

Archetypus, Imaginatio, and Inventio: The Poet as Artifex and the Creation of a Feminized Language, Subject, and Text

Robin Hass

The compositional theory of the late twelfth- and early thirteenth-century rhetoricians depends upon several concepts: the poet as *artifex*, imagination and linguistic rejuvenation as the site of invention, and the marriage of form to content/subject; moreover, these concepts are integrated in the creation of a feminized text. Geoffrey of Vinsauf and John of Garland, whose texts I will examine as representative of the arts of poetry of this period, are primarily concerned with the ways in which the author creates and shapes a subject through embellishment and amplification. They prescribe similar methods of invention but differ in their attitudes toward the inherent value of subject matter. Geoffrey and John both present invention as a cognitive process but respectively designate the site wherein that process occurs as imagination and reason. In this essay, I argue that the slightly varied cosmological, epistemological, and aesthetic paradigms of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* and John of Garland's *Parisiana poetria* lead to particular constructions of gendered language, and that analysis of these constructions more fully uncovers the compositional theory of the treatises.

Although literary critics such as Douglas Kelly, James J. Murphy, and Winthrop Wetherbee have recognized and explicated aspects of the compositional theory inherent in these treatises since the late 1960s, the treatises have long been disparaged by some modern rhetoricians for their fragmented and/or distorted theory. Early work by the above literary critics defended the theories and their influence on medieval poetics; however, it has been with the more recent publication of Kelly's *The Arts of Poetry and Prose*, Marjorie Curry Woods' *An Early Commentary on the Poetria nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf*, and Rita Copeland's *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* that we have begun to understand and appreciate the fuller articulation of composition theory contained in these texts.¹

Prior to addressing the concepts leading to the disparate paradigms of rhetoric figured as female, I will clarify what I mean by

“feminization,” which is possibly a contested term. “Feminization,” as I intend it, refers to the attribution to an entity of characteristics believed to be feminine. While a great deal of sociological and feminist scholarship exists arguing that gender is culturally determined or constructed, I wish to focus on a few representative pieces of research by medievalists to further define the terms “feminized language” or “feminized text.” Over twenty years ago, Joan Ferrante correctly asserted that

to a great extent, the gender of an abstract noun determines the gender of the personification, but that is not the end of it. Since, in the early and high Middle Ages, ideas were believed to have an existence of their own, the symbol was closely identified with the thing symbolized. The fact that a human quality or a divine attribute was represented as a woman meant that it must have female characteristics like giving birth or milk, that there was something essentially female about it. (6)²

Even though Ferrante is not dealing specifically with the personifications of the Liberal Arts and their methods, her statements hold true for figures such as Geoffrey’s Description, who is pregnant. Furthermore, as Ferrante aptly notes, this ascription of female characteristics can be either positive or negative. R. Howard Bloch has analyzed the ways in which woman and language were treated synonymously as riot, body, and artifice.³ Although she is primarily focused on gendered acts of reading, Carolyn Dinshaw offers a densely packed discussion of the medieval attribution of gender to various discursive activities:

literary activity has a gendered structure, a structure that associates acts of writing and related acts of signifying—allegorizing, interpreting, glossing, translating—with the masculine and that identifies the surfaces on which these acts are performed, or from which these acts depart, or which these acts reveal—the page, the text, the literal sense, or even the hidden meaning—with the feminine. (9)⁴

While literary critics have addressed the gendered nature of language with reference to medieval poetry in general and accomplished in-depth studies of gendered Renaissance rhetoric, no critic has analyzed the explicit and implicit feminization of language

and the processes of the art of rhetoric for this period and in these texts. Such an examination yields a more complete understanding of the compositional theories themselves and their relation to medieval poetry: explicating the cosmological, epistemological, and aesthetic theories that comprise the feminization of language in these arts of poetry foregrounds the embedded compositional theory itself and clarifies the differences between the works of Geoffrey and John. The recognition of multiple medieval paradigms of feminized language should lead to a better understanding of issues of gender and genre in the literature of the late Middle Ages.

To varying degrees, both Geoffrey of Vinsauf and John of Garland conceive of the author as *artifex*, which is one of the elements of the Platonic/Christian cosmology that informs their rhetorical treatises.⁵ In the *Poetria nova*, Geoffrey presents the author as one who creates by imposing order and form on thought. His introductory metaphor for poetic composition is a building process that involves the two stages of the divine act of creation: the poem is imagined (composed in the mind) and, then, it is given linguistic form:

If a man has a house to build, his hand does not rush, hasty, into the very doing: the work is first measured out with his heart's inward plumb line, and the inner man marks out a series of steps beforehand, according to a definite plan; his heart's hand shapes the whole before his body's hand does so, and his building is a plan before it is an actuality (34).⁶

The *archetypus*, or "definite plan" that precedes linguistic composition corresponds to the divine speech act prior to Creation; it resembles the status of primal matter, that of potentiality, prior to the introduction of order and form, the state of actuality. In this case, the author, *artifex*, thinks the text and then incarnates it through the word. Geoffrey uses two other metaphors to present a conception of the author as a master craftsman who molds and shapes the material: the material is compared to wax and the author is likened to a blacksmith (41 and 59). Thus, the poetic work is a created object that is formed by the hand of a master artisan, according to Platonic/Christian cosmology that situates man's productive efforts in a continuum with God's.

