

MÉLANGES

A DEBATE BETWEEN SHROVETIDE AND LENT

Here is a pair of letters extracted from the *Rota Nova* of Guido Faba, a 12th. century *dictator*, contained in Oxford Ms. New College 255, fol. 1-58^v. I have set down elsewhere the reasons why I believe the work was composed by Guido in Bologna about the year 1227¹. New College 255, which is very clear, presenting few problems of transcription, has been dated by Coxe 14th. century², but earlier by Denholm-Young, who says it was "written apparently in Spain, about the last quarter of the thirteenth century in a good court hand, and illuminated"³.

The *Rota* is made up of three main parts: a short account of the career of the author, a section on theory, giving the rules of *Ars Dictaminis*, the remainder being lists of form letters suitable as models for all occasions, accompanied by several very spirited and eloquent messages from Guido to prospective students, announcing new courses.

Fol. 7^r marks the real beginning of the work, erroneously placed here by the binder of the manuscript. It opens *Incipit Rota Nova magistri Guidonis Fabe. Letentur celi et exultet terra*. Fol. 7^v ends *Explicit Rota*.

Fol. 1^r begins the doctrinal part.: *Incipit ala prima que angelica dicitur*.

1. See A. P. CAMPBELL, ed., *Guido Faba's Rota Nova*, unpublished Ph. D. thesis, Fordham University, 1959, pp. 10 ff.

2. Henricus A. COXE, *Catalogus Codicum MSS qui in Collegio Aulisque Oxoniensibus hodie adseruntur*, Oxford, 1852, Pars I, New College, D 255.

3. N. DENHOLM-YOUNG, *Collected Papers on Medieval Subjects*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1946, p. 48.

Fol. 2^r opens the second part of the doctrinal matter : *Incipit ala secunda de regulis dictaminum a magistro Guidone Sancti Michaelis composita.*

Fol. 6^v opens the first set of model letters : *Incipiunt littere stili secularis facte.* These are, of course, interrupted on folio 7 recto and verso by the autobiographical matter introducing the *Rota.*

Fol. 16^r. *Incipiunt littere prosaici dictaminis stili ecclesiastici a magistro Guidone compositae.*

Fol. 23^r. *Incipiunt dictamina rethorica que celesti quasi oraculo...*

Fol. 40^v. *Littera missa scolaribus Bononie et lecta per omnes scolas civitatis omnium artium.*

Fol. 49^r. *Littera carnisprivii contra quadragesimam adversariam suam.*

Fol. 49^r. *Invectiva quadragesime contra carnisprivium inimicum suum.*

The remaining pages to fol. 58^v are covered with form letters continuing the *dictamina rethorica* begun on fol 23^r, along with some letters from Guido himself.

The question immediately arises, what has this pair of spirited and spiteful volleys from *carnisprivium* and *quadragesima* to do with *ars dictaminis*, the sober art of writing letters correctly, and secondly, how do these two pieces fit into medieval debate tradition. From the point of view of *ars dictaminis* it must be said that these letters conform outwardly to the rules, such as those of pointing, the *cursus* and the handling of parts, such as *salutatio*, *narratio*, *conclusio*, etc. ; but a debate of this kind between two abstract qualities or beings is completely outside of the dictaminal tradition. I have not been able to find a single instance of a prose debate exchange in all the form letters in available collections. Before attempting to explore their antecedents as debate pieces, let us examine them a moment to see how they do relate in content and external form to *ars dictaminis*.

Although there are no debates properly speaking, there are in the *Rota* other examples of sharp exchanges between persons, such as between an ardent young man and a young lady, who puts him in his place very wittily (fol. 26^r) ; between parents, who paint a very gay scene of tavern activity, which they say is the haunt of their student son, and the student himself, who shows

a very contrary picture (fol. 41^v-42^r). But there is nothing that can come close in spirit to the two letters printed here.

In their external shaping, these letters, as we have indicated, conform to the rules of prose *ars dictaminis*. Among the rules governing the use of the *salutatio*, for example, we find the following passage :

Qui non debeant salutari

Item, nota quod non salutantur excommunicati, Saraceni patareni, Iudei, sed dicitur, "spem consilii sanioris". Iterum, non salutantur inimici manifesti, ut dictum est, sed aliquid ponitur salutationi contrarium" (fol. 5^r).

