EXCHANGING PERFORMATIVE WORDS:
Epistolary Performance and University Drama in Late Medieval England

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According to the accepted narrative, English university drama began in the Tudor period, principally in the first few decades of the sixteenth century, when Masters at English universities wrote plays and dialogues to encourage students to develop Latin proficiency, eloquence in communication, and moral decorum. The publications of the Records of Early English Drama project would seem to support this claim, since researchers have not discovered definitive records of university drama before 1506 (when we find evidence of a specific play, *St Mary Magdalene*, written by John Burgess at Magdalen College).[1] It would seem that Frederick Boas' assertion that before the Tudor period there wasn't 'a single extant text of a cycle or of a detached play which can be connected with either Oxford or Cambridge', still stands.[2] The absence of medieval academic drama is further justified with claims that there existed a strict separation between festive and didactic forms of dramatic expression within the university setting. Boas, for instance, acknowledges that the students of medieval English colleges sought to entertain themselves between terms (particularly around Christmas), but labels these youthful expressions as 'merely recreative' and not formally a part of 'academic life', like the performances in the sixteenth century. In particular, he faults the medieval curriculum for its inability to 'foster an interest in humane letters generally' or drama specifically.[3] When considering the precedents for academic drama, scholars acknowledge the presence of 'ceremonial customs' from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, such as rituals of the Boy Bishop, King of Beans or Lords of Misrule, and various festive disguisings, but do not view these customs as being either academic or properly dramatic. Performative pedagogical practices within the medieval university curriculum have likewise been denied their potential for performance. In his editorial procedures for the *REED* volume on Cambridge, for instance, Alan Nelson mentions that he excludes disputations and commencement exercises even though, as he acknowledges, they were, 'frequently treated as entertainment for the benefit of visiting dignitaries'.[4]

Scholars have subsequently highlighted what they see as the limitations of a 'demonstrative' medieval approach to pedagogy in order to emphasize the specific relevance and dramatic impetus of humanist pedagogy.[5] Recently, Paul Sullivan, for instance, has explored the humanist implications of Tudor pedagogy as witnessed in collections of *vulgaria*, that is, English and Latin sentences that were used to teach Latin in English grammar schools. Although he uses collections that date to the 1420s, he views these earlier examples of *vulgaria* as purposed for schoolmasters 'to leaven classroom tedium and engage student interest in Latin conversation'.[6] By contrast, Sullivan claims *vulgaria* from the Tudor period not only had the potential to envision and rehearse different social identities, but also constituted, through the use of impersonation, a 'rudimentary form of school drama'.[7] The supposed difference lies in an 'exploratory' rather than 'demonstrative' pedagogical approach. Whereas medieval grammar teachers required students simply to memorize and recite Latin *vulgaria*, Tudor grammar teachers asked students to recite their exercises *non in propria persona*, that is, by assuming a persona or identity other than their own. This is a compelling claim; however, Sullivan never supports it with specific evidence from the compilations of *vulgaria* or external evidence to demonstrate this practice actually happened.

I contend that university drama did happen before the Tudor period and that medieval pedagogy was capable of producing dynamic forms of entertainment both in and out of the classroom. Scholars have overlooked medieval traditions in part due to narrow definitions of performance that fail to consider the range of 'texts' that were performed.[8] We must recognize that the terms of the conversation have been changed by the newer category of performance. 'Drama' no longer suffices to tell the history of medieval performance practices.

I would like to examine one aspect of medieval pedagogy, rhetoric, as it relates specifically to *ars dictaminis*[9] or the art of letter writing, and explore its potential for performance. First, I will demonstrate how the performance of medieval university letters could be both 'didactic' and 'recreative' through their connection to treatises on *ars dictaminis*. Then, I will focus on a seminal manuscript, Cambridge: Trinity College MS R 14 5, which provides a remarkable example of university drama and epistolary performance practices.

It must be stated from the beginning, however, that *ars dictaminis*, *per se*, was not formally taught as part of the university curriculum. For instruction in grammar and rhetoric, students may have been exposed to various treatises on letter writing that were used as models for prose composition. However, *dictamen* was also a part of the curriculum for business instruction, and seen (from at least the fourteenth century) as something external to the university curriculum and taught for the purpose of preparing students for careers in business administration.[10] Two different types of instruction produced two different styles of letter writing. Grammar masters or instructors at the university, for instance, emphasized rhetorical stylistics that could be found in contemporary prose and verse literature. Business *dictatores*, on the other hand, preferred a sparse structure (with little rhetorical flourish), resembling the format of legal documents such as deeds and testaments.[11] These pedagogical and stylistic differences will be important later.

