery and debate carried on not only at England's premier center of higher education but also in learned circles with strong Oxford connections."³ The treatise had a strong commentary tradition⁴ and was cited by prominent writers including Chaucer, Vincent of Beauvais, and Nicholas Trevet.⁵ Erasmus even ranked Geoffrey alongside Cicero, Quintilian, and Horace.⁶ For readers such as these, Geoffrey was a teacher, but, perhaps more importantly, he was also a poet. To understand fully the meaning of the *Poetria nova* and the value it had for medieval poets, we must read Geoffrey's dense Latin verse not just for its precepts but also for its poetic style.

(Berkeley, 1971), 27–108; and Ernest Gallo, *The Poetria nova and its Sources in Early Rhetorical Doctrine* (The Hague, 1971). It should be noted that the line numbering in Gallo's facing-pages edition differs slightly from Faral's edition.

² Martin Camargo, "The Late Fourteenth-Century Renaissance of Anglo-Latin Rhetoric," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 45 (2012): 107–33, at 108. For a list of the manuscripts, see Marjorie Curry Woods, *Classroom Commentaries: Teaching the Poetria nova across Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (Columbus, OH, 2010): 289–307. For information on Geoffrey's other works, see Camargo, "'Tria sunt': The Long and Short of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's 'Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi,'" *Speculum* 74 (1999): 935–55 and idem, "In Search of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's Lost 'Long Documentum,'" *Journal of Medieval Latin* 22 (2012): 149–83.

³ Camargo, "The Late Fourteenth-Century Renaissance of Anglo-Latin Rhetoric," 116.

⁴ Nicolas Dybinus, for example, composed one particularly famous commentary. Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, eds., *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory* (Oxford, 2009), 595. Marjorie Curry Woods has written the most extensive studies of the commentary tradition on the *Poetria nova*. See especially Woods, "A Medieval Rhetoric Goes to School — and to the University: The Commentaries on the *Poetria nova*," *Rhetorica* 9 (1991): 55–65.

⁵ *Troilus and Criseyde* l.1.1065–71 draws on the building metaphor. The *Nun's Priest's Tale* cites the lament for King Richard and opens with an apostrophe to Geoffrey (lines 3347–52). This was the passage that prompted J. M. Manly's *Chaucer and the Rhetoricians* (London, 1926), a study that inspired a generation of scholarship with the assumption that Chaucer must have read the *Poetria nova* in its entirety. Such work was immediately outmoded when James J. Murphy responded to that leap of logic in "A New Look at Chaucer and the Rhetoricians," *Review of English Studies* 15 (1964): 1–20 and idem, "Rhetoric in Fourteenth-Century Oxford," *Medium Aevum* 34 (1965): 1–20.

⁶ Desiderius Erasmus, *The Correspondence of Erasmus, Letters 1 to 141, 1484–1500*, ed. Wallace K. Ferguson, R. A. B. Mynors, and D. F. S. Thomson (Toronto, 1974), 27.44–47.

Although it is often acknowledged that Geoffrey “embodies” the art he teaches,⁷ most of the critical work on the *Poetria nova* has concentrated on its sources, its relationships to other treatises, or on education and rhetorical theory. More recently, however, two important critical works have focused on its poetic qualities. In line with Margaret F. Nims’s observation that Geoffrey had a “fondness for novel metaphor,”⁸ Jean-Yves Tilliette and Alexandre Leupin have written separately about key metaphors and images that Geoffrey either borrows from other writers or invents. Leupin identifies the recurring value of likening poetry to a mirror, for example, to explain how it demonstrates literary values influenced by the Christian doctrine of the incarnation.⁹ Tilliette argues more broadly that the *Poetria nova* is a “discourse on poetry towards a discourse of poetry” and that the treatise therefore cannot be reduced to a set of mere definitions and principles.¹⁰ Following the precedent set by their work, I argue for close attention to two images used to explain the workings of metaphoricity: the image of *peregrinatio* (pilgrimage) and of a *nubes serena* (clear cloud). In liturgical drama, biblical commentary, and iconography the images have a rich history of signifying the affective power of the relationship between the literal and non-literal. By adopting them for a rhetorical treatise, Geoffrey aligns their hermeneutical significance with his literary argument for the subtle efficacy of unobtrusive metaphoric language: a rhetorical process that takes place when the proper or literal sense is so familiar and quotidian that initially it conceals its nature and meaning and thus takes the reader wondrously by surprise. Recognizing the provenance of these images can expand our understanding of likely influences on the treatise, and exploring their resonance can deepen our appreciation for Geoffrey’s interest as a poet in leveraging the affective potential of transumptive language.

THE PILGRIMAGE OF METAPHOR

The images of pilgrimage and the clear cloud appear in the sections of the treatise on ornamentation. Geoffrey divides the types of ornaments into two categories: *ornatus leves*, ornamentation that uses words in the sense proper to them, and *ornatus graves*, ornamentation that uses words in a sense non-proper to them. In the treatise, the ten weighty ornaments, sometimes called tropes in other medieval writings on rhetoric, include *translatio*, *nominatio*, *pronominatio*, *permutatio*,

⁷ Camargo, “Introduction to the Revised Edition,” in *Poetria nova*, rev. ed., trans. Nims, 4–16, at 13.

⁸ Nims, “Translator’s Introduction,” in *Poetria nova*, rev. ed., 1–3, at 3.

⁹ Alexandre Leupin, *Fiction and Incarnation: Rhetoric, Theology, and Literature in the Middle Ages* (Minneapolis, 2003).

¹⁰ “Discours sur la poésie au discours de la poésie.” Jean-Yves Tilliette, *Des mots à la parole: Une lecture de la Poetria nova de Geoffroy de Vinsauf* (Geneva, 2000), 17.

denominatio, *superlatio*, *intellectio*, *abusio*, and *transgressio*.¹¹ All have in common another key term in the discipline of rhetoric: *transumptio*. The term has a long and complicated history, spanning the centuries from classical to early modern rhetoric. In classical Latin, the word means generally “the taking or assuming of one thing for another,” known in Greek rhetoric as *metalepsis*.¹² Quintilian is the first rhetorician known to have used the term. In the *Institutio oratoria* he provides a “syllogistic” pattern with a “major premise, minor premise, and conclusion,” to borrow William Purcell’s description.¹³ Although Quintilian’s narrow definition was used in the Middle Ages (including Donatus’s *Ars grammatica*, Bede’s *Liber de schematibus et tropis*, and Matthew of Vendôme’s *Ars versificatoria*),¹⁴ a broader definition also existed in which *transumptio* was always connected with a dislocation of meaning from proper to non-proper or, as Irène Rosier-Catach succinctly calls it, “la notion de transfert sémantique.” This definition was used in a variety of contexts and discourses, including writings on grammar, rhetoric (including rhetorical commentaries), logic, and theology.¹⁵

¹¹ Although Geoffrey says there are ten tropes, he actually only discusses nine. He leaves out *circumitio*.

¹² Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, eds., *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1955), s.v. “transumptio” (n.).

¹³ William Purcell, “Transumptio: A Rhetorical Doctrine of the Thirteenth Century,” *Rhetorica* 5 (1987): 369–410, at 371–72. According to Quintilian, *metalepsis* “form[s] a kind of intermediate step between the term transferred and the thing to which it is transferred, having no meaning in itself, but merely providing a transition.” Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, trans. Harold Edgeworth Butler, 8.6.37–39. Butler used the 1868 Halm text. Michael Winterbottom has since produced a critical text better for detailed work with the original, but for the passage cited here, I found no significant difference between Butler’s text and Winterbottom’s. Quintilian, *Institutionis oratoriae libri duodecim*, ed. Michael Winterbottom (Oxford, 1970).

¹⁴ Purcell, “Transumptio,” 372–75.