Whereas Geoffrey's entire treatise explicates, validates, and follows his introductory presentation of the fecund yet contained *archetypus*, John of Garland merely mentions the poet as *artifex*, emphasizing instead an Aristotelian paradigm that positions the author as the *causa efficiens*. John gives the following as an exemplary proverb pertaining to "the artificer of any work": "Both God and man are the gainers whenever a master craftsman sets faithfully to work"(13).⁷ Despite this reference to the poet as an *artifex*, John's representation of the Aristotelian causes in conjunction with his treatment of the ethical nature of texts distinguishes his construction of the authorial role from that of Geoffrey. Explicitly addressing invention, John explains how students can "amplify and vary their subject matter," suggesting that the work can be praised or criticized according to its "efficient cause, that is through the writer" (31). At the same time, John asserts that the purpose of writing, or the final cause, is primarily to gain knowledge (31). While *artifex* and *causa efficiens* both denote the constructive role of the author, John's specific use of the Aristotelian term seems to carry further ramifications relating to the ethics of the work and its creator, as we shall see.

Not only do the two treatises differ slightly with reference to cosmological paradigms, but they also privilege varied cognitive sites of invention. Central to the *Poetria nova*, as argued by Kelly, is imagination as the locus of invention.⁸ From the introductory architectural metaphor discussed above to the stylistic arrangement and disposition of the work, the compositional process involves imagining the idea and transferring that conception to the page. Geoffrey advises that one "let the mind's inner compass circumscribe the whole area of the subject matter in advance" and "assemble the whole work in the stronghold of [the] mind"(34-35).⁹ This privileging of imagination correlates with Geoffrey's conception of the author as *artifex* and the poem as artifact.

Just as Geoffrey's emphasis on imagination corresponds with his construction of the author as *artifex* and his Neoplatonic cosmology, so John of Garland's focus on reason and the ethical purposes of texts illustrates the influence of Aristotelian philosophy. John privileges reason over imagination throughout the treatise because he questions man's capacity for true knowledge and positions logic as a corrective to man's faulty perception. Man is divorced from a full knowledge of the divine as a result of sin: "in us knowledge is blind and buried; pining in the prison of the body" only to be restored by teaching (169).¹⁰ Fortunately, in John's

schema virtue can aid man in the acquisition of knowledge, as "knowledge flows from virtue and wears down vice. . . . Stirred by study, knowledge bursts into new life, grows and flourishes" (169).¹¹ Through virtue and study, man can ascertain his own nature as well as that of God and Creation. According to John, Logic, "the irrigatrix of the mind," drives the "cloud of the mind" away, "lead[ing] by deduction to certain knowledge of things" (169).¹² In fact, John calls on Logic to help him see his flaws: "Hold up the mirror of your reason, that I may see the flaws in my roughness; that my roughness may be smoothed by the file that renews and the clear path to truth may lie open" (171).¹³ It is this distrust of perception and earthly objects that leads John of Garland to vilify ornamental language in service to anything but divine truth, but it is the mirror of Logic that will help him to see and correct his errors in perception.

Geoffrey likewise uses a mirror as a vehicle for analyzing the poetic process and language's relation with its author and its content. The poet does not merely shape his material; rather, he is present in the material. As the author of the language of a given text, one must "'transsume' words properly": "Such transsumption of language is like a mirror for you, since you see yourself in it and recognize your own sheep in a strange field" (61-62).¹⁴ The author is manifest in his own creation, as God is made present through and in His. In order for language to evidence its true subject, the individual words must correspond to the essence of the matter; otherwise, the product is "like a picture made of mud, a thing fabricated, a false beauty, a whitewashed wall, and a mime feigning some speech for himself although he has none" (60).¹⁵ Words must correspond to the things described or the resulting product is a false copy of the original.

This correlation of word to thought is the basis for Geoffrey's presentation of words as clothing. He advises that the "sententia . . . not come content with one costume, but rather let it vary its apparel and assume changes" (41-42), that "rich content be dignified by rich expression; do not let a wealthy matron blush in a pauper's gown" (60), and that conversion "strive to weave a fabric of words such that the unadorned theme may take to itself a garment of new beauty" (93).¹⁶ In these excerpts, language is depicted as having the ability to express meaning in variegated form to rejuvenate the matter. Geoffrey also suggests that language should not always be straightforward: "neither plainly lay bare, but rather intimate a thing through little clues" (42).¹⁷ He

elsewhere asserts: "there is a certain effect of color and a certain gravity which arises from the fact that the statement does not show itself in public with a bare face or avail itself of its own voice, but rather uses a strange voice. And thus it covers itself, as it were, with a cloud" (71).¹⁸ This type of cloud does not entirely hide the meaning; instead, it acts as a veil through which the discerning reader can ascertain the meaning.

The language used by Geoffrey in his discussion of the relation between words and ideas is mirrored in John of Garland's treatment of the naked text; however, John laments the painted, artificial nature of ornamental rhetoric. Distinguishing between naked and painted texts, he writes: "The next subject is dressing up naked matter. I call 'naked matter' whatever is not rhetorically amplified or embellished" (65).¹⁹ Like Geoffrey, John sees rhetorical ornamentation as clothing the body of the text, and John's distrust of said ornamentation becomes clear when he announces his desire for plain style for the transmission of truth and vilifies ornate language as deceptive: "True love knows not how to be painted in the ornaments of words and brilliant figures, knows not how to spread paint over plain soil, does not seek the chaff without the grain, . . . does not cover blackness with snow" (91).²⁰ Both Geoffrey and John see the necessity of connecting matter to form, but John views ornate form as indicative of degenerate matter. Although it refers to ancient rhetoric, Todorov's comments apply here: "Clearly these comparisons are permeated with moral condemnation: ornate discourse is like an easy woman, with glaring makeup; how much more highly must one value natural beauty, the pure body, and thus the absence of rhetoric!" (74).²¹ As John explains, "honorable subject matter use[s] plain sentences and words that put the case in the open. Distinguishing disreputable subject matter calls for subtlety" (21).²²

