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ABSTRACT

Most 18th-century rhetoricians viewed style as the expression of a writer's individual character and thought, placing little emphasis on the lists of figures common in many 17th-century rhetorics. John Stirling and others, however, continued the 17th-century tradition that reduced rhetoric largely to style and emphasized classical figures of speech. Stirling's first major book, "A System of Rhetoric" (1733), intended for elementary students, went through about 18 editions and remained in print for 100 years. Its popularity proves that rhetoric was by no means neglected on the elementary level, and it represents an important development in the curriculum as it moved from Latin-based to English-based instruction. It also demonstrates a representative 18th-century pedagogical method for teaching rhetorical figures to young students as tools for analyzing texts. The book began with Stirling's own explanation in English of 94 distinct rhetorical figures; the second part discusses the same figures in Latin. To help memorization of the figures, Stirling 's definitions were versified into "disticHes," or rhymed couplets. As an additional learning aid, Stirling numbered the name of each figure at the end of the line of poetry in which it was mentioned. In a section labeled "Terms English'd," students are given English terms equivalent to the Greek and Latin ones. Stirling's purpose was not to produce effective speakers or even graceful writers but to make his students better readers of the classics, and to that end, he was successful. (Contains six references.) (NKA)

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John Stirling and the Classical Approach to Style in 18th-Century England

It is generally assumed that 18th-century rhetoric largely rejected the study of the classical figures of speech. This rejection is certainly found in Hugh Blair, who, in his belletristic view of rhetoric, argued that the study of style was the study of human nature. As Linda Ferreira-Buckley notes, for Blair, "instruction in correct style and the censure of barbarisms help develop the student's character" (28). Rather than viewing style as the dress of thought as Cicero had, Blair and other important 18th-century rhetoricians came to view style as the expression of a writer's individual character and thought. The classical method led to problems, according to Blair. In the first volume of the Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, he argues that the great attention paid to figures of speech "has often led persons to imagine, that, if their composition was well bespangled with a number of these ornaments of speech, it wanted no other beauty; whence has arisen much stiffness and affectation [in writing]" (I 277). Because of this suspicion, Blair and other major rhetoricians placed little emphasis on the long lists

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of figures common in many 17th-century rhetorics. Blair, for instance, lists only nine major and a handful of minor figures of speech that he considered valuable. While the general trend in the century's rhetorical thought was to ignore the figures of speech, it is important to note, however, that the classical tradition did not die completely. Writers such as Thomas Gibbons, Anthony Blackwall, and John Stirling continued the 17th-century tradition that reduced rhetoric largely to style and emphasized the classical figures of speech. Stirling is a particularly interesting 18th-century rhetorician because he wrote his major book, A System of Rhetoric (1733), for students on the elementary level (see Moran).

Little is known about Stirling's life except that he held a MA, served as chaplain to the Duke of Gordon, and wrote a large number of elementary books "designed to teach Latin and English, most of which are extremely rare" (Alston). These books include English titles such as A Short View of English Grammar (1735), A Course of Theology (1750), The Private Tutor to British Youth (1778), and Cato's Moral Distichs and Lily's Pedagogical Admonition (1787); but his most important publication was A System of Rhetoric (1733), an elementary school text that listed and defined 94 rhetorical figures. The book went through about eighteen editions, including American ones in 1788 and 1789, and remained in print through 1833, one hundred years after it was first published. In 1786, Stirling's work was combined with John

Holmes's The Art of Rhetoric Made Easy (Howell 137). As Wilbur Samuel Howell notes, however, the combination of the two works was not entirely fortunate because Holmes's Art already summarized four of the arts of Ciceronian rhetoric, including style. Stirling's contribution therefore was redundant since it addressed itself exclusively to style (137-38).

The confusion about the purpose of Stirling's book is intensified by its title, which suggests that the book will cover all of rhetoric, including the arts of invention, arrangement, memory, and delivery in addition to style. Such narrowing of traditional rhetoric follows in the 17th century tradition that, according to R.C. Alston, reduced rhetoric to stylistics. This tradition included Thomas Farnaby's Troposchematologia (1648), which used the term "rhetoric" in the sense of stylistics. This system distantly reflects Ramas's famous system that limited rhetoric to style and delivery, giving invention and arrangement to logic.

The importance of Stirling's rhetoric should not be overlooked, however, for his book and its popularity prove that "rhetoric was by no means a neglected subject in eighteenth century education" (Alston) on the elementary level. Since the first part of the book is in English, The Art of Rhetoric also represents an important development in the curriculum as it moved from Latin-based to English-based instruction. Stirling's work also demonstrates a representative 18th-century pedagogical

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method for teaching rhetorical figures to young students as a tool for analyzing texts.

Stirling's Rhetorical Theory

To understand Stirling's work we must first recognize that his goal, as he notes in his preface, was to teach his elementary students "a right Understanding of the Classics." Since these students lacked a full understanding of Latin, he began his book with his own explanation in English of 94 distinct rhetorical figures. The second part of the text discusses the same figures in Latin. Stirling admits that he took the Latin section "mostly" from Thomas Farnaby's 17th century Latin primer. One of Stirling's main contributions, therefore, was that he defined, for young students, the classical rhetorical figures in the vernacular. Consequently, students, and other readers, who did not know Latin had easy access to the principles of classical style.