¹⁵ Irène Rosier-Catach, “Prata rident,” in *Langages et philosophie: Hommage à Jean Jolivet*, ed. Alain de Libera, Abdelali Elamrani-Jamal, and Alain Galaonier (Paris, 1997), 155–76, at 155. The term was not limited strictly to academic contexts. Dante’s famous “Letter to Can Grande” makes reference to *transumptio* as one *forma tractandi*, or literary style or method: “Forma sive modus tractandi est poeticus, fictivus, descriptivus, digressivus, transumptivus; et cum hoc diffinitivus, divisivus, probativus, improbativus, et exemplorum positivus” (poetic, fictive, descriptive, digressive, transumptive; and likewise proceeding by definition, division, proof, of the refutation, and setting forth of examples). *Dantis Alagherii epistolae; The Letters of Dante*, ed. Paget Jackson Toynbee (Oxford, 1966), 13.27. *Transumptio*, therefore, was not always thought of as an ornament only; it could be used more broadly to characterize a textual mode. For more on *transumptio* and *translatio* in logic and philosophy, see the work of Mary Sirridge on Robert Kilwardby, “‘Utrum idem sint dicere et intelligere sive videre in mente’: Robert Kilwardby, *Quaestiones in librum primum Sententiarum*,” *Vivarium* 45 (2007): 253–68. One treatise that devotes an unusually large amount attention to *translatio* is the anonymous “Flores rhetorici,” nearly three quarters of which discusses the kinds of metaphor. For the text, see Martin Camargo, “A Twelfth-Century Treatise on ‘Dictamen’ and Metaphor,” *Traditio* 47 (1992): 161–213.

Gervase of Melkley's *Ars poetica*, John of Garland's *De arte prosayca, metrica, et rithmica*, and Eberhard the German's *Laborintus* all use *transumptio* as the heading under which fall the ornaments that use words in a non-proper sense.¹⁶

The *Poetria nova*, however, played a key role in adapting the broad definition of *transumptio* to make it the defining characteristic of the tropes. It is explicitly the organizing principle in the section on the *ornatus graves*. To introduce these ornaments, Geoffrey writes,

Noli semper concedere verbo
 In proprio residere loco: residentia talis
 Dedecus est ipsi verbo; loca propria vitet
 Et peregrinetur alibi sedemque placentem
 Fundet in alterius fundo: sit ibi novus hospes,
 Et placeat novitate sua. Si conficis istud
 Antidotum, verbi facies juvenescere vultum.
 Instruit iste modus transsumere verba decenter. (lines 758–65)

Do not always permit a word to reside in its proper place: such a residence disgraces the word. Let it steer clear of its proper place and go on pilgrimage elsewhere and find an agreeable dwelling in another land. Let it be a new guest there and please by its newness. If you produce this remedy, you make the countenance of the word young again. This method teaches how to transume words fittingly.¹⁷

Geoffrey firmly establishes the connection between *transumptio* and the proper/non-proper distinction and, more importantly, makes *transumptio* the umbrella under which fall all ten of the tropes and the dislocating process that defines them.

¹⁶ Renewed attention to Quintilian in the early modern period encouraged a resurgence in the use of his definition. For example, see Thomas Wilson, *Arte of Rhetorique*, ed. G. H. Mair (Oxford, 1909), 175.

¹⁷ In this definition, Geoffrey echoes his primary source text, the anonymous, first-century BC *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Although the *Ad Herennium* does not use the term *transumptio*, it does group the same ten ornaments together and describes their shared qualities as follows: “Nam earum omnium hoc proprium est, ut ab usitata verborum potestate recedatur atque in aliam rationem cum quadam venustate oratio conferatur” (They indeed all have this in common, that the language departs from the ordinary meaning of the words and is, with a certain grace, applied in another sense). *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. Harry D. Caplan (Cambridge, MA, 1968), 4.31.42. In addition, according to Ulrich Krewitt, a neo-Platonic conception of the relationship between *res* and *verba* informs some of Geoffrey's diction regarding the interior and exterior qualities of words. *Vultus* is one such word. Although the philosophical context of the *Poetria nova* is not the concern of this study, I find the idea intriguing and so note it briefly here. Krewitt, *Metapher und tropische Rede in der Auffassung des Mittelalters* (Ratingen, 1971), 317. Also, it should be noted that Faral starts a new subheading with line 765; however, I think it is more continuous with the preceding lines than modern editorial conventions make it appear.

In light of the importance of *transumptio* in the discourse of rhetoric in the Middle Ages and the role played by the *Poetria nova*, the finer details of Geoffrey's explanation merit close attention. In the passage above, he uses the image of a word going on a pilgrimage, and it reoccurs later in the same section, in a second reflection on the effect of transumptive language:

Denarius iste colorum
 Verba colorat ea gravitate, quod est alieno,
 Non proprio, vox sumpta modo. Genus omnibus unum:
 Scilicet improprius vocum status et peregrina
 Sumptio verborum. (lines 960–64)

This group of ten ornaments colors words with a weightiness that consists of receiving a word not through its proper voice but through an unfamiliar one. They all belong to one class characterized by the non-proper state of voice and the sense of the words on pilgrimage.

Transumptive language, therefore, displaces words from their ordinary, familiar location to an unfamiliar, extra-ordinary one.

Despite the fact that the *Poetria nova* has been written about more than any other medieval rhetorical treatise, the image of pilgrimage has gone unremarked with the exception of Tilliette. This is perhaps because it is obscured in all three published translations of the treatise. In lines 758–65 it is translated as “uncommon meaning” (Nims), “the choice of words is exotic” (Kopp), or “wandering application” (Gallo). In lines 960–64, it is translated as “travel about” (Nims) or “wander elsewhere” (Kopp; Gallo). None of these translations is incorrect. Lewis and Short confirms each, and *peregrinus* could be used in classical rhetoric to describe a type of barbarolexis involving the use of non-Latin words and provincialisms.¹⁸ In medieval Latin, *peregrinatio* could indeed generally mean a

¹⁸ Lewis and Short, eds., *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. “peregrinor” (v.) and “peregrinus” (adj.). On “verba peregrina” in classical rhetoric, see Heinrich Lausberg, *Handbook of Literary Rhetoric: A Foundation for Literary Study* (Leiden, 1998), §477. See also Quintilian, *The Institutio oratoria of Quintilian*, trans. H. E. Butler (Cambridge, MA, 1980), 1.5.3 and 1.55.5–7. The general idea that metaphoric language has the ability to make us see something familiar in a new and fresh way is at least as old as Aristotle: “Such variation from what is usual makes the language appear more stately. People do not feel towards strangers as they do towards their own countrymen, and the same thing is true of their feeling for language. It is therefore well to give to everyday speech an unfamiliar air: people like what strikes them, and are struck by what is out of the way... . Metaphors, like epithets, must be fitting, which means that they must fairly correspond to the thing signified: failing this, their inappropriateness will be conspicuous.” Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts (New York, 1954), 3.2 (1404b in the Bekker indexing). On the more general *alienus* quality of metaphor in classical rhetoric, see Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 8.6.5 and 8.6.18; and Cicero, *De oratore*, ed. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (Cambridge, MA, 1948), 3.37.149. See also Krewitt, *Metapher*, 325.

journey to a foreign location, but it also referred more specifically, of course, to the spiritual practice of pilgrimage to holy places.¹⁹ In the *Poetria nova*, then, each of these ten figures sends a word on a pilgrimage from its own, accustomed, proper place to a place not its own.

Tilliette is, to my knowledge, the only critic to recognize why this translation could suit Geoffrey's purposes. He notes briefly that the association with spiritual progress towards regeneration and renewal is apt for *transumptio* because it is a process that involves displacement of meaning.²⁰ His observation seems to imply that Geoffrey came up with the image himself, but the connection between *peregrinatio* and metaphor is well documented in key texts in the Latin tradition. First, Geoffrey knew the works of Alan of Lille and may have known him personally during his education in Paris.²¹ One of Alan's shorter poetic works, "De Incarnatione Christi Rhythmus Perelegans," meditates on the Christian teaching of the Incarnation through seven stanzas for the seven liberal arts. *Peregrinatio* appears in connection with metaphoric language in the stanza for rhetoric as Alan plays on terminology:

Peregrinat a natura
 nominis positio,
 cum in Dei transit iura
 hominis conditio.
 Novus tropus in figura
 novus fit constructio;
 novus color in iunctura
 nova fit translatio.
 In hac Verbi copula
 stupet omnis regula.