Thus, in our two letters, neither writer salutes the other, since they are *inimici manifesti* : *Nulla salutationis eloquio carnisprivium Quadragesima te invitata*, and *Tibi carnisprivio quadragesima de salutatione non loquitur*.

The use of the *narratio*, which means the setting forth of the *status questionis* and circumstances, is well exemplified in both letters. The rules of pointing, which in the doctrinal part of the *Rota* are carefully specified and in the form letters very carefully followed, appear to be slighted in one respect in these two letters : the full stop, for which the *Rota* requires the *periodus*, the equivalent in shape of our modern "semicolon", is several times indicated by single *punctum*, or point on the line. This might suggest that these two letters were copied into New College 255 from a source different from that of the other forms.

Continuing our examination of the pointing, we find that the rules specified by the *Rota* indicate a slight pause in a sentence by a *cola*, made with a *punctum* on the line (fol. 5^v). A longer pause, called a *coma*, is made with a *punctum* on the line and a *virgula* above it (!). The *periodus*, identified as a kind of semicolon above, is sometimes, at the end of a letter, made with a period followed by a *virgula*, both on the line (.,). This form of the full stop is the only one we have in the two letters, along with a very liberal sprinkling of properly employed *cola* and *coma*. It is worth noting, perhaps, that the *Candelabrum*⁴, a famous work on *ars*

4. Bene di LUCCA, *Candelabrum*, unpublished Plimpton Ms. 65, fol. 5v.

dictaminis uses, in its doctrinal part, the same theory as we find exemplified in the *Rota*.

Two other punctuation signs not yet mentioned need some comment. The question mark, used as we use it today, is formed somewhat like our modern counterpart, except that the hook part above the point is not so rounded. Then there is the slant line (/) used as the equivalent of our comma, especially used to mark off the units in a series of more or less parallel words or phrases. For example, in a letter to a friend, a student from the University of Napoli praises not only his University but the surrounding country: "... *terra spectabilis est' apta studio' fertilis et amena' in qua celi terre marisque divitie possidentur.* (fol. 41^v). Perhaps the best example is found in a letter from a clerk to a bishop, praising him and asking for a benefice. One sentence runs :

Non sunt loquere neque sermones per quos mentis mee magnum gaudium exprimatur quid tunc veraciter habui | et suscepti magnifice. cum de vestre promotionis honore cognovi. quia post solum deum mee parvitas estis reverendus pater | pius pastor | benignus iudex | iustus rector | clemens antistes | honestatis exemplum | prudentie speculum | misericors dominus | benefactor precipuus | portus tutissimus | et refugium singulare. (fol. 51^r, ll. 21-23).

If this did not move the bishop, he must have been hard to flatter.

The use of the slant line was not common in the *Rota*, but we do notice an instance similar to the one quoted above in our invective of Lent against his enemy Shrovetide.

In the *cursus* one of the most important elements of the prose *dictamen*, the two letters conform to the rules as laid down and exemplified generally in the *Rota*. Letter after letter has its arrangement of *planus* (*vīncā p̄rfr̄gīt*)⁵, *tardus* (*vīncā p̄rfr̄gērāt*), *velox* (*vīncūlūm fr̄gērāmūs*). These rhythmic runs occur mainly at the ends of clauses but may be found almost anywhere in these carefully constructed sentences. According to the rules in the *Rota*, each full stop, that is, each complete sentence, must end with a *velox*. This is one unbroken rule in all of the form

5. These are not taken from the *Rota*, but are culled from other sources.

letters in the *Rota*: examination will disclose in each letter at least two instances, and usually three, of the *velox*: one at the end of the *narratio*, a major division in the letter, and the other at the very end of the letter. If the *narratio* is lengthy it may have more than one full stop; and, of course, a *velox* may occur at any point where rapid motion is desired.

In the two letters here published there are instances of the *planus* (*făcīt dīscōrdēs*), (*rēbēllēs īrātōs*), (*păcēs frāngūtūr*); and of the *tardus*, (*căpă ēt clērică*), (*īmō cālāmītās*), (*salutătōnē nōn lōquītūr*). But there is a much larger number of instances of *velox* in these than is usual in the other letters, perhaps because the subject is light and the language heated and rapid. For example, (*ōmnībūs īnīmīcă*), (*nōscītūr prōvēntrē*), and a dozen others in the first letter, and (*ōmnīūm ānimārūm*), (*salutătēris ōrnāmētīs*), and several others in the second letter. It is clear from this examination of the cursive runs in the two letters that the rhythmic pattern, being predominantly rapid, would be an asset to the debate pattern.