Not only does John equate ornate style with dishonorable subject matter, but he also correlates embellished rhetoric with a lack of authorial integrity:

I have used a naked style to you, lest I seem to cloak a foxy slyness by cursing my state and my changes in fortune in fancy language. I put forth the naked truth, by nakedness, I cast off the charge of dissimulation, . . . writing to you rather in the open air of truth than in the shade of vanity, by no means under the mask of a Ciceronian

tongue a hunter after artifice, but an embracer of Christian integrity, free of the subtleties of dissimulation . (93)²³

John's disavowal and condemnation of "fancy language" and his espousal and praise of "naked style" are meant to attest to his own veracity. The text, its style, and its words reflect the nature of the author—whether he be a "Ciceronian hunter after artifice" or "an embracer of Christian integrity." John further vilifies ornamental rhetoric that is not used to illuminate divine truth when he warns: "Flee the painted songs of the poets, which spout poisons and whose filthy debaucheries contaminate the pure. Read and reread moral books, learn them by heart" (207).²⁴ John creates a dichotomy of salvific, sanctified texts and "painted" poetic works.

Resulting from the above cosmological, epistemological, and aesthetic theories, Geoffrey of Vinsauf and John of Garland construct different paradigms of feminized rhetoric: Geoffrey presents a "pedestalized" rhetoric (ornate language used to depict a courtly or noble subject and presented without disjunction between form and content), and John provides the dichotomy of a "chaste" rhetoric (high, ornamental rhetoric that is considered unquestionably legitimate, usually has a sanctified subject matter, and is consistently indicative of truth) and "wanton" rhetoric (beautiful language that is frequently distrusted for its association with carnality and duplicity). Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* explicitly joins language and woman throughout his treatise. After having prescribed the care with which one should approach the composition of a poetic work, Geoffrey moves to the "offices of pen and tongue," which "clothe" the cognitive matter with words:

When a plan has sorted out the subject in the secret places of your mind, then let Poetry come to clothe your material with words. Inasmuch as she comes to serve, however, let her prepare herself to be apt for the service of her mistress; let her be on guard, lest either a head of tousled hair, or a body clothed with rags, or any minor detail be displeasing. Neither let her spoil anything in one place by overdoing something in another: for if a single part turns out, in whatever manner, to be inept, the whole arrangement can attract blame from that quarter alone. A little gall makes all the honey bitter; a single blemish mars a whole face;

therefore consult your material carefully, lest it deserve to dread reproaches. (35)²⁵

It is at the moment where thought becomes incarnate or assumes the fleshly trappings of language that it is depicted as feminine: the subject or matter and its form, language, are both feminine in their actual composition or creation.²⁶ Geoffrey figuratively accomplishes two things here: he allegorizes rhetoric as woman and metaphorizes it as clothing.²⁷ Feminized rhetoric is secondary and subservient, yet necessary, to the subject. Poetic adornment “serves” the overall meaning and worth of the poem, its “mistress.” Ornamental rhetoric also veils the subject. If to use poetic adornment is to clothe the text with words, then “to use metaphors . . . is to cover the body” of the text.²⁸ Both types of rhetoric, which Geoffrey conflates, must be attractive and ordered: neither the language nor the women depicted should be “tousled” or “clothed with rags.” The adornment should exhibit decorum, as poetic order denotes its worth. Finally, the archetypal paradigm of composition that Geoffrey initially prescribed applies to the individual parts as much as it did to the poem as a whole: at each level of composition, the poet conceptualizes the material, invents words for it, and arranges it.

Not only is Poetry, both as subject matter and as language, depicted as a feminine being, but the various rhetorical devices are also thus gendered in Geoffrey’s text. Each figure is said to enlarge and beautify the text.²⁹ In particular, Geoffrey likens his seventh device of amplification, *descriptio*, to a pregnant woman, which metaphorically enacts the theory of amplification; the poem grows “fat” or swells when proper description is used. Description makes the poem naturally fat and fertile:

The seventh device, Description, pregnant with words,
follows that the work may swell. But though she be large,
let her be delightful: let her be handsome as well as big.
Let the matter manage to marry with the words in due form.
If she seeks to be nourishment and full refreshment for the
mind, let not her brevity be too terse nor her conventional
nature too trite. (53-54)³⁰

Geoffrey allegorizes *descriptio* as a pregnant woman to emphasize the importance of natural amplification.³¹ Embodying the

fecundity necessary to *amplificatio*, the swelling of the text should be proper, productive, temporary, and pleasing.

In addition to his devices acting as feminine agents of amplification, Geoffrey's example of *effictio*, or the familiar description "of a full picture of feminine beauty" (54), is essential to understanding his construction of a functionally ornamental feminized rhetoric. Furthermore, this description is in essence an *ars poetria* of description in and of itself, containing as it does the various dicta for any such *effictio*: a physical description should be artfully and colorfully decorated, governed by rule, ordered, and polished.³² With the understanding that Geoffrey's portrait is as applicable to the various components of his poem as it is to actual physical portraiture, and with the recognition that both are depicted as feminine beings, we can consider this "full picture of feminine beauty" (54).³³ Geoffrey prescribes, "Let Nature's compass describe first a circle for her head" (54), a phrase that calls to mind Geoffrey's description of poetic composition: "Let the mind's inner compass circumscribe the whole area of the subject matter in advance" (34).³⁴ Thus to begin a poem or a description, one should first map out its dimensions. Color should then follow, delineating the various components of the being: "Let the color of gold be gilt in her hair; let lilies spring in the eminence of her forehead; let the appearance of her eyebrow be like dark blueberries; let a milk-white path divide those twin arches" (54).³⁵ Geoffrey next states: "Let strict rule govern the shape of the nose, and neither stop on this side of, nor transgress, what is fitting" (54).³⁶ Again note the similarity between this advice and his previous advice about the order of poetic composition: "And since the ensuing discussion takes its own course from a plan, of primary importance is, from what boundary line the plan ought to run" (35).³⁷ The parts of a poem, of a description, and of a woman should not "transgress" their proper boundary lines.