The defining power of the noun strays from its natural role when the condition of a man passes into the rule of God. A new figural troping takes place, a new construction; a new metaphorical joining, a new translation comes to pass. In this joining of the Word, every rule is confounded.²²

¹⁹ Both DuCange and Niermeyer cite pilgrimage as an important and common definition of *peregrinatio*, and the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* documents its use in that sense as early as AD 692. J. F. Niermeyer, ed., *Mediae Latinitatis Lexicon Minus* (Leiden, 1976), s.v. "peregrinatio" (n.) and "peregrinus" (adj.). R. E. Latham, D. R. Howlett, and R. K. Ashdowne, eds., *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (London, 1975–2013), s.v. "peregrinus" (adj.).

²⁰ Tilliette, *Des mots à parole*, 123.

²¹ Margaret F. Nims, "Translatio: 'Difficult Statement' in Medieval Poetic Theory," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 43 (1974): 215–30, at 221–22.

²² Alan of Lille, "Rhythmus de Incarnatione Domini," in *Literary Works of Alan of Lille*, trans. Winthrop Wetherbee (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 535–41. For more information on the

The incarnation is described in this stanza as a metaphoric process, a new “troping” or “translation” in which the flesh is transformed by union with the godhead.²³ It is a departure — a pilgrimage — from the natural to the supernatural.

In the prologue to the *Distinctiones*, pilgrimage again appears in connection with metaphoric language. Alan justifies the necessity of his wordlist, describing that which is *periculosus* (dangerous) and *difficilis* (difficult) in scriptural interpretation when readers do not understand the meanings of metaphors and obscure tropes. This is particularly true for such places,

ubi non habemus sermones de quibus loquitur, ubi rem ut est sermo non loquitur, ubi vocabula a propriis significationibus peregrinantur et novas admirari videntur; ubi divina descendit excellentia ut humana ascendat intelligentia.

where we have no words for that of which we speak, where the discourse does not speak of the matter as it is, where names are displaced from their proper significations and new things to be wondered at are perceived, where divine excellence descends so that human understanding may ascend.²⁴

In this passage, Alan’s use of the word accords with the *Poetria nova* and “De Incarnatione”: it denotes the way that metaphoric language departs from customary use to produce something new and wondrous.

Finally, in the *Anticlaudianus*, Alan uses *peregrinus* to portray Lady Rhetoric when she adorns the chariot fashioned by Grammar and Dialectic. In the description of her appearance, Alan writes:

In vultuque natat color igneus, ignis in ore
purpureus roseo vultum splendore colorat,
sed partim vultus candor peregrinus inheret
nativoque suum certat miscere colorem.

manuscripts, see Marie-Thérèse d’Alverny, “Alain de Lille et la ‘Theologia,’” in *L’homme devant Dieu: Mélanges offerts au père Henri de Lubac* (Paris, 1964), 111–28; D’Alverny, *Alain de Lille: Textes inédites, avec une introduction sur sa vie et ses oeuvres* (Paris, 1965), 37–51. The text of the poem is also printed in *Analecta hymnica medii aevi* 20.9 (1895): 42. The text in PL 210:577–80 is not reliable.

²³ The verb “traseo” was also used to describe the process of transubstantiation, as was *transumptio*. Boncompagno da Signa, one of the preeminent teachers of the *ars dictaminis* in Bologna and Padua, states in his *Rhetorica novissima* that “per occultam similitudinem transumpsit Dominus panem in corpus suum” (in a concealed likeness God transsumes bread into his body). *Boncompagni Rhetorica novissima*, in *Scripta anecdota antiquissimorum glossatorum*, vol. 3, ed. Augustus Gaudentius (Bologna, 1892); cited in Krewitt, *Metapher*, 252.

²⁴ Alan of Lille, *Distinctiones*, PL 210:687. Shortly thereafter, Alan also uses the term more literally to mean “departure” in the sense it sometimes had in grammar in relation to barbarisms and solecisms.

In her face a fiery color plays, a purple flame on her rosy mouth that splendidly enhances her beauty. Yet a gleam of a foreign kind also lurks in her face and seeks to blend itself with her natural color.²⁵

Alan is indebted to Peter of Compostella's *De consolatione rationis* for the phrase "candor peregrinus inhaeret."²⁶ This foreign brightness may be a reference to the influence of Greek rhetoric on early Latin rhetoric, but it may also be a more specific reference to a tradition as old as Aristotle of ascribing special value to unobtrusive but powerful metaphor.²⁷

Furthermore, figuring a process of language as a *peregrinatio* makes sense given other spatiotemporal ways of thinking about reading and writing. Augustine sometimes described interpretation as a journey along a road, as in this passage in *De doctrina christiana*:

Sed quisquis in Scripturis aliud sentit quam ille qui scripsit, illis non mentientibus fallitur: sed tamen, ut dicere cœperam, si ea sententia fallitur, qua ædificet charitatem, quæ finis præcepti est, ita fallitur, ac si quisquam errore descrens viam, eo tamen per agrum pergat, quo etiam via illa perducit. Corrigendus est tamen, et quam sit utilius viam non deserere demonstrandum est, ne consuetudine deviandi etiam in transversum aut perversum ire cogatur.

But anyone who understands in the scriptures something other than that intended by them is deceived, although they do not lie. However, as I began to explain, if he is deceived in an interpretation which builds up charity, which is the end of the commandments, he is deceived in the same way as a man who leaves a road by mistake but passes through a field to the same place toward which the road itself leads. But he is to be corrected and shown that it is more useful not to leave the road, lest the habit of deviating force him to take a cross-road or a perverse way.²⁸

Reading, right or wrong, is a journey, but only reading rightly keeps to the *via* of truth and charity.

Thinking of reading as a road was also referenced in grammar texts foundational to medieval language theory. In the *Institutiones*, Priscian gives an etymology for *litera*: "Dicitur autem litera uel quasi legitera, quod legendi iter praebeat, uel a lituris, ut quibusdam placet, quod plerumque in ceratis tabulis antiqui

²⁵ Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, in *Literary Works of Alan of Lille*, trans. Wetherbee (Cambridge, MA, 2013), 219–517, at 3.2.153–56.

²⁶ Alan of Lille, *Anticlaudianus*, trans. James J. Sheridan (Toronto, 1973), 97 n. 28. Sheridan also provides a side-by-side comparison of key passages from the *Anticlaudianus* with Peter of Compostella in an appendix. For the full text of the *De consolatione rationis*, see P. B. Soto, "Petri Compostellani de Consolatione Rationis Libri Duo," *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie und Theologie des Mittelalters* 8 (1912): 61–151. Wetherbee includes no note on these lines.

²⁷ See n. 18 above.

²⁸ Augustine, *De doctrina christiana*, CCL 32 (Turnholt, 1962), 1.36.41. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson (Indianapolis, 1958).

scribere solebant” (It is called a “letter” either in likeness to *legitera*, because it offers a road for reading, or, as it pleases some, from “erasure,” because the ancients used to write mostly on wax tablets).²⁹ Isidore of Seville echoes this explanation in his *Etymologiae*: “Litterae autem dictae quasi legiterae, quod iter legentibus praestent, vel quod in legendo iterentur” (Letters are thus called as if from *legiterae*, because they offer a road for readers, or because they are reiterated in reading).³⁰ Alcuin’s *De grammatica* presents a similar explanation.³¹

These texts could have provided Geoffrey with the connection between pilgrimage and metaphoricality but not with the ideas of concealment and revelation, which are intimately related to *transumptio* as pilgrimage in the *Poetria nova*. Towards the end of the section on the *ornatus graves*, Geoffrey writes:

Praescriptis formis quaedam pictura coloris
Et quiddam gravitatis inest, quae nascitur inde
Quod res in medium facie non prodit aperta,
Nec sua vox deservit ei, sed vox aliena,
Et sic se quasi nube tegit, sub nube serena. ...
Sic tamen esto gravis ne res sub nube tegatur,
Sed faciant voces ad quod de jure tenentur.
Quae clausum reserent animum sunt verba reperta
Ut quaedam claves animi: qui vult aperire
Rem clausam, nolit verbis inducere nubem;
Si tamen induxit, facta est injuria verbis:
Fecit enim de clave seram. Sis claviger ergo,
Remque tuis verbis aperi. (lines 1046–50, 1063–70)

In the previously described forms, there is a kind of painting of color and a kind of gravity which is born when the matter does not go forth in the presence of all with a bare face, neither does its proper voice serve it, but rather an unfamiliar voice. Thus, as it were, it conceals itself with a cloud, yet a clear cloud. ... Be weighty in a way that does not conceal the subject matter with a cloud; let the expressions hold fast to that to which they rightly belong. Discoverable words open a closed intellect, like keys to the mind. He who intends to open the closed subject matter should not draw a cloud over the words. To do so is to do wrong by the words, to make a lock out of a key. Therefore, be a key bearer and lay bare the subject matter through your words.³²

²⁹ Priscian, *Institutiones*, Corpus Grammaticorum Latinorum, 1.3, accessed 7 June 2016, <http://kaali.linguist.jussieu.fr/CGL/text.jsp?id=T43>. Hosted online by the Laboratoire d’histoire des théories linguistiques.

