A major achievement of recent scholarship has been the demonstration that, alongside scholasticism and partly in reaction against it, there emerged, with Renaissance humanism, a major alternative to it. Among the distinguished scholars who have variously participated in this work have been P. O. Kristeller, Charles Trinkaus, and Salvatore Camporeale. They have demonstrated that, following the Bible, Saint Paul, and Saint Augustine, the humanists of the Renaissance discovered in rhetoric, as they saw it, a vehicle of communication, Christian but also secular, vastly superior to scholastic discourse because of its ability to speak to the human heart. But while these scholars have chiefly described the emergence of this movement, Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle has shown in precise detail how rhetoric empowered the writings of major figures of the time. In addition to her remarkable empathy and imagination, she has brought to this project a training in philosophy and a deep knowledge of the classical and medieval sources of Renaissance culture, both learned and popular.

Her first book, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), dealt generally with the devotion of Erasmus to the rhetorical theology of the church fathers; in this connection it emphasized the significance of Erasmus's translation of the *logos* of the Fourth Gospel. For the *verbum* (*word*) of Origen and Jerome, Erasmus substituted *sermo* (*speech* or *discourse*). Indeed, she tells us, Erasmus would have preferred to translate *logos* as *oratio* but was too fastidious to designate the Son with a feminine word (p. 33).
Her interest in rhetorical analysis figured even more directly in *Rhetoric and Reform: Erasmus's Civil Dispute with Luther* (Cambridge: Harvard Historical Monographs LXXI, 1983). This work dealt with the debate between Luther ("the elephant") and Erasmus ("the fly") over freedom of the will. In Boyle's treatment the two sides represented two kinds of rhetoric: Luther's was juridical, Erasmus's deliberative. In his dogmatism and his love of "assertions," however, Luther plays somewhat the same role as Erasmus's scholastic opponents in Boyle's earlier book. This book also was more general in its sense of historical context, noting the effect of the so-called Peasants War on Luther's mood at the time.

With *Petrarch's Genius: Pentimento and Prophecy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), Boyle struck out in another new direction; Luther was recognized on all sides as a theologian, and the significance of Erasmus for religious thought had been well established. But Petrarch has often been regarded chiefly as a figure in the history of secular literature, his poetry isolated from such pious works as the *Secretum*. Boyle now demonstrated that the Augustinianism of the *Secretum* was not the product of a momentary crisis but an essential element in a career that had to be understood as a whole. Underlying this argument was a general insistence on the affinity in the Renaissance between theology and poetry, and again on the religious significance of rhetoric. One of Boyle's individual articles also made her point with particular effectiveness. Entitled "Rhetorical Theology: Charity Seeking Charity" (Berkeley: Center for Hermeneutical Studies Colloquy 54, 1987, pp. 22–30), it argued that charity, which, alone among the traditional theological virtues, is clearly directed out from the self to others, is "the greatest" among them, in accordance with the familiar Pauline formula.

The rhetorical reading of a text recognizes, as other readings may not, that linguistic communication has many purposes, especially in ordinary life, and that the communication of information or systematic argument is, for most human beings most of the time, one of its least important—and indeed least effective—functions. For language accomplishes a host of human purposes, and notably the communication to others of needs, directions, love and other feelings, the insights of imagination, and a multitude of singularly powerful impulses that often operate among us below the level of consciousness. Rhetoric is also aware of the importance of genre, so that it tries to avoid reading in one genre.
what was composed in another: to avoid, for example, extracting from a poem a “meaning” in prose or an argument or moral.

All of this is brought to bear in *Loyola’s Acts*, now Boyle’s most sustained work of rhetorical analysis; it is also, in the best sense, a tour de force. It interprets the so-called autobiography of Ignatius of Loyola as a work of epideictic rhetoric rather than, in the accepted sense, either a biography or an autobiography; there is no direct evidence of its authorship. It seems, in fact, to belong to the genre of saints’ lives, the function of which is to induce pious admiration and emulation. Boyle demonstrates how it does this by a detailed analysis of the text, making each detail the occasion for an illuminating essay on its artful incorporation of materials drawn from iconography, folklore, bestiaries, and the personal experience of its subject, as well as the Scriptures and classical and patristic literature. The result, however, is far more than a dazzling display of erudition. Boyle intends it as a model for the reading and interpretation of numerous other texts in European culture that have never been analyzed in this way. Some of the detail in the book may not survive the scrutiny of other scholars; but its general method, however shocking its novelties at first sight, should stimulate other “rhetorical” readings. Such readings promise to make familiar texts, like the “autobiography” of Ignatius of Loyola, once again rich and strange.

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