The matter of the debate technique next arises. The question of the tradition of a debate in Latin prose has received scant attention up to the present ⁶. In my opinion, since the prose of the *ars dictaminis* is rhythmic and highly skilled in form, the writers felt that it had a kinship with the poetical art, in which there existed by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a very popular literary form, the *certamen*, or debate. J.W.H. Atkins traces the beginnings of this form back to the eclogues of Theocritus and Virgil ⁷. With the intellectual activity which sprang up and developed around the school of Charlemagne, we find such famous Latin poetical exchanges as *Conflictus veris et hiemis*, attributed to the Englishman Alcuin, and *De rosae liliique certamine*, of Sedulius Scotus. In the high Middle Ages, with the delight in philosophical speculation manifest everywhere in Europe, the debate developed into a very popular literary form. The principals of the debate

6. H. Walther speaks of a Latin prose dialogue, a dispute between a rich man and a poor man over the value of riches, in *Das Streitgedicht in der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, München, 1920, p. 123. Cf. note 2.

7. J. W. H. ATKINS, ed., *The Owl and the Nightingale*, Cambridge, 1922, p. xlvii.

were sometimes birds or animals, at other times qualities or inanimate objects, such as summer and winter, water and wine, etc. The debate of the body and soul was found not only in Latin but in Old French and in Medieval English. One required quality of such debates was that the topic be eternally debatable, for the point was not to settle a dispute, but to exercise and test in battle your wit and mental agility. Atkins attests to this purpose of the debate :

“ In Abelard’s *Sic et Non*... the author had aimed not so much at the imparting of truth, as at the sharpening of the wits of the beginners in philosophy. And this was the method that influenced for the most part the intellectual activities of the 12th. century scholars. It everywhere developed that taste for argument and formal discussion, and it established incidentally the vogue of the 12th. century debate. Written at first as a mere exercise in the new study of dialectics, the debate soon became one of the most popular of literary forms. Before the end of the 12th. century it had rapidly developed and had become one of the most characteristic types in the literature of the period ⁸. ”

In English the most delightful of the medieval debates is *The Owl and the Nightingale* ; it is found even in the Renaissance in Milton’s charming pair of poems *L’Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* (unfortunately not always recognized as belonging to this tradition).

The debate between Shrovetide and Lent presents all kinds of wonderful opportunity for fun and satire, and challenges the ingenuity of the debaters. Shrovetide, originally intended as the time of serious preparation for Lent, especially in the matter of going to Confession, gradually became an occasion of merriment, such as is found in the modern idea of “ mardi gras ”. Thus the debate explains that the name has changed in meaning : ...*mutatum est nomen et officium variatum, non enim cibi privatio sed carniuum susceptio decetero volumus nominari*. In the first letter, issuing from Shrovetide, the author makes full use of his experiences and observations in the forum of fasting ; the notion of the

8. *Op. cit.* p. xlix.

monks being unable even to keep time in singing the office, due to their bad temper from fasting, is indeed a good touch. The picture of women maddened and wild, running through the woods, bloated with gas from fasting, is hardly equalled by Chaucer. The sense of urgency in ordering Quadragesima out of the country is very apt, since on the morrow the period of fasting was to begin. The severe scolding and condemnation that Lent heaps upon the feasting Shrovetide is a delightful exhibition of the art of exaggeration, in which all those associated with Shrovetide are turned into the filthiness of dung and corruption, and every possible sin is seen as deriving therefrom: ...*iniquitates fiunt | paces franguntur | federa violantur | sciscitantur lites | bella geruntur | strupantur moniales et virgines corrumpuntur.*

These pieces are undoubtedly the product of the monastery, for not only do they demonstrate a keen knowledge of how fasting can endanger the peaceful life of a group, but there is shrewd instance in the first letter of the ironical misapplication of scriptural quotation. In the line, *comederunt et saturati sunt nimis* [*Ps.*77:29], quoted in defence of feasting, one checks the context and discovers that this refers to the feasting of the children of Israel in the desert, after they had been complaining about the lack of meat. God sent them an abundance of quail ... and then swallowed them up in death ! The irony of the quotation would not be lost on the medieval monks and friars.