³⁰ *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W. M. Lindsay (Oxford, 1911), 1.3.3.

³¹ PL 101:855.

³² Reading l. 1070 as “Remque tuis” rather than “Rem citius.”

By adding a layer of meaning to the literal sense, transumptive language hides meaning or at least removes it a step or two from immediate accessibility. This is the import of the hidden face, the cloud (which I will address in the next part of the essay), and the lock and key.³³ Delayed accessibility, however, is not inaccessibility. The tension in Geoffrey's imagery means that the responsible use of *transumptio* hides but does not entirely prohibit comprehensibility. When executed well according to this standard, the weighty ornaments are powerful: "Procuras istas epulas istosque liquores: / Hoc epulum satiat, hic potus inebriat aures" (lines 955–56) (Procure this feast and these spirits: this feast satisfies and this drink makes drunk the ears).

Although Geoffrey's discussion of *transumptio* concentrates around the section on the *ornatus graves*, it appears elsewhere in the treatise. In the section on amplification, he includes *collatio* (comparison), which can take place in two ways.³⁴ The *apertus* (open) way of comparison uses one of three *signa* (signs) to indicate its presence: *magis* (more), *minus* (less), or *aeque* (equal) (line 246). In the case of an *occultus* (concealed) comparison, however, the situation is different:

Quae fit in occulto, nullo venit indice signo;
 Non venit in vultu proprio, sed dissimulatio,
 Et quasi non sit ibi collatio, sed nova quaedam
 Insita mirifice transumptio, res ubi caute
 Sic sede in serie quasi sit de themate nata. (lines 247–51)

In the concealed comparison, no disclosing sign appears; it does not come forth with its proper countenance but with a disguised one, as if no comparison were there, but rather some kind of new transumption, wondrously grafted in, where it takes its place cautiously as if born of the theme.

This passage complicates the idea of concealment. The covert way of comparison is *subtilis* because it makes it seem as if there were no comparison at all. Covert comparisons are so subtle that they seem to be a matter of nature and not the work of the composer: they conceal their own methods of working. As Geoffrey notes,

³³ The imagery of lock and key is fairly common in medieval literary exposition, for example, in the *accessus ad auctores*. It featured prominently in the language of one vein of the *tenso* genre of troubadour poetry, between *trobar clus*, mastered and espoused by poets like Marcabru, Raimbaut d'Aurenga, and Arnaut Daniel and *trobar leu*, practiced famously by Bernart de Ventadorn. See, for example, Guillaume IX's "Farai un vers de dreit nien," sometimes called "La contraclau," (published online March 2016), accessed 1 May 2016, http://www.trobar.org/troubadours/coms_de_peiteu/guilhen_de_peiteu_04.php.

³⁴ According to Krewitt, Geoffrey owes to Quintilian the idea that the structure of a comparison is metaphoric. Krewitt, *Metapher* (n. 17 above), 328.

“Plus habet artis / Hic modus, est in eo longe sollemnior usus” (lines 262–63) (This method requires more skill, and its use is much more distinguished).³⁵

Later in the treatise, in keeping with the general concern for responsible use of rhetoric, Geoffrey notes the following about humor:

Attamen est quandoque color vitare colores,
 Exceptis quos sermo capit vulgaris et usus
 Offert communis. Res comica namque recusat
 Arte laboratos sermones: sola requirit
 Plana. (lines 1883–87)

However, sometimes it is a color to eschew colors, except such as everyday speech and common discourse permit. Comic material refuses language belabored by art: it needs only plain language.

This particular use of *planus* has something in common with the description of the occult way of comparison. Covert comparisons, Geoffrey explained, are subtle because they conceal their presence and method of working. Their subtlety makes it seem as if there were no comparison in the text at all. The plain speech in the explanation of humor works in a similar way; even the figures that he includes in the example passage hide themselves through a kind of ordinariness. It is exactly in this sense that Geoffrey says, “est quandoque color vitare colores.” The apparent absence of color is itself a color because that absence is the rhetorical method by which the text takes effect.

In sum, therefore, for Geoffrey the key to the most powerful transumptive language is the fact that it combines displacement of meaning with the process of concealment and revelation. Although medieval rhetorical discourse can account for the first part of that equation, it cannot account for the second. Yet the *Poetria nova* is not the only medieval text to use pilgrimage as an image for the transumptive process. It is central to the liturgical drama known as the *Officium peregrinorum*, based on the gospel narrative of the journey to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35) and most commonly performed during Easter Monday vespers.³⁶ Although some studies have explored its literary qualities, much work remains to be done, and the fact that the drama makes pilgrimage the

³⁵ For these lines, I have borrowed parts of Margaret F. Nims’s translation: “This type of comparison is more artistic; its use is much more distinguished.” Nims, *Poetria Nova* (n. 1 above), 27.

³⁶ The narrative is also recounted in Mark 16:12–13, but in much reduced form. All quotations are from the Vulgate: Roger Gryson and Robert Weber, eds., *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam versionem*, 5th ed. (Stuttgart, 2007). All translations are from the Doaii-Rheims. The standard introduction to liturgical drama is still O. B. Hardison’s work, which corrected some of the historically unjustified evaluations Karl Young made of the quality of such drama: Hardison, *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages: Essays in the Origin and Early History of Modern Drama* (Baltimore, 1965). Young’s work is still valuable for the

stage for hermeneutical engagement with metaphoric process has not yet been discussed.³⁷ Two details about the role of pilgrimage are key and are shared by each version. First, the drama takes up the single reference to pilgrimage in Luke and makes it a defining feature of performance. In the gospel text, when Christ first approaches the disciples and asks the cause of their sadness, Cleophas responds, “Tu solus peregrinus es in Jerusalem, et non cognovisti quæ facta sunt in illa his diebus?” (Luke 24:18) (What, art thou the only pilgrim in Jerusalem who has not heard of what has happened there in the last few days?). All of the versions of the drama reproduce this response. Cleophas calls Christ a *peregrinus* (παροικεῖς) because it was a pious practice for Jews to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the commemoration of Passover, which had taken place just before the crucifixion.

The manuscripts that include instructions for costuming take this reference to first-century Jewish practice and give it decidedly medieval garb. A record of a performance in Padua in the thirteenth century describes the disciples as wearing coats and cloaks and carrying staves, “ad modum Peregrinorum” (in the manner of pilgrims), and Christ as wearing a cloak and carrying a staff, also, “ad modum Peregrini.”³⁸ The twelfth-century version from the monastery of St-Benoît-sur-Loire at Fleury provides more detailed costume descriptions.³⁹

texts of the dramas. All versions of the *Officium peregrinorum* discussed in this essay are found in Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1933).

³⁷ For recent works that examine the *Officium peregrinorum* beyond its strictly historical and liturgical qualities, see Gunilla Iversen and Nicolas Bell, eds., *Sapientia et Eloquentia: Meaning and Function in Liturgical Poetry, Music, Drama, and Biblical Commentary in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, 2009); Peter V. Loewen and Robin Waugh, “Mary Magdalene Preaches through Song: Feminine Expression in the Shrewsbury ‘Officium Resurrectionis’ and in Easter Dramas from the German Lands and Bohemia,” *Speculum* 82 (2007): 595–641. Although Dee Dyas does not address the drama specifically, her work adroitly tackles several oversimplifications in how modern scholarship has approached the concept of pilgrimage in literature: Dyas, *Pilgrimage in Medieval English Literature, 700–1500* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2001). For more general commentary see Julia Bolton Holloway, *The Pilgrim and the Book: A Study of Dante, Langland, and Chaucer* (New York, 1987). See also F. C. Gardiner, *The Pilgrimage of Desire: A Study of Theme and Genre in Medieval Literature* (Leiden, 1971) (noted below). Gardiner’s is still the fullest and most historically grounded treatment of pilgrimage as a literary theme. He situates the theme in the commentary of Gregory the Great rather than in the liturgy itself; whereas Augustine read the disciples’ doubt as a failure of faith, Gregory saw a love strong enough to endure doubt. This more positive approach proved longer lasting in the Middle Ages according to Gardiner.

