

Jenny C. Mann. *Outlaw Rhetoric: Figuring Vernacular Eloquence in Shakespeare's England*.

Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012. xiii + 250 pp. \$45. ISBN: 978-0-8014-4965-9.

Outlaw Rhetoric advances an elegant argument for the literary and cultural importance of rhetorical figures in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. Mann's study brings a broad range of English rhetorical manuals to bear on canonical literary works. In her hands, the rhetorical manuals reveal humanist anxiety over the project of importing Latin eloquence into English. Imitating Latin rhetoric in English threatened to degrade (to make "common") its privilege and authority by allowing women and social inferiors access to it. English humanists, she writes, displaced their anxiety onto a set of rhetorical figures — figures loosely grouped under *hyperbaton*, or the "Trespasser" — that they characterized as unruly or even subversive. If English humanists worried about the subversive potential of their work, however, contemporary poets gladly exploited that potential. Mann's major achievement is to display the shaping force of these rhetorical figures in canonical works, including Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Sidney's *Arcadia*, Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream* and Sonnet 20, Jonson's *Epicene*, and Cavendish's *Blazing World*. These works have been endlessly considered, and yet emerge afresh through her argument.

Mann adopts the structure of the typical English rhetoric, following her introduction with chapters that treat single figures: chapter 2 discusses "The Trespasser," chapter 3 "The Insertour," chapter 4 "The Changeling," etc. Each chapter first introduces its key figure as used in classical and English rhetorics, then

considers the impact of that figure on a major literary work, and concludes with a coda. If the book's structure comes to feel somewhat restrictive, it is also clever, clear, and revealing.

Mann's excellent reading of Sidney's *Arcadia* demonstrates the rewards of her method. She reveals the parenthesis (the figure of the "Insertour") as fundamental to the structure of Sidney's narrative, rather than a stylistic tic. Sidney uses the ostensibly parenthetical story of Erona, for instance, to upend readers' assumptions about background and foreground, main plot and interruption, the necessary and the superfluous. Comprising over one hundred pages, and frequently "interrupted" by events in the supposedly primary plot, the story of Erona reverses the hierarchical relationship of plot to subplot. It performs on the level of narrative precisely the kind of linguistic subversion whose social and cultural implications made English humanists uneasy.

A chapter on the "Figure of Exchange" (or *enallage*) makes new sense of Shakespeare's Sonnet 20, and provides an incisive addition to the scholarship on Jonson's *Epicene*. Since it relies on inflection, *enallage* is one of the rhetorical figures most difficult to translate into English from Latin; the English rhetorical manuals address this by limiting it to the "exchange" of female and male pronouns. Mann suggests that the figure produces the kinds of mixed-gendered bodies we see in the "Master Mistris" of Sonnet 20, in the character of Epicene, and even in the final moments of *As You Like It*, when Hymen refers to Rosalind with a male pronoun. (One might add Leander to her list as well.) She thus goes beyond the historical context of the transvestite stage to explain the prevalence of these kinds of characters, who abide somewhere between the masculine and the feminine but cannot be nailed down into biological categories.

By the final chapter, on Cavendish's *Blazing World*, Mann has traced rhetoric from its systematic introduction into English literature to the disregard it faced in the late seventeenth century. Natural philosophers critiqued rhetoric for confusing words and things and cast it as effeminate and immature (contesting the humanist presentation of rhetorical facility as the end result of an elite and masculinizing education). Seen in this light, Cavendish's *Blazing World* embodies a "Mingle Mangle" (*soraismus*) of fancy and reason, words and things. It thus emerges as a more cogent work, with a more distinct intellectual position, than has been recognized.

In other words, Mann not only charts the historical and literary trajectory of the project of English eloquence, but explores its fraught relationship to contemporary cultural preoccupations with gender and class hierarchies. She does so in a nuanced and understated way, both in her main close readings and in the lovely moments of etymological attention scattered through the text, as when Mann traces the multiple meanings of *common* to show its ambivalence as a descriptor of English, as well as its economic resonance in a time of enclosure; or when she discusses both the legal and vulgar meanings of *case*. She makes a similarly clear but understated case for the importance of preserving the idiosyncrasies of original texts in modern editions; without such texts, we would miss the parentheses in the

Arcadia, the use of the male pronoun for Rosalind in *As You Like It*, and the original publication of Cavendish's *Observations* and *Blazing World* together.

Perhaps the largest question that can be raised in response to Mann's book is whether rhetorical figures can indeed be made to bear such weight: whether, in fact, we can perform formalist analyses on texts to draw sociocultural conclusions. Mann argues that "Once one acknowledges that the discourse of rhetoric is deeply implicated in the social and political order that produces it, it becomes possible to analyze rhetorical forms such as figures of speech not only as vehicles of local literary effects but also as instruments of wider cultural significance" (Mann, 10). If you do not agree with her at the beginning of *Outlaw Rhetoric*, you may by the end.

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