Geoffrey returns to "coloring" the object thus depicted, advising that "her eyes, shine, both of them, either with gems' light or with light like that of a star," "her face rival the dawn, neither red nor bright," "her mouth gleam," and "her lips, as if pregnant, rise in a swell, and let them be moderately red: warm, but with a gentle heat" (54).³⁸ The lips of a woman thus described should moderately swell in a manner similar to the proper dilation and sexualization of description, as if pregnant. Her teeth, composed by order and "of one proportion," her neck, "a column which bears

up the mirror of the face on high," and "her shoulders adjust[ing] together with a certain discipline" all suggest adherence to order and decorum.³⁹ Furthermore, he advises: "Let the circumference of her waist be narrowly confined, circumscribable by the small reach of a hand" (54).⁴⁰ Again note the similarity with Geoffrey's conception of the cognitively circumscribed poem. Geoffrey's conclusion to the description of natural, physical attributes is similar to his advice in reference to Poetry serving her mistress aptly: "And thus let beauty descend from the top of the head to the very roots, and everything together be highly polished down to the very fingernail" (55).⁴¹ Just as in clothing material with words, the "turns of phrase" used in portraiture should be polished "lest either a head of tousled hair . . . or any minor details be displeasing" (35).⁴²

Immediately following this prescriptive rather than descriptive portrait, Geoffrey offers a "clothed" version of this beauty. The whole is infused with gold, with the word being used five times in the initial lines (55).⁴³ In addition to coloring the object thus depicted, the golden accoutrements both contain and conform to her body, entwining and encircling it. Luminous objects⁴⁴ act as a transition to the remainder of the description which focuses on the reader's reception of such a portrait: "Who is there who is ignorant of the fire in this torch? Who is there who has not discovered the flame?" (55).⁴⁵ Not addressing the gendered nature of Geoffrey's descriptive theory, Kelly, nonetheless, connects the theory of description to the overall composition of a poem and suggests that the material included in a description is a "reading":

By amplifying the attributes invented for some or all of these analogous commonplaces in accordance with the principle of material style, the writer proposes a reading of a given *materia*, a reading that uses coherent and suitable representation as 'hypothetical' amplification. Thus, the attributes . . . define and delineate the quality of the persona and the *materia*. The multiplication of attributes enhances the comprehensibility and credibility of the work, provided they remain representative, coherent, and consistent (*Arts*, 73).

As Kelly's explication of the descriptive theory of the medieval arts of poetry suggests, the epithets, or commonplaces, used within

a poetic portrait provide a "reading" of both the person thus described and the *materia* of the poem. Not only does Geoffrey directly address the reader within his portrait of generalized feminine beauty, he also provides a list of female figures who would not have been "sport[ed] with," "deflower[ed]," or "deceived" by Jove if he had seen the woman described in this portrait.⁴⁶ Geoffrey prescribes that the portrait be created and used so that it is convincing and evocative: he is suggesting, in effect, that the poet create a portrait that is attractive enough to warrant the seduction or rape of the gods. Feminized language, whether it is an enticing "picture of feminine beauty," ornamental words, or a well-constructed poem, becomes a site of desire that is meant to entice the reader. It is this seductive power of feminized language that disturbs John of Garland.

In his poetic examples, John of Garland implicitly identifies the fallen, carnal state of language with the nature of women.⁴⁷ Revealingly, in his example for "chastisement," "the lips of a whore drop honey, but her depths give wormwood (cf. Prov. 5: 2-4)" (15).⁴⁸ Poetic adornment, which John sees as defiled, is analogous to the "whore" who appears to be beautiful on the surface, but whose beauty hides her inner rottenness—poetic adornment is, in other words, "wanton" rhetoric. Much later in the text, he writes, "in death's eternal kingdom Woman is enthroned forever; from her mouth flows the gall that is taken for nectar, and kills body and soul. Woman is lovely, beautiful—and destroys everything through lust" (217).⁴⁹ Keeping in mind his former assertion that poetic ornamentation is "debauchery," one can see that both women and language are blamed for corruption of the male text or body.

John further conflates ornamental rhetoric as corrupted language and woman as fallen human being in his "Ode on the Conflict of the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, Sung by Calliope": "The world entices careless eyes from without with smooth flatteries; the eager flesh leaps to comply. . . . God's food, the sacred Word, will give strength. A joke is a sly weapon to weaken the walls of the mind, idleness breaks them, laughter ruins them, and so do the sound of a lute, a girl's hair, wine, food" (211).⁵⁰ His invocation of the "Sacred Word" as a stronghold against the vice of carnality is just one of his allusions to divine truth as the proper subject matter for poetry, versus the joking, idle, merry, melodic, and beautiful verse devoted to "other" subject matter. The "smooth flatteries" of poetic adornment deceive the reader and the poet

who must safeguard against their effect by focusing on the divine truth or Eternal Word.