³⁸ “Cleophas et quidam alius, induti byrris et sclauinis cum burdonibus ad modum Peregrinorum. ... Et tunc associat se eis ipse Christus cum sclauina, burdone, et barisello uini ad modum Peregrini.” Padua, Bibl. Capit., S, Ordin. Patavinense saec. xiii, fols. 103r–104r. Young, *Drama*, 481–82.

³⁹ Orleans, Bibl. de la Ville, 201. Young, *Drama*, 470–76. For the text set with its music, see Charles Edmond Henri de Coussemaker, ed., *Drames liturgiques du moyen âge (texte et musique)* (New York, 1964).

The disciples wear hoodless cloaks with hats and carry staves; Christ approaches barefoot, with a pilgrim's scrip and palm, wearing a tunic. Christ's status as a pilgrim is not just Cleophas's attribution (as it is in Luke) but almost described as an intentional disguise on Christ's part. The text opens, "Ad faciendam similitudinem Dominice Apparicionis in specie Peregrini" (In order to produce the likeness of Christ's appearance in the guise of a pilgrim).⁴⁰ Christ and the disciples appear as distinctly medieval pilgrims, and the costuming thus associates the Emmaus narrative with the medieval practice of pilgrimage.

The second key factor is the interpretation of metaphoric processes in the spatiotemporal setting of pilgrimage. In the gospel, Christ rebukes the disciples for having had only a literal understanding of the Old Testament figures of the crucifixion and resurrection, but the details of the explication are not recorded. Some of the versions reproduce this succinctness, but two versions elaborate extensively upon the exegetical activity of the journey. In the twelfth-century Beauvais text,⁴¹ Christ says to the disciples:

Hec Moyses significauerat,
cum paschalem agnum occiderat;
Isaias idem predixerat,
cum ut agnum illum clamauerat
flagellari et obmutescere,
et occisum peccata tollere.
Oblatus est, inquit, cum uoluit
et peccata nostra sustinuit.
Sic et cunctis prophetis testibus,
Christus, mortis solutis nexibus,
quod sit uiuus, et hoc perhenniter,
iam debetis credere firmiter.

This Moses had signified, with the striking down of the paschal lamb; Isaiah had predicted it, proclaiming him aloud as the lamb, scourged and yet silent, to remove the sins of the stricken. He was an offering, he says, as he willed, and bore our sins. This is the testimony of all the prophets: You should believe steadfastly in Christ, who loosed the bonds of death, who is alive unto everlasting.

Christ reads for the disciples the figure of the sacrificial lamb as they journey, this stanza being spoken in procession through the church.

⁴⁰ The instructions in full read, "Ad faciendam similitudinem Dominice Apparicionis in specie Peregrini, que fit in tercia feria Pasce ad Vesperas, procedant duo a competenti loco, uestiti tunicis solummodo et cappis, capuciis absconsis ad modum clamidis, pilleos in capitibus habentes et baculos in manibus ferentes, et cantent modica uoce, *Jesu nostra redemptio* ..." Young, *Drama*, 471.

⁴¹ Paris, BN, Nouvelles Acquisitions, lat. 1064, fols. 8r–11v. Young, *Drama*, 466–70.

In the Fleury text, the explication takes place when Christ breaks bread, disappears, and then reappears and hails the disciples three times with the “Pax uobis” greeting, which is incorporated into an antiphonal exchange with the choir. The first two responses are the first and second parts of Isaiah 63:1, read now as figures of Christ: “Quis est iste qui uenit de Edom, tinctis uestibus de Bosra?” (Who is this, coming from Edom, coming on the road from Bosra, with garments deep-dyed?), followed by, “iste formosus in stola sua, gradiens in multitudine fortitudinis suae?” (Who is this, so gaily clad, marching so valiantly?). The third response, from the festal liturgies of Easter week, ties these figures explicitly to the resurrection: “Surrexit Dominus de sepulcro, qui pro nobis pependit in ligno” (The Lord is risen from the tomb, who for us hung from the tree).

A few lines later, Christ begins to leave, and the “Discipuli autem appropinquant, pedetentim, incedentes, alternando hos uersus” (the disciples follow, proceeding step by step, alternating the following verses):

Adam nouus ueterem duxit ad astra;
 creatorem recolit iam creatura.
 Sed Maria Iacobi cum Magdalena
 et Maria Salome ferunt unguenta.
 Quibus dixit angelus in ueste alba:
 “Resurrexit Dominus, morte calcata.”
 Fracta linquens tartara et spoliata,
 refert secum spolia uictor ad astra.
 Se demonstrat postea forma preclara
 dilectis discipulis in Galilea.
 Comes factus increpat latens in uia;
 scriptura reserat pius archana.
 Conuiuans agnoscitur propria forma;
 panis reddit fractio lumina clara.
 Sibi laus et gloria.

The New Adam leads the Old to heaven; the Creator makes anew the creatures. Mary mother of James, with Mary Magdalene and Mary Salome, brought ointments. The angel in white robes said to them, “The Lord is risen; death is trampled down.” Hell is broken, forsaken, and despoiled; the Victor himself brings back the spoils to heaven. His glorious form demonstrated this to the beloved disciples in Galilee. Their companion secretly along the way upbraided them; he unlocked the holy secrets of scripture. His proper form was not recognized by the disciples, but the breaking of bread restored clear light. To him be praise and glory.⁴²

⁴² Young, *Drama*, 473.

This second journey complements the first. Having first walked to Emmaus in ignorance, Luke and Cleophas now walk, quite literally, in knowledge. With the juxtaposition of the Old and New Adam, these verses, set in procession, align the revelation of Christ's "proper" form with the activity of reading the Old Testament figuratively. At first, Christ's ordinary, pilgrim form conceals his true nature just as the literal sense of familiar Old Testament figures conceals the spiritual truths of the New. The disclosing of the one secret entails the disclosing of the other. To undertake the journey of this pilgrimage is to watch those means of concealment become the very means of revelation.

THE CLEAR CLOUD OF METAPHOR

In lines 1046–70 (quoted above) of the *Poetria nova*, Geoffrey brings in another image for the way that displacement of meaning in *transumptio* involves concealment and revelation: "Et sic se quasi nube tegit, sub nube serena" (Thus, as it were, it [that is, the intended sense] conceals itself with a cloud, yet a clear cloud). As with *peregrinatio*, the history of the image is located not in the discourse of rhetoric but in biblical commentary and hermeneutics. In a general way, *nubes* fills the same role as *umbra* and many other words used since the patristic period to describe the obscurity of scripture. Alan of Lille cites Psalm 18:12 to read *nubes* as "obscura intelligentia in Scripturis sacris" (obscure understanding in holy scriptures).⁴³ Rabanus Maurus understands the same verse as referring to the Old Testament prophets, since "occulta est scientia in prophetis" (knowledge is hidden in the prophets).⁴⁴ Hugh of St. Cher reads the phrase "fuerunt sub nube" in 1 Corinthians 10:1 as "sub figuris" (under figures). Such *umbræ* were the Israelites' experience, he writes, but not ours, as Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 3:13.⁴⁵ Paul's own source for the image is the Old Testament itself, where God provides obscure and partial revelation of his presence to the Israelites through a cloud. Moses's encounter with God on Mount Sinai, for example, is one of the most prominent of those moments.