The definitions of the figures of speech were versified into distiches, or rhymed couplets, to help students memorize the figures. In the preface Stirling explains his method. While the Latin section could explain each figure in a single line, his English equivalent had to be longer because the English language is not as "concise" as the Latin. Therefore, he presented each figure in a distich so that he could define it "in an intelligible and easy Turn of Expression, a full and exact Definition of the Figure, its Nature and Use, and what

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Observation is sometimes equally necessary with the very Definition" (Preface). He was also concerned about his student's ability to commit the figure and its definition easily to memory, so he made certain that the name of the figure appeared first, with the definition following. This order is more natural, Stirling argues, and fosters ease of memorization. This may be true, but as Howell accurately notes, much of this verse would not have "advanced the cause of poetry in the eyes of schoolboys of the time" (138). A brief sample from the section headed "Affections of Tropes" will suffice to justify this view:

> A Catachresis Words too far doth strain:
> Rather from such Abuse of Speech refrain.
> Hyperbole soars high, or creeps too low;
> Exceeds the Truth, Things wonderful to shew.
> By Metalepsis, in one Word combin'd,
> More Tropes than one you easily may find.
> An Allegory Tropes continue still,
> Which with new Graces every Sentence fill. (2)

While this doggerel might well help students remember the names and uses of the tropes, it would not have encouraged a taste for good poetry.

In addition to the couplets, Stirling provided his students with additional learning aids. First, he numbered the name of each figure at the end of the line of poetry in which it was mentioned. This number referred students to a list of examples

of the figure used in English. Stirling intentionally separated the example from the rule for two reasons. First, he assumed that students did not have the judgment to distinguish the rule from the example, which would cause confusion. Second, to include the examples in the poetry would lead to infelicities, no small problem already. An example of this problem is made clear by Stirling's treatment of metonymy, which Stirling defines as the trope that "does new Names impose,/And Things for Things by near Relation shews," (1) for which he offers the following examples:

> 2. The Inventor is taken for the invented: As Mars (War) rages. The Author for his Works: as, read Horace, i.e. his Writings. The Instrument for the Cause; as, his Tongue (Eloquence) defends him. The Matter for the Thing made; as, the Steel (Sword) conquers. The Effect for the Cause; as, cold Death, i.e. Death that makes cold. The Subject containing for the Thing contained; as, I feast on Dishes, i.e. Meats. The Adjunct for the Subject; as, the Mace (Magistrate) comes. (1)

While they do illustrate the various figures, the examples would not have helped the elementary student. They tend to be abstract and difficult to follow, especially since they do not appear in context. The teacher would probably have to explain them to students in some detail, perhaps pointing out their uses in texts

the students read. The examples also do not illustrate all kinds of metonymy. Again, the teacher would have to expand on the types for the class.

Stirling's final pedagogical tool in the text is the section labeled "Terms English'd," by which he means to give students English terms equivalent to the Greek and Latin ones. These English names are tied to the original names via the numbering system. Stirling justifies this method in his preface on the grounds of association psychology. He argues that the names being mostly Greek, they "cannot excite in the Mind the proper ideas affixed to them, without a tolerable Acquaintance with the Original" (Preface). He therefore offered English equivalents "that the young Student might not only understand the Figure itself, but also the particular meaning of its Name" (Preface). These translations, however, must have caused considerable confusion in the students' minds because many of the Anglicized names at best are loosely equivalent to the Greek or Latin terms. For instance, metaphor becomes "Translation"; metonymy, "Changing of Names"; synecdoche, "Comprehension"; and irony, "Dissimulation" (1). None of these precisely duplicates the original terms, and, since they were well established in English at the time, it is hard to see the benefits of including English equivalents. While Stirling thought that his elementary students needed an English word to associate with the rhetorical term to root the term in experience, the modern reader cannot help but

wonder if this imprecise language did not lead to obfuscation rather than clarification.

Some of the most interesting sections of the preface discuss the four-week syllabus that Stirling developed to teach his "Scholars" all figures, beginning with the English section and moving to the Latin. Since he had 94 figures to teach, he required his students to memorize eight of them during the school day and eight more "at home for their Evening Exercise" (Preface), transcribing all sixteen from the book. Therefore, he notes with some satisfaction, he could finish the English system in six days. During the second week, the students repeat the assignments of the first week, after which they are ready to begin the Latin section. Since they already understand the concepts from the English section, they can speed through the Latin material "because it contains no more than half the Number of Lines" (Preface). He does not mention how proficient students were in Latin, but they must not have been beginners because by the end of the third week he claims that they can recite from memory all the Latin verses as well as the English. Stirling concludes his preface with a boast common to many textbook authors about the effectiveness of his method:

> In the fourth Week, as they are become very easy and familiar, the Scholar will have no hard Task to go through the whole again both in English and Latin: After which, with a constant Praxis in daily reading

> the Classics, and rehearsing them every Saturday, they must soon be fixed so strongly in their Memory, as scarcely ever to be forgotten, and render even the Poets as easy and more pleasant to Boys than the Prose Authors.

One can only speculate about how the young scholars viewed the program after being forced to memorize Stirling's doggerel.

It is important to note, however, that Stirling's purpose for developing his rhetoric was not to produce effective speakers or even graceful writers. He taught his scholars the rhetorical figures to make them better readers of the classics. Furthermore, Stirling conceived of his rhetoric as part of a larger system of text analysis that he presented in another volume, A Short View of English Grammar (published in 1735), which included three parts: etymology, syntax, and prosody. His rhetoric made up the fourth part of this system (22). Rhetoric as Stirling conceived it therefore fell logically under grammar as part of the methodology that students learned in order to analyze literature, especially the classics. Given the current interest in the rhetoric of reading, Stirling appears somewhat modern in his approach.

Although flawed, Stirling's Art of Rhetoric is an important text for several reasons. It indicates that the rhetorical figures were being taught in some elementary schools throughout the 18th century. The large number of editions of the book

points to its popularity. By discussing its material in English first, Latin second, the book represents a step in the direction of vernacular instruction. Finally, although the poetry is bad, Stirling develops in the book a new pedagogical approach to teach students to read the classics, and this approach must have helped them with their speaking, reading, and writing of English.

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