While John decries the use of ornamental language for secular subjects, he condones it for sacred subjects. In his sixth chapter, John addresses the embellishing of poetry, including the following poem: "She is a creature, yet blessed, / Sanctified, beautified, / Marked out and presented, / Transported, assumed. / Girl of chastity, well and fount of sweetness / Picture of beauty, lamp and vessel of brightness, / Highest glory of demureness, star of deity, / Eternal light of gracefulness, lamb of piety" (119).⁵¹ Pervading this poem is John's conviction that in order for poetic works to be ornamented, they must be sanctified. The ambiguous "she" of the poem is a blessed, sanctified, beautified, and beatified feminine being who is marked out, presented, transferred, and translated. She is as much an example of the metaphorization of language as she is the metaphorization of woman for the purposes of discussing language. Moreover, her blessed state depends upon the general, central description in which she is presented as chaste, sweet, beautiful, bright, pious, and demure. The proper matter of poetic composition is just such a paragon of virtue; furthermore, the sanctified nature of the matter (both woman and text) allows for the possibility of ornate discourse.

In the last section of his treatise, "The Art of Rhymed Poetry," John invokes Mary as linguistic savior. In very flowery language, indeed, John praises Mary in standard medieval Marian imagery (177). In "A Rhymed Poem on the Blessed Virgin," which John states "display[s] various rhetorical figures," Mary is not only beautiful, resplendent and the ornament of all women, the "star of the sea," "a breath of the true flower" (177),⁵² and "a light that always shines" (179),⁵³ but she also carries the conceptual weight that a host of Biblical female figures convey (179). John ends the poem by asking, "Why do I entangle so many scriptures and draw out so many emblematic meanings?" (179-81), a highly appropriate question given his declared preference for the naked truth. He answers, "She [Mary] is everything to us: the ornament of virgins, a unique model, the glory of women" (181).⁵⁴ As the purifier, Mary in her virgin state restores woman and language to a prelapsarian condition: "Mary brought forth Christ, the sole Creator of all things; the Woman lost the world, Mary gave back life, her bosom blooming undefiled" (185).⁵⁵ John continues to address Mary as his muse: "Direct my feet through slippery ways by directing the feet of my meter, let voice and work falter and

entangle the upright mind" (199).⁵⁶ Through the Virgin Mary, John can be directed toward writing "honorable" texts, texts invested by their sacred matter, sanctified woman. John's role as a poet is justified, in his own mind, by the topic which he chooses to praise. Without its divine subject matter, his poetry would be "painted" and play the fallen woman, Eve.

Geoffrey of Vinsauf's and John of Garland's disparate paradigms of feminized language result from their different conceptions of the author, their preference for alternate cognitive sites of invention, and their varied attitudes toward the relation between words and thoughts. These types of feminized rhetoric, in addition to "domesticated" rhetoric (the use of an image of mother or nursemaid to extol or describe the powers of speech), are present in the other arts of poetry from this period and in medieval poetry in general. Distinguishing the variations of feminized language, rather than conceiving of a universal model, and looking at the underlying theories that construct these variations partially recuperates the compositional theory of the arts of poetry. At the same time, such an analysis will complicate our understanding of medieval linguistic and poetic theory. Whether decorated discourse plays the madonna, whore, courtly lady, or wetnurse, feminized language comes clad in the garb of as many types of female as medieval society constructed, rather than in one form representative of universalized "woman." The changes in "costume" or "garment" that reflect each different type indicate alternate attitudes toward thought, language, and composition.⁵⁷

Indiana University Northwest

1 Douglas Kelly's early articles include "The Scope and Treatment of Composition in the Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Arts of Poetry," *Speculum* 41 (1966): 261-78 and "Theory of Composition in Medieval Narrative Poetry and Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria nova*," *Medieval Studies* 31 (1969): 117-48, while his more recent *The Arts of Poetry and Prose* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991) addresses the compositional theory of the arts more completely. Although James J. Murphy has written numerous articles on medieval rhetoric, see in particular "The Arts of Discourse, 1050-1400," *Medieval Studies* 23 (1961): 194-205 and his *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1974). Winthrop Wetherbee's *Platonism and Poetry in the Twelfth Century: The Literary Influence of the School of Chartres* (Princeton: Princeton, UP, 1972) addresses the Platonic cosmology that influences these rhetorical treatises. For the view that these arts of poetry consist of fragmented or distorted ancient rhetoric, see Charles Sears Baldwin, *Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (to 1400)* (1928; Gloucester, MA: Smith, 1959) and Brian Vickers, "Medieval Fragmentation," *In Defence of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1988) 214-53. Marjorie Curry Woods' *An Early Commentary on the Poetria nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf* (New York: Garland, 1985) has added much to our understanding of the reception of Geoffrey's treatise and to current attitudes toward rhetoric, while Rita Copeland's *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991) provides insight into the translation theory articulated in these treatises.

2 Joan Ferrante, *Woman as Image in Medieval Literature* (New York: Columbia UP, 1975).

3 R. Howard Bloch, "Medieval Misogyny," *Representations* 20 (1987): 1-24 and *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1991).

4 Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1989). For an alternative definition of "feminization," see Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1992) 15-25.

5 Other Platonic/Christian elements evidenced in these treatises include the conception of God as *opus creatorix*, Nature as the

envoy of Creation, Creation as a copy of an Exemplar, and the *archetypus* that precedes any creation by one of the *Three Fabri*. The notion of a divine creator manifesting himself in his creation, which is but a copy of the original archetype, influences twelfth- and thirteenth-century rhetoric in a variety of ways, but here I am concerned with the manner in which this cosmological tradition compares poetic and divine creative acts. For discussions of the *artifex* in relation to the *artes poetriae* and medieval poetry, see Kelly's *Arts* (64-68) and Wetherbee's *Platonism and Poetry*.

6 "Si quis habet fundare domum, non currit ad actum / Impetuosa manus: intrinseca linea cordis / Praemetitur opus, seriemque sub ordine certo / Interior praescribit homo, totamque figurat / Ante manus cordis quam corporis; et status ejus / Est prius archetypus quam sensilis" (Faral 198).