Yet the clouds of the Old Testament are not just metaphors or images — they are also themselves figures fulfilled by the cloud of the Transfiguration.⁴⁶ It is the third event (in chronological rather than church calendar order) associated with the feast of Epiphany or Theophany; the visit of the Magi and the Baptism in

⁴³ Alan of Lille, *Distinctiones*, PL 210:876. Cf. Ps. 18:12: "Et posuit tenebras latibulum suum; in circuitu ejus tabernaculum ejus, tenebrosa aqua in nubibus aëris" (Shrouded in darkness, canopied with black rainstorm and deep mist).

⁴⁴ Ps.-Rabanus Maurus, *Allegoriae in universam Sacram Scripturam*, PL 112:1008.

⁴⁵ Hugo de Sancto Caro, *Opera omnia in universum Vetus et Novum Testamentum, Tomi Octo* (Venice, 1732): tom. 7, p. 97, col. 4. Cited hereafter parenthetically by reference to volume, page, and column.

⁴⁶ Recounted in Matt. 17:1–9, Mark 9:1–7, and Luke 9:28–36.

the Jordan are the first and second. All three have in common the revelation of Jesus as the Messiah. The biblical text of the Transfiguration offers a striking image taken up in both patristic and medieval commentary: “*ecce nubes lucida obumbravit eos. Et ecce vox de nube, dicens: ‘Hic est Filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi bene complacui: ipsum audite’*” (Matt. 17:5, emphasis mine) (a *shining cloud* overshadowed them. And now, there was a voice which said to them out of the cloud, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; to him, then, listen”).

Only Matthew includes the description of the cloud as *lucidus* (“clear,” “bright,” or “transparent”), but the adjective was powerful enough to be formational for commentary on each of the other gospel accounts. In the *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam*, Ambrose interprets the clear cloud as the Holy Spirit:

Diivini spiritus est obumbratio ista, quae non caligat affectibus hominum, sed reuelat occulta. Quae etiam alio conperta est loco dicente angelo: “et uirtus altissimi obumbrabit tibi” [Luke 1:35]. ... Sed quoniam haec iam supra diximus, cognosce nubem istam non fumigantium esse montium nebuloso umore concretam et coacti aeris caliginem piceam, quae caelum tenebrarum horrore subtexat, sed lucidam nubem, quae nos non pluuiatibus aquis et umentis adluuione imbris inmadidet, sed de qua mentes hominum uoce dei omnipotentes emissa fide ros rigauit.

This shadowing is the Holy Spirit, which does not darken the affections of men but reveals things that have been hidden. This is disclosed in another place through the angel saying: “the power of the most high will overshadow you.” ... But because we speak now in a spiritual sense, understand this cloud is not a pitch-black mist of the air separated and condensed from the foggy moisture of smoking mountains, which can cover the sky with dread of darkness, but a clear cloud, which would not wet us with rainwater and overflowing of damp pouring rain, but from which the hearts of men are watered like fields through the faithfully sent word of the almighty God.⁴⁷

Similarly, Hugh of St. Cher describes the cloud in Luke 9:34 as a “*nubes ... lucida*” (tom. 6, p. 187, col. 4) (clear cloud). He expands upon this idea further in commentary on Mark’s account:

Nubens lucida est gratia, quae mentem illuminat, et refrigerat. ... Haec nubes obumbrat, dum Deus loquitur intus in corde per inspirationem, vel exterius in corpore per flagellationem, vel in aure per praedicationem. (tom. 6, p. 104, col. 3)

The clear cloud is grace, which illuminates and restores the mind. ... This cloud overshadows when God is spoken within the heart through inspiration, or outwardly in the body through affliction, or to the hearing through preaching.

⁴⁷ Ambrose of Milan, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam, Fragmenta in Esaiam*, ed. M. Adriaen and P. A. Ballerini, CCL 14 (Turnhout, 1957), 7.20. Commentary on the Transfiguration is concentrated in 7.6–21. Cited hereafter parenthetically in-text.

In this passage, Hugh of St. Cher reads carefully the paradox built into the idea of a clear cloud. The cloud both overshadows, *obumbrat*, and illuminates, *illuminat*. Together, those effects reveal Christ as the Son of God.

Although the clear cloud is a potent image in medieval hermeneutics, the Transfiguration did not acquire the same status in the visual arts in the West as other biblical scenes, such as the Annunciation or Nativity. Even as a feast day it never attained to the same prominence; it was recognized officially only in 1475. This difference is especially noticeable when compared to the Eastern traditions, as scholars of art history, including Émile Mâle and Gertrud Schiller, have noted.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, it was used in manuscript illuminations and church mosaics and frescoes and largely followed the iconographic patterns of Eastern design (typified by the mosaic located above the altar in St. Catherine's monastery in Sinai). In (see Figure 1), for example, the cloud is represented by a mandorla, with beams of light emanating to Moses (left), Elijah (right), and the three disciples (bottom). (see Figure 2), from the Caesar Master Hours, is a later image, but it represents beautifully the continuation of the standard iconographic tradition from the earliest Christian centuries. In this depiction, the beams of light from Christ emanate more generally; Moses (left) holds an open book, signifying the tables of the law; the apostles gaze at Christ in wonder; and Peter (center) holds a speech scroll emanating from his index finger signifying that he speaks in the scene.⁴⁹ The scroll unfurls towards Christ, the addressee, standing on the mount within a mandorla. Although the inscription is damaged in the manuscript, Peter's offer to build three booths can be made out.⁵⁰ The composition of these images produces in visual form the process of the disciples' reaction to the transformation. From the foot of the mount and the disciples' humble awe (indicated by their supine posture), the eye is carried up, through Peter's gaze and his words, to the summit of the mount and to Christ in his glorified, heavenly form.

The visual dimension of the narrative took on a signifying power of its own in biblical commentary. The Transfiguration was commemorated as a moment of God's divine revelation, but it was also understood first as a moment of concealment. The three disciples see Christ transfigured, but not in his fullness. Ambrose writes eloquently on this point:

Et haec enim mysteria sunt et referuntur altius; etenim pro tua possibilitate tibi uerbum aut minuitur aut crescit, ac nisi altioris prudentiae cacumen ascendas,

⁴⁸ Émile Mâle, *Religious Art in France, the Twelfth Century: A Study of the Origins of Medieval Iconography* (Princeton, 1978): 125. Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, trans. Janet Seligman, 2 vols. (London, 1971–72), 1.145–52.

⁴⁹ The idea that the index finger pointing to the unfurled scroll signifies a speech act in image form is the contribution of both Jesse M. Gellrich and Michael Camille.

⁵⁰ Matt. 17:4, Mark 9:4, Luke 9:33. Many other depictions of the Transfiguration give Peter a scroll with that verse. See Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, 1.150.



Figure 1: The Transfiguration. From a psalter produced in Oxford between 1200 and 1220. Reproduced with permission. © The British Library Board, Royal MS 1 D X f. 4.

non tibi apparet sapientia, non tibi apparet mysteriorum cognitio, non tibi apparet quanta sit gloria, quanta sit species in dei uerbo, sed dei uerbum quasi quodam apparet in corpore non habens suam speciem neque decorem et apparet quasi homo in plaga, qui ferre possit infirmitates nostras, apparet tibi quasi quidam sermo natus ex homine litterarum opertus inuolucris, uirtute spiritus non refulgens. (7.12)

And here indeed loftier mysteries are related. For truly, according to your ability, the word is either diminished or increases to you, but you may not yet ascend the summit of higher discretion. Wisdom does not appear to you, the knowledge of mysteries does not appear to you, nor does it appear to you how great the glory is, how great the form in the Word of God. Rather, the Word of God appears somehow as if in a body having neither his own form nor beauty; and he appears as a man in affliction, who shall bear our infirmities; he appears to you as a certain utterance born of man, concealed in the wrappings of letters, his spirit not shining in full power.



Figure 2: The Caesar Master Hours. Produced in Oxford or London, 1460. Reproduced with permission. © The British Library Board BL Add. MS 62523 f. 32v.