So what do I mean by 'epistolary performance'? Let us first consider the structure of a medieval letter, which was designed to be read aloud in public. By the early twelfth century, the art of letter writing is codified with the assimilation of a Ciceronian model of oration, providing the basic structure of a letter (employing five instead of six parts).[12] Indeed, many *dictatores* in their treatises or textbooks, the *artes dictandi*, describe letters as written orations that serve complementary ends.[13] Similarly, the *cursus* or 'rhymical patterns' that resemble the late Antique *clausulae* of Cicero's speeches were added to 'make the prose sound pleasing when spoken'.[14]

Recently Martin Camargo has explored the possibility that, given the oral transmission of most letters (from dictation to delivery), there exists the potential for instruction on the performance of letters. Most treatises on *ars dictaminis* tend to focus on defining specific terms or parts of a letter (particularly the *salutatio* and *captatio benevolentiae*) with comparatively little ink devoted to their oral delivery. Yet, Camargo finds an exception in one thirteenth-century *ars dictandi*, the *Candelabrum* of Bene of Florence, which provides instruction for the proper delivery, gestures, and facial expressions in the oral performance of letters.[15] In Book 8, for instance, Bene states, 'Delivery therefore observes proper management in voice, facial expression, and gesture, so that the listener is won over (*concilietur*) and is led to belief through persuasion, and his passions are kindled' (Bene 8:58).[16] Camargo believes that passages such as this one articulate what is implicit in most *artes dictandi*.

In addition to performance-based structure of letters and instructional precepts of *ars dictaminis*, there is recorded evidence that letters were performed outside the classroom, but still within the confines of the university, during the sixteenth century at both Oxford and Cambridge. Seventeenth-century antiquarian Anthony Wood, for instance, describes a performance event that happened in 1557 at Merton College in relation to the election of the *rex fabarum* or King of Beans:

> On the 19th of November, being the Vigil of St. Edmund, King and Martyr, Letters under seal were pretended to have been brought from some place beyond [the] sea, for the election of a King of Christmas, or Misrule, sometimes called with us of the aforesaid College, Rex Fabarum. The said letters being put into the hands of the Bachelaur Fellows, they brought them into the Hall that night, and standing, sometimes walking, round the fire, there reading the contents of them, [they] would choose the senior Fellow that had not yet borne that office.[17]

Wood also states, 'That custom hath been as ancient for ought that I know as the College itself'.[18] Indeed, if we examine Merton's College Register from the beginning of its records (1485/6), the election of the King of Beans is described as taking place in accordance with 'ancient custom'. The Register also corroborates many of the performance details Wood describes and even provides some tantalizing snippets.[19] In 1517, for instance, the Warden of Merton College denies Mr Williot, a bachelor at the college, 'exhibition' money as well as the ability to 'lay claim to the place and rank of senior' because Williot did not properly organize the ceremony for the election of the king.[20] He did not provide, for instance, a letter with a seal 'according to the ancient custom', nor did the bachelors, who also participated in the performance, wear masks and come attired in 'outlandish clothing'.[21] If what defines something as a performance rather than an academic exercise or ceremonial custom is, as Sullivan suggests, students engaging a specific text *non in propria persona,* then this certainly qualifies as a performance. Yet, what is its relationship, then, to Tudor (or medieval) pedagogy? For the answer, we will need to examine the performance texts, in this case the letters, to draw further conclusions.

Wood may have exaggerated when he claimed that the performance of the election of the Christmas King at Merton was as old as the college itself, but multiple examples of 'mock king' or 'mock abbot' letters from the fourteenth and fifteenth century would seem to document such performances.[22] These letters (in conjunction with their 'manuscript matrix') have the potential to be both recreative and pedagogical, serving multiple purposes within the Oxford academic community.[23] In my initial investigation, I have found several treatises of *ars dictaminis* that exist in conjunction with 'mock letters' (which are variously allegorical, mythological and satirical), and have connections to Gloucester College, Canterbury College, Hinxey Hall, Greek Hall, and New College, as well as Merton College. This new evidence raises a new conundrum: from the Tudor period, beginning in 1485 (though not until 1539 at Cambridge), we have records of the election of the Christmas King and King of Beans, but no extant letters; from the fourteenth to the late fifteenth century we have approximately twenty-two different letters (some existing in multiple copies) that are associated with Oxford and pertain to the election of the King of Beans, Christmas King, Emperor, and/or mock Abbot, but no records of performance, *per se*. The solution I propose is that so many of these kinds of letters survive from the medieval period because they were consciously preserved as part of collections or compendia of *dictamen*. Some were included in *dictatores*' textbooks or *artes dictandi*, while others, like Merton's letters for the election of the King of Beans, were compiled to supplement individual treatises and/or other model letters. I suggest that these letters were preserved because the compiler recognized their pedagogical usefulness, in addition to their entertainment value. Indeed, the humour and satire of these letters often belies their sophistication and rhetorical complexity. For instance, a letter from the first quarter of the fifteenth century from Neptune to the Nobles of the Kingdom of Beans begins:

> *Celestis progenies neptunus & magne dyane filius a ditis palacio ad maximi Iovis artem Rector, dominus & patronus; omnibus & singulis Regni fabe proceribus. Salutem cum pace & ad perpetue polecie precepta aures erigere manus apponere. & tanquam alis pennatis affeccionis pedibus prope conuolare.* [24]
>
> Neptune, the offspring of heaven and son of great Diana, ruler, lord, and patron from Dis [Pater]'s palace to greatest Jove's citadel, to each and every noble of the Kingdom of the Bean, [wishing them] good health and peace and that they may listen attentively to the precepts of the everlasting republic, set [their] hands [to do them], and gather soon [to obey them] on the feet of affection as if on feathered wings.

Neptune beseeches the 'nobles' to elect a new king since the current king is 'about to renounce the world' (*renunciaturus seculo*) and a kingdom without a ruler is likely to 'fall into depredation and ruin equally' (*in direpcionem incidant pariter et ruinam*).[25] This decision is to be made when the 'feast of Clement' (*festivitas clementina*: 5 December) dawns, that is, the day before the customary start of the King of Beans' reign on the feast of St. Nicholas. The *conclusio* of the letter states: 'Written in the port of Pelion at the time when Thetis was rejoicing everywhere with Bacchus in honour' (*Scriptum in portu pelionis. Instanti; quo thetis vndique bacho gaudebat honore*).[26] This letter is found in British Library MS Royal 10 B IX along with five other letters that are similarly addressed to the Kingdom of Beans, and exhibit comparable rhetorical flourishes (with local references to Oxford and the surrounding area). The classical references and rhetorical flourishes within these medieval letters, however, seem to trouble scholars.

In his introduction to his edition of the *Registrum Annalium* for Merton College, H.E. Salter, for instance, connects these letters to Merton's Christmas festivities, yet questions their 'advanced' use of language. Perhaps, he says, 'if the letters were fifty years later, we might understand them better'.[27] However, what he, and so many others, has failed to notice is the important pedagogical connection these letters have with the instruction of *ars dictaminis.* Composing these mock letters (often with elaborate classical allusions) was not for the uninitiated. As Martin Camargo points out, *ars dictaminis* was an advanced skill and one that is rarely attempted in English grammar schools.[28]

To understand the pedagogical and performative relationship between 'mock letters' and *ars dictaminis*, we must return to the manuscripts and examine why these 'mock letters' were preserved and their sixteenth-century counterparts were not. British Library MS Royal 10 B IX, which contains the six letters to the Kingdom of Beans, is often referred to as a miscellany and its quire-signatures suggest more than one arrangement or configuration. However, the manuscript's 'original components' can still be identified and grouped, according to seven distinct hands.[29] When we do this, we find that 'Hand B' consistently scripts discrete sections of compendia on *dictamen* with accompanying model letters that often refer to Oxford (fols 13^{r}–45^{v}, 123^{r}–124^{r}, 127^{r}–132^{v}, 168^{r}–174^{v}, and 178^{r}–201^{r}). It is within one of these sections that Merton's six letters are located (fols 127^{r}–132^{v}). In another discrete section, there are three short treatises by Thomas Sampson, a prominent 'business administration' *dictator* in Oxford during the fourteenth century (fols 13^{r}–32^{v}). The first of these treatises describes the rules for creating a will, followed by model examples, writs, libels, and ecclesiastical causes, in addition to humorous examples with names like 'Dysshewassher' (fols 13^{r}–16^{v}). Accompanying the third tract, *de litteris missivis*, there are model letters of correspondence between Oxford scholars and family members, and a satirical letter (fols 25^{v}–32^{r})

that targets academic and ecclesiastical members from the 'kingdom of Canterbury College' (a diatribe that also incorporates sections from the Christmas liturgy). What is striking is that in almost every discrete section the pattern is the same: treatise or official correspondence followed by a mixture of entertaining and instructive model letters. In the *REED* volume for Oxford, Elliott questions the relationship between the six letters from Merton and the satirical letter from Canterbury College. Perhaps there is no connection of the type he was seeking. Rather, it may be that each extant letter is representative of a performance event that could subsequently be used (as part of the diverse collection of *dictamina*) for pedagogical purposes. Again, the reason these performance-based letters were preserved was that they shared an affinity (in goals and/or practice) with the compendia of *ars dictaminis*.

Let us now view these epistolary performances in relation to Cambridge: Trinity College MS