All English translations are taken from "Geoffrey of Vinsauf: *The New Poetics (Poetria nova)*," trans. Jane Baltzell Kopp, *Three Medieval Arts*, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley: U of California P, 1971) 27-108, while Latin citations are from Edmond Faral, *Les arts poétiques du xii^e et du xiii^e siècle* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1924). I use the Kopp translation rather than the *Poetria nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf*, trans. Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967) because it correctly foregrounds Geoffrey's allegorization and feminization of language.

For general discussions of Geoffrey's treatise see J. W. H. Atkins, *English Literary Criticism: The Medieval Phase* (London: Methuen, 1943); James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1974) 168-173; Douglas Kelly, "The Scope and Treatment of Composition in the Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century Arts of Poetry," "Theory of Composition in Medieval Narrative Poetry and Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova*," and *The Arts of Poetry and Prose*; Ernest Gallo, "The *Poetria nova* of Geoffrey of Vinsauf," *Medieval Eloquence: Studies in the Theory and Practice of Medieval Rhetoric* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978) 68-84; Peter Dronke, *The Medieval Poet and His World* (Rome: Edizioni Di Storia e Letteratura, 1984) 21-32; Alexandre Leupin, "Absolute Reflexivity: Geoffroi de Vinsauf," *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*, eds. Laura A. Finke and Martin B. Shichtman (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1987) 120-41; and Marjorie Curry Woods, *An Early Commentary on the Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf*.

7 "Ad artificem alicuius operis. Est apud Deum et hominem lucrosam quociens probatus artifex conatur fideliter operari" (Lawler 12).

All Latin quotations and English translations are taken from *The Parisiana poetria of John of Garland*, ed. Traugott Lawler (New Haven: Yale UP, 1974).

For general discussions of John's treatise, see Faral 40-46 and 48-103, Atkins 91-141, Baldwin 191-95, Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (175-80), and Kelly, "Scope" (275-78), and *Arts*.

8 See in particular *Arts* 64-68.

9 "Circinus interior mentis praecircinet omne / Materiae spatium" and "Opus totum prudens in pectoris arcem / Contrahe, sitque prius in pectore quam sit in ore" (Faral 199).

10 "In nobis sciencia ceca sepelitur, / Corporis ex carcere languens inanitur; / Vt sintilla flamine paulum enutritur, / Et adulta dogmate longo reperitur" (Lawler 168).

11 "Ex uirtute defluit viciumque terit; / . . . Suscitata studio surgit rediuiua / Et crescit sciencia, uirens et oliua" (Lawler 168).

12 "mentis irrigatrix," "mentis nubilo pulso," and "Et ad certitudinem rerum deductiua" (Lawler 168).

13 "Rationis speculum uestre porrigatis / Speculer ut vicium mee ruditatis, / Vt limetur ruditas lima nouitatis / Et illimis pateat uia veritatis" (Lawler 170).

14 "Instruit iste modus transsumere verba decenter" (Faral 221) and "Talis transsumptio verbi / Est tibi pro speculo: quia te specularis in illo / Et proprias cognoscis oves in rure alieno" (Faral 222).

15 "faciem depingere verbi / Est pictura luti, res est falsaria, ficta / Forma, dealbatus paries et hypocrita verbum / Se simulans aliquid, cum sit nihil" (Faral 20).

16 "Materiam verbis veniat vestire poesis" (199), "sententia cum sit / Unica, non uno veniat contenta paratu, / Sed variet vestes et mutatoria sumat" (204), "Dives honoretur sententia diuite verbo, /

Ne rubeat matrona potens in paupere panno" (220), "Quando venit tali sententia culta paratu, / Ille sonus vocum laetam dulcescit ad aurem" (226), and "stude contexere vocum, / Ut rude thema novae formae sibi sumat amictum" (248-49).

In the *In principio huius libri* Type A Commentary, the first of these lines are glossed as follows: "TO CLOTHE WITH WORDS. Just as the human body is adorned with clothes, so rude matter is adorned with words" ["VERBIS VESTIRE. Sicut enim corpus humanum ornatur uestibus, ita rudis materia ornatur uerbis"] (Woods 19). The second example is explained in the following terms: "For the words by which a thought is expressed adorn it just as clothes adorn a human body" ["Verba enim ornant sententiam cum quibus ipsa profertur sicut uestes corpus humanum"] (Woods 41).

17 "nec plane detege, sed rem / Innue per notulas; nec sermo perambulet in re, / Sed rem circuiens longis ambagibus ambi / Quod breviter dicturus eras" (Faral 204).

18 "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" (Faral 229).

19 "*De Arte Uestiendi Nudam Materiam. Sequitur de materia nuda uestienda. 'Materiam nudam' uoco illam que non est rethorice ampliata neque ornata*" (Lawler 64).

20 "Carta rudis, stilus incomptus, deiecta Camena, / Quis sim quidque uelim nuncia certa uenit. / Verborum faleris et claro cemate pingi / Nescit amor uerus; pingere nescit humum, / Non querit paleam sine grano, non sine fructu / Subridet foliis, non tegit atra niue. / Olim nudus amor pictus fuit; omnia nuda, / Omnia que sua sunt monstrat aperta suis" (Lawler 90).

21 Tzvetan Todorov, "The Splendour and Misery of Rhetoric," *Theories of the Symbol*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1982).

22 "In materia honesta utendum est sententiis planis et uerbis materiam declarantibus. In turpi materia, si uelimus latere, utendum est insinuacione" (Lawler 20).