Despite the revelation of the Transfiguration, Christ is still concealed by his human nature and by the “letter” (as opposed to the spirit). Christ, Moses, and Elijah must be “overshadowed,” Hugh of St. Cher writes, because until the fullness of time, mortal human beings will not be able to sustain the splendor of the light (“fulgorem non poterunt sustinere”) (tom. 6, p. 187, col. 4.). According

to Rabanus, a cloud can indicate the “*protectio Dei*.” Of Moses’s encounter with the face of God on Mount Sinai, he writes, “*quod cum aliquis ad contemplationis altitudinem pertingit, necesse est ut ei protectio divina assit, ne aberret*” (thus, when someone attains to the height of contemplation, it is necessary that God’s protection be at hand, so that he go not astray). Of the *nubes candida* of Revelation 14:14, Pierre Bersuire writes in his *Repertorium morale*, “*Item ibi fuit claritas ipsius obscurata. Claritas enim solis justitiae tanta erat, quod debilitas humani visus ipsum videre non poterat, nisi nube carnis humane mediante*” (Thus clarity itself is rendered obscured. So great was the clarity of the sun of justice, that the weakness of man’s vision was not able to look upon him, unless through the mediating cloud of human flesh).⁵¹ Similarly, Hugh of St. Cher says the cloud of the Transfiguration should be understood mystically as Christ’s human flesh: “*sicut sol sub nube absconditur, ita Christus in carne, Isa. 45[:15], ‘Vere tu es Deus absconditus, Deus Israel Salvator’*” (tom. 6, p. 187, col. 4) (just as the sun is hidden beneath a cloud, so was Christ in flesh, as it says in Isaiah, “Truly, God of Israel, our Saviour, thou art a God of hidden ways”).⁵² Thus, even in one of the greatest moments of revelation, Christ’s human form is understood partially to serve a self-concealing function.⁵³

The clear cloud is not just about concealment and revelation in general; the fact that Moses and Elijah appear with Christ made the Transfiguration a moment that condenses the entirety of the hermeneutic process itself. The significance of the Old Testament figures was recognized early in commentary. As Ambrose writes, “*inde apparent Moyses et Helias, hoc est lex et propheta cum uerbo; neque enim lex potest esse sine uerbo neque propheta nisi qui de dei filio prophetauit*” (7.10) (thereafter appeared Moses and Elijah, that is, the Law and the Prophet[s] with the Word; for the law can be nothing without the Word, neither did the prophet prophesy except of the Son of God). Hugh of St. Cher observes that not only the appearance but also the disappearance of Moses and Elijah are meaningful. Mystically, they signify that Christ is the “head” (*caput*) of the Law and of the Prophets, and furthermore, that they are perfected in Christ, have their beginning in Christ, and are bound by Christ (tom. 6, p. 188,

⁵¹ Petrus Berchorius, *Dictionarium seu repertorium morale* (Venice, 1583): 586–88 (s.v. “*nubes*”). I have silently expanded the abbreviations printed in the text.

⁵² Translation of Isa. 45:15 from the Douai-Rheims.

⁵³ Reading *transfiguratio* as concealment is also attested outside of writings on the Transfiguration. Under *transfigurare*, DuCange offers, “*Transfiguratus in vestimentis*” (changed or transformed in garments) and defines it as “*aliena veste indutus*” (having put on foreign or strange clothing), glossed in French as “*deguisé*” (disguised). Interestingly, for this sense of *transfigurare*, DuCange cites the *Chronica* of Rolandino da Padova (1200–1276) who studied under Boncompagno da Signa, a famous instructor of the *ars dictaminis*.

col. 1.).⁵⁴ Hugh uses Paul's vocabulary to explain that the simultaneous departure of the cloud and of Moses and Elijah is allegorically significant because "Apostoli enim Judaei fuerunt, et eis fuit velata Scriptura" (tom. 6, p. 59, col. 4.) (the Apostles were indeed Jews, and to them the scriptures were veiled). Only after the lifting of this veil can they truly see Christ.

Not only does the presence of Moses and Elijah miraculously confirm that Jesus is the promised Messiah; it also testifies specifically to his death and resurrection. Luke's account is the only one of the three to include this detail, and, for Ambrose, it signifies not only the conversation held on the mountain but the entire "speaking" throughout time of the Law and the Prophets about Christ's ministry: "Docent enim te de excessu eius mysteria. Et hodie Moyses docet et hodie Helias loquitur et hodie in maiore gloria Moysen uidere possumus" (7.11) (Indeed, they teach to you the mysteries of his death. Today Moses teaches, and today Elijah speaks, and today we can see Moses in a greater glory). The idea of experiencing the Transfiguration "today" is also expressed powerfully in the excerpts chosen by Aquinas in the *Catena in Matthaeum*.⁵⁵ For Origen, to perceive Christ in the Old Testament is to behold the Transfiguration for oneself: "Si quis etiam intelligit spiritualementem legem convenientem sermonibus Iesu, et in prophetis absconditam Christi sapientiam; ille vidit Moysen et Eliam in gloria una cum Iesu" (However, if any man discerns a spiritual sense in the Law agreeing with the teaching of Jesus, and in the Prophets finds "the hidden wisdom of Christ," [1 Cor. 2:7] he beholds Moses and Elias in the same glory with Jesus).⁵⁶ Indeed, the clear cloud itself testifies to the same possibility: "dicam etiam salvatorem nostrum esse lucidam nubem, quae obumbrat Evangelium et legem et prophetas; sicut intelligunt qui possunt aspicere lumen ipsius in praemissis" (I may also venture to call the Saviour that bright cloud which overshadows the Gospel, the Law, and the Prophets, as they understand who can behold His light in all these three).⁵⁷ Remigius of Auxerre echoes the idea: "Dicit ergo ipsum audite, ac si aliis verbis diceret: recedant umbrae legales, et typi prophetarum; et solum coruscum lumen Evangelii sequamini" (He says therefore, "Hear Him," as much as to say, "Let the shadow of the Law be past, and the types of the Prophets, and follow ye the one shining light of the Gospel").⁵⁸

⁵⁴ "Significatur mystice, quia Christus fuit in lege, et Prophetis tamquam caput legis, et Prophetarum, et in ipso Christo consummantur, et sic a Christo incipiunt, et in Christo definiunt."

⁵⁵ Aquinas, *Catena in Matthaeum*, 17.1–2. For the Latin text of the *Catena aurea* on all four gospels, I have used S. Thomae Aquinatis doctoris angelici *catena aurea in quatuor evangelica*, ed. Angelico Guarienti, 2 vols. (Turin, 1953). Translations of the *Catena in Matthaeum* are from *Catena aurea*, trans. John Henry Parker (London, 1841–45).

⁵⁶ Aquinas, *Catena in Matthaeum*, 17.1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.2.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

The presence of the Law and the Prophets as well as the clear cloud make the Transfiguration an organizing image for the hermeneutics of spiritual reading, that is, reading of the non-proper senses. Indeed, Bersuire takes the cloud to signify the style of scripture itself:

Secundo signat puritatem diuinae scripturae. Nam sicut nubes habet quandam obscuritatem exterius, continet tamen ignem et claritatem interius, et inde, quod est ipsa quandoque pluit, quandoque tonat, quandoque coruscat, quandoque fulgurat interius, sic sancta scriptura exterius in apparentia rudis et obscura videtur scilicet quantum ad litteram et historicam ruditatem, et tamen constat, quod ipsa continet interius claritatem summae scientiae et doctrinae quantum ad mysticam veritatem.

The second [sense] signifies the purity of divine scripture. For just as a cloud has a kind of more outward obscurity, nevertheless within it encloses fire and brightness, and thence it is that at any time it rains, at any time it thunders, at any time it quakes, at any time it lightnings within. Thus, holy scripture outwardly in appearance is naturally seen as unpolished and obscure according to the literal and historical crudeness. And yet it is fitting that it itself contains within the brightness of highest knowledge and doctrine, according to mystical truth.⁵⁹

For Bersuire, even the humble style of scripture itself is a cloud through which the glories of eternal truth can be perceived. The paradox of the clear cloud is the juncture of concealment and revelation through the agency of something that is deceptively ordinary or simple in its literal or proper sense.