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Littera Carnisprivii contra Quadragesimam, adversariam suam.

Nulla salutationis eloquio Carnisprivium, Quadragesima, te invitat, cum salutis contraria sis et modis omnibus inimica, quia sub religionis spetie gaudium mundi auferre niteris atque vitam. Et quid est hoc? Responde, misera; loquaris, captiva. Tu precipis a populo Christiano ieiunia celebrari: condescendunt admonitionibus tuis prima facie religiosi et clerici universi, non voluntate spontanea, sed potius com-

pulsiva — ut quemadmodum a laicis differunt in capa et clerica, sic eos qualitate videantur precellere meritorum. Sed numquid melius est abstinere a vitiis quam a cibis? Cuius auctoritate moveris? Qua Scriptura induceris? Forte divina? Nonne primo parenti dominus dixit, « In sudore vultus tui vesceris panem. »? (*Gen.* 3: 19) Forte dicis aliter prophetia testatur. Erubescere, tace, formidare, quiesce! Nam propheta dicit, « Comederunt et saturati sunt nimis. » (*Ps* 77: 29)

Hiis, ergo, potest auctoritatibus et multis aliis comprobari quod non utilitas, sed temeritas, non sanitas, immo calamitas ex superstitione tua noscitur provenire.

Videamus, itaque, quis et quantus effectus ieiunii censeatur. Ieiunium fratres facit discordes, rebelles, iratos, invidos et multipliciter detractores, et vix canendo concordant, nec in officiis stare possunt. Ante cibum exuriunt et postea sitiunt. Primo egroti sunt fame, nec postmodum vivere possunt ventris dolore nimio ¹ fatigati. Sic perit obedientia, dissipatur collegium et destruitur ecclesiastica disciplina, Dei timor repellitur et hominibus reverentia denegatur.

Laici, quoque, languidi, pallidi, avari, frenetici, mellanconici, insani et furiosi effecti, tuam ypocrisim et abstinentie vanitatem fugiunt sicut pestem. Mulieres, etiam, infatuatae per nemora furiant et deserta, membris ex ventuosis cibariis dissolutis. Et tam virgines quam continentibus et coniugali federe copulate, cuiuscumque ordinis, conditionis vel etatis existant, odiosum tuum adventum totis viribus detestantur.

Tue, siquidem, temeritati distractione qua possumus inhibemus ne more solito audaciam presumptionis assumas nec Ytalicam introeas regionem, quia inbecillitas tua sentiet nostras vires cum per militum nostrorum potentiam tua miseria nostris imperiis subiacebit. Ceterum, si scire desideras quis sit qui talia comminatur, mutatum est nomen et officium variatum: non enim cibi privatio, sed carniarum susceptio decetero volumus nominari, nam in solio regni sedemus, mundi principatum tenentes. Per nos, quippe, cantilene fiunt iocunditates pariter et corree, tristes letificantur et conciliantur discordes, omnesque mortales glorificant nomen nostrum et omnia que sunt nobis.

Invectiva Quadragesime contra inimicum suum.

Tibi, Carnisprivio, Quadragesima de salutatione non loquitur, cum nulla tibi sit communia cum salute. Quenam participatio vite ad mortem, tenebrarum ad lucem, aut Christi ad Bellialim? Tu, pessime

1. Ms.: *mimio*.

lupe rapax, destructor es corporum et insidiator omnium animarum; per tuam crapulam et immoderatam saturitatem putrescunt quasi marcida tuorum corpora sequatium singulorum, et in stercore luxurie sicut quatruiduani fetidi polluuntur quicumque tuis deceptionibus aquiescunt. Nempe velut a principe huius mundi cecitatis filii maculantur, iniquitates fiunt, paces franguntur, federa violantur, sciscitantur lites, bella geruntur, strupantur moniales et virgines corumpuntur.

Dic nobis, miserime, homicidia, periuria, adulteria furta — unde proveniunt? A te criminoso descendunt crimina, et secuntur vitia vitiosum. Precipimus, itaque, tue prevaricationi sub multa districtione ut cum omnibus tuis militibus de Ytalica festinanter fugias regione, quia die tali cum nostra milicia veste candida veniemus ad purganda tuorum scelera nostrarum virtutum splendidis ac salutiferis ornamentis.