23 “vsus sum nudo stilo uobis, ne uulpinam palliare uidear arguciam dum statum meum et fortune mee mutatoria perstringo coloribus. Nudam ueritatem propono, nuditate culpam simulationis amoueo, nec in plano quero fraudis offendiculum inuenire. O mihi dilecte, O vere dilecte, O ueratius preelecte, in huius opinionis tramite procedo, uobis scribens magis in ueritatis propatulo quam in uanitatis obumbraculo, nequaquam sub lingue Tulliane larua uenator fictitii, sed integritatis Christiane sine simulationis scrupulis amplexator” (Lawler 92).

24 “Lectio celestis placeat tibi, lectio salutis, / Medela mentis, lux iterque uite. / Picta poetarum fuge carmina, que uenena fundunt, / Luxus lutosi polluantque puros. / Morales libros lege, perlege, corde lecta scribe” (Lawler 206).

25 “Mentis in arcano cum rem digesserit ordo, / Materiam uerbis ueniat uestire poesis. / Quando tamen seruire uenit, se praeparet aptam / Obsequio dominae: caveat sibi, ne caput hirtis / Crinibus, aut corpus pannosa ueste, uel ulla / Ultima displiceant, alicunde nec inquinat illud / hanc poliens partem: pars si qua sedebit inepte, / Tota trahet series ex illa parte pudorem: / Fel modicum totum mel amaricat; unica menda / Totalem faciem difformat. Cautius ergo / Consule materiae, ne possit probra uereri” (Faral 199).

The compositional theory inherent in this passage was noted by an early commentator on the treatise: “LET IT TAKE HEED. Here he notes three considerations that have to be attended to in poetic art, namely that the beginning, middle, and end suit each other. LEST A HEAD WITH TOSLED LOCKS, that is lest the beginning be faulty” (Woods 19).

For an analysis of Geoffrey’s tripartite theory of composition, see Kelly, “Scope” 272, and *Arts* 66ff; Atkins 100; and Dronke 21.

26 Bernardus Siluestris suggests that God creates in this manner; see *Cosmographia* ii. In the introduction to *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993), Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury state that the period of the Middle Ages was “a moment of history governed by what we might call an incarnational aesthetic: the Word having been made flesh, the spiritual and the somatic were necessarily intermingled, and the body itself in the Middle Ages became a significant grounding of religious experience” (viii).

27 See Margaret Nims, "Translatio: 'Difficult' Statement in Medieval Poetic Theory," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 43.3 (1974): 226 wherein she briefly discusses the history of the metaphor of the poem as human body.

28 Todorov 73.

29 They are what Patricia Parker terms *Literary Fat Ladies* (London: Methuen, 1987) in her discussion of Renaissance rhetoric.

30 "Septima succedit praegnans descriptio verbis, / Ut dilatet opus. Sed, cum sit lata, sit ipsa / Laeta: pari forma speciosa sit et spatiosa. / In celebri forma faciat res nubere verbis. / Si cibus esse velit et plena refectio mentis, / Ne sit curta nimis brevitatis vel trita vetustas. / Sint variata novis exempla secuta figuris, / Rebus ut in variis oculus spatietur et auris" (Faral 214).

31 For a discussion of "dilation" or *amplificatio* through the image of a pregnant, female body, see Parker 15.

32 Parker suggests that the discussion of rhetorical display is gendered in its presentation: "What is striking about the wider discussion of rhetorical display—the construction of discourse through the strategy of dividing into parts—is that its terms are themselves already subtly gendered in the texts in which they appear, and in ways which might make the blazon, presented within the texts of rhetoric as simply a subset of the larger category of rhetorical amplification by partition, ultimately a figure for the larger motivations of the whole of which it is supposedly simply one part. For the language of 'opening' by division or partition—and specifically of opening up to the eye or gaze—is in these texts linked by its very language to the possibility of an eroticized, even potentially prurient and voyeuristic looking" (129).

33 "Femineum plene vis formare decorem" (Faral 214).

34 "Praeformet capiti Naturae circinus orbem" (Faral 214) and "Circinus interior mentis praecircinet omne / Materiae spatium" (Faral 198).

35 "Crinibus irrutilet color auri; lilia vernet / In specula frontis; vaccinia nigra coaequet / Forma supercilii; geminos intersecet arcus / Lactea forma viae" (Faral 214).

36 “castiget regula nasi / Ductum, ne citra sistat vel transeat
aequum” (Faral 214).

37 “Cumque sequens series praesumat ab ordine cursum, / Est
operae primae, quo limite debeat ordo / Currere” (Faral 199).

38 “Excubiae frontis, radient utrimque gemelli / Luce smaragdina
vel sideris instar ocelli; / Aemula sit facies Aurorae, nec rubicundae
/ Nec nitidae, sed utroque simul neutroque colore. / Splendeat os
forma spatii brevis et quasi cycli / Dimidii; tanquam praegnantia
labra tumore / Surgant, sed modico rutilent, ignita, sed igne /
Mansueto” (Faral 214).

39 “dentes niveos compagnet ordo, / Omnes unius staturae,” “quae
speculum vultus supportet in altum,” and “Quandam se lege
coaptent” (Faral 215).

40 “Sit locus astrictus zonae, brevitate pugilli / Circumscripibilis”
(Faral 215).

41 “Et sic / A summo capitis descendat splendor ab ipsam /
Radicem, totumque simul poliatur ad unquem” (Faral 215). Faral
states the following in reference to the order of descriptions: “Ainsi
arrêtée dans ses éléments constitutifs, la description l’est aussi dans
l’ordre de ses parties. Sur le plan qu’il convient d’y observer, nos
auteurs ne formulent pas de préceptes, mais l’étude des exemples
qu’ils proposent supplée à ce manque. Un portrait complet
comprend deux parties et traite successivement du physique et du
moral. Pour la description du moral, la règle est assez lâche et
d’ailleurs c’est un point qui est souvent négligé” (80). But, if one
takes into account the affective quality of even the physical de-
scriptions and their expressed purpose of evoking praise or blame,
effictio can be seen to embody or subsume *notatio* and is thus re-
ally present, albeit not as a formal part.