Reading with receptivity to the non-proper senses is not just an intellectual activity — the vision was recognized in a wide variety of commentary as spiritually overwhelming for the three disciples. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all agree that Peter responds by offering to build three tabernacles; at the appearance of the cloud and the voice, however, the disciples become afraid. Matthew reports that they fell on their faces.⁶⁰ Mark offers an additional observation on Peter's offer, of interest to commentators: "Non enim sciebat quid diceret: erant enim timore exterriti" (Mark 9:5) (He did not know what to say, for they were overcome with fear). Before looking more closely at the quality and character of the disciples' reaction, especially Peter's, it is important first to note the cause. Many commentators are at pains to emphasize that nothing in Christ's substance changed during the Transfiguration, only his appearance and the disciples' ability to recognize something that had been a part of his substance all along. Speculation on the quality and nature of the light was of especial concern to Aquinas. He cites from Jerome, for example, the following warning:

⁵⁹ Bersuire, *Repertorium morale*, s.v. 'nubes.'

⁶⁰ "Et audientes discipuli ceciderunt in faciem suam, et timuerunt valde" (Matt. 17:6) (The disciples, when they heard it, fell on their faces, overcome with fear).

Nemo autem putet pristinam eum formam et faciem perdidisse, vel amisisse corporis veritatem, et assumpsisse corpus spirituale vel aereum. ... Ubi splendor faciei ostenditur, et candor describitur vestium, non substantia tollitur, sed gloria commutatur. ... Transformatio splendorem addidit, faciem non subtrahit.

Let none suppose that He lost His former form and lineaments, or laid aside His bodily reality, taking upon Him a spiritual or ethereal Body. ... For that His face is said to shine, and His raiment described to become white, does not take away substance, but confers glory. ... The transformation enhanced the brightness, but did not destroy the countenance.⁶¹

Bede echoes the idea expressed by Jerome: “Transfiguratus igitur salvator, non substantiam verae carnis amisit, sed gloriam futurae, vel suae, vel nostrae resurrectionis ostendit” (Our Saviour then when transfigured did not lose the substance of real flesh, but shewed forth the glory of His own or of our future resurrection).⁶² Hugh of St. Cher cites Jerome’s commentary in the sections on both Mark’s and Luke’s accounts.⁶³ The wonder of the Transfiguration, then, is not that anything in Christ’s substance changed but rather that the disciples’ knowledge thereof changed. The reasoning is partly a product of orthodox Incarnational theology, but it also runs parallel to the principle of the historicity or literalness of the figure. When Christ fulfills the figures of the Old Testament, nothing in the substance of those figures changes, but they are understood in a new and fuller way. The disciples’ fear and wonder, therefore, are explicitly made the product of retro-active recognition and understanding.

Peter’s confusion was sometimes read negatively as spiritual blindness, but many commentaries also recognized that he could not help but be moved by what he saw. Ambrose calls Peter’s devotion premature (“praematura deuotio”) but also commends it: “Delectatus est Petrus: et quem saeculi huius illecebrosa non caperent, gloria resurrectionis illexit” (7.18) (Peter was overcome with joy, and since the alluring things of this world could not hold him, the glory of the resurrection carried him away).⁶⁴ Bede explains that Peter did not know what to say “prae stupore humanae fragilitatis” (from the stupor of human frailty), nevertheless, “insiti tamen sibi dat affectus indicium” (still he gives a proof of the feelings which were within him). In expressing *affectus*, Peter forgets his

⁶¹ Aquinas, *Catena in Matthaeum*, 17.1.

⁶² Aquinas, *Catena in Marcum*, 9.1. Translations from the *Catena in Marcum* are from *Catena Aurea: Commentary on the Four Gospels Collected out of the Works of the Fathers*, trans. John Henry Newman, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1841; repr., Southampton, 1997).

⁶³ On Mark, see Hugh of St. Cher, *Opera omnia*, tom. 6, p. 104, col. 2; on Luke, see tom. 6, p. 186, col. 3.

⁶⁴ It is difficult to reproduce in English the effect of Ambrose’s diction in this passage. The best word for *delectus*, “delight,” is simply not strong enough. Like *illicere* and *illicebrosus*, it frequently has negative connotations. What Ambrose succinctly conveys is that Peter is “seduced” by this vision rather than by worldly things.

earthbound state: “nec recordatus est se suosque coapostolos mortali adhuc carne circumseptos immortalis vitae statum subire non posse; cui etiam mente excesserat quia in domo patris quae in caelis est, domus manufacta necessaria non sit” (he did not remember that he and his fellow Apostles were still hemmed in by mortal flesh and could not bear the state of immortal life, to which his soul had already carried him away, because in our Father’s house in heaven, a house made with hands is not needed).⁶⁵ By the revelation of transfigured glory, Peter’s spirit had lifted him (“excesserat”) beyond the physical world. As Remigius of Auxerre writes, “Visa domini maiestate et duorum servorum, Petrus adeo delectatus est ut cuncta temporalia oblivioni traderet, et ibi in perpetuum vellet manere” (At this view of the majesty of the Lord, and His two servants, Peter was so delighted, that, forgetting everything else in the world, he would abide here for ever).⁶⁶

The common thread in these passages is that Peter speaks from an out-of-body state. His devotion may be premature, but it is genuine. In his mind, he is carried away from the literal to the spiritual sense, from figure to fulfillment, from the limits of the physical to the glory of heaven. He is even, as Hugh of St. Cher puts it, drunk: Peter speaks “quasi ebrius de una gutta vini caelestis, quam biberat, vel viderat, volebat facere tres tabernas” (tom. 6, p. 186, col. 3.) (as if drunk from one drop of heavenly wine which he drank, or rather saw, and wanted to make three tabernacles). Peter drinks in the vision, and even this *una gutta vini caelestis* is beyond his capacity to handle. The description is remarkable and parallel to Geoffrey’s description of successful metaphoricity: “Procures istas epulas istosque liquores: / Hoc epulum satiat, hic potus inebriat aures” (lines 955–56) (Procure this feast and these spirits: this feast satisfies and this drink makes drunk the ears).

CONCLUSION

Whether or not Geoffrey of Vinsauf drew directly from the Latin liturgical dramas of the Emmaus narrative or the commentaries and depictions related to the Transfiguration, the extent and significance of *peregrinatio* and the *nubes serena* in those contexts reveals that they wielded a broadly iconographic power as organizing images for the hermeneutics of metaphoricity and its affective potential. It is no coincidence that Geoffrey uses such curious, and seemingly unrelated, images together. Both *peregrinatio* and the *nubes serena* serve to convey what he considers the key qualities of *transumptio*. He consistently commends the kind of ornamentation that appears natural, artless, even familiar. Transumptive language accomplishes this effect not only by displacing meaning

⁶⁵ Aquinas, *Catena in Marcum*, 9.1.

⁶⁶ Aquinas, *Catena in Mattaeum*, 17.1.

from the ordinary to the extra-ordinary, but by concealing its own meaning and methods. By virtue of that deceptively simple appearance, such language is uniquely poised to seize the reader unawares with the weight of its true significance. When the text “conceals itself with a cloud, yet a clear cloud,” when it takes us on a journey to an unforeseen, otherworldly place, the effect can be surprisingly overwhelming.

Ultimately, it is a fuller understanding of the *Poetria nova* that is at stake. Geoffrey may have written the treatise partly for his immediate audience of elementary students, but it was thoroughly appreciated by more mature communities of readers and writers for centuries afterwards. While it laid out in succinct fashion the most important precepts of formal rhetorical training in the Middle Ages, the subtlety and richness of Geoffrey’s writing left much for poets to study, decipher, and emulate. Limiting our own study of the *Poetria nova* to its sources in, influence on, and relationships to other texts in the history of rhetoric prevents us from recognizing that Geoffrey was by no means restricted to previous treatises — medieval or classical — for his ideas. Indeed, theological and hermeneutical discourse would have been an obvious trove of imagery and ideas for any scholar who wished to address metaphoricity. Studying the *Poetria nova* as a work of poetry in its own right can thus help expand what we recognize as likely sources and influences for medieval rhetorical thought. Filling in the gaps in that complex web of sources and influences can, in turn, shed light on what poets — and not just later writers of rhetorical treatises — saw in Geoffrey’s work. To say that the *Poetria nova* is a masterful work is nothing new, but his rhetorical knowledge and explanatory skill and wit are not the only qualities that would have attracted a medieval poet. Geoffrey does not limit himself to describing how to build a text with affective energy — he does so himself. By deploying the imagery of *peregrinatio* and the *nubes serena* with delicacy and elegance, he not only cites but augments their transporting power, allowing his readers to see familiar images in a new and startling light.

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