42 “ne caput hirtis / Crinibus, aut corpus pannosa veste, vel ulla /
Ultima displiceant” (Faral 199). See Horace, *Ars poetica* I. 294.
Parker explains that “the ‘matter’ of discourse, then, is to be made
plentiful, by a shaper outside it who ‘opens’ it to the gaze, but also
to be kept firmly under control. The inventory or itemizing im-
pulse of the blazon . . . would seem to be part of the motif of taking
control of a woman’s body by making it, precisely, the engaging

'matter' of male discourse, a passive commodity in a homosocial discourse or male exchange in which the woman herself, traditionally absent, does not speak. The 'inventory' of parts becomes a way of taking possession by the very act of naming or accounting" (131).

43 "Nexilis a tergo coma compta recomplicet aurum; / Irradiet frontis candori circulus auri; / . . . chlamis ardeat auro; / Zona tegat medium, radiantibus undique gemmis; / Brachia luxuriaent armillis; circinet aurum / Subtiles digitos et gemma superbiore auro" (Faral 215).

44 For a detailed discussion of the various light metaphors throughout Geoffrey's treatise and their connection to the theoretical implications of his text, see Leupin, "Absolute Reflexivity: Geoffroi de Vinsauf," in which he argues: "Though it contains an evident wealth of technical instruction, the *Poetria Nova* actually transforms its own doctrine into a metaphoric veil for the speculative and specular enterprise that is its true aim" (121).

45 "Quis in hac face nesciat ignes? / Quis non inveniat falammam?" (Faral 216).

46 "Si Jupiter illis / Temporibus vidisset eam, nec in Amphitrione? Luderet Alcmenam; nec sumeret ora Dianae, / Ut te fraudaret, Calixto, flore; nec Yo / Nube, nec Antiopam satyro, nec Aegenore natam / Tauro, Messione nec te pastore, vel igne / Ansepho genitam, vel te Deionis in angue, / Vel Ledam cygno, vel Danem falleret auro. / Hanc unam coloret omnesque videret in una" (Faral 216). See Ovid, *Metamorphoses* VI, 11. 110-20.

47 For a book-length discussion of the conflation of woman and language, see Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Love*. In particular, his discussion of "Early Christianity and the Esthetization of Gender" is directly applicable to John of Garland's attitude toward language and women, in which he aligns the dangerous allure of woman, song, and drink and his assertion of the salvific influence of Christian subjects (37-63).

48 "*De castigatione*. Meretricis labia fauom distillant, sed absinthium eius nouissima subministrant" (Lawler 14).

49 "Eterno regno prefertur femina, cuius / In ore nectar creditur,
quo fel fluit / Quod corpus mentemque necat; mulier speciosa /
Formosa queque destruit libidine" (Lawler 216).

50 "Mundus, spiritus, et caro / Forti bella mouent tristia milite. /
Incautos oculos foris / Mundus blandiciis mitibus allicit; / Paret
prosilienis caro / Pulsu quam subito precipitat Sathan. / Contra
uiribus utere / Vires; esca Dei sermo dabit sacer / Vires.
Belligerans iocus / Furtim debilitat, frangit et ocium, / Mentis
menia diruit / Risus, uox cithare, trica, merum, cibus" (Lawler
210). See also Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* I, m1.

51 Margins: "Creata est beata / Sacrata est ornata / Signata est
donata / Translata est leuata." Center: "puella castitatis, cisterna,
fons dulcoris / tabella venustatis, lucerna, vas splendoris / pudoris
laus superna, deitatis stella / decoris lux eterna, pietatis agnella"
(Lawler 118). As designated by the term "margins" in Lawler's
translation, the text above was written in lines forming a block
around a center text and repeated in a circular pattern that sur-
rounded the whole poem.

52 "*De Beata Virgine Rithmus Diuersimode Coloratus.* / Virgo,
Mater Salvatoris, / Stella maris, stilla roris, / Et cella dulcedinis: /
Da spiramen ueri floris / Florem fructus et odoris, / Fructum
fortitudinis" (Lawler 176).

53 "Que prefulges singulari / Semper igne preuio" (Lawler 176)
and "Semper lucens est lucerna" (Lawler 178).

54 "Quid intrico tot scripturas / Et extrico tot figuras? / Hec est
nobis omnia: / Hec est decus uirginale, / Et exemplum speciale, /
Mulierum gloria" (Lawler 178).

55 "Qui solus cuncta condidit, / Maria Christum edidit; / Virago
mundum perdidit, / Maria uitam reddidit, / Intacto uernans gre-
mio" (Lawler 184).

56 "Pedes regas per lubricum / Pedem regendo metriucum, / Ne
uox opusque iambicent / Statumque mentis inplicent" (Lawler 198).

57 In the *Poetria nova*, Geoffrey of Vinsauf often refers to lan-
guage as clothing: "Let poetry come to clothe your material with

words”(35) [“*Materiam verbis veniat vestire poesis*” (Faral 199)], “let it [the *sententia*] not come content with one costume, but rather let it vary its apparel” (41-42) [“*sententia cum sit / Unica, non uno veniat contenta paratu, / Sed variet vestes et mutatoria sumat*” (Faral 204)], and conversion “strive[s] to weave a fabric of words such that the unadorned theme may take to itself a garment of new beauty” (93) [“*stude contexere vocum, / Ut rude thema novae formae sibi sumat amictum*” (Faral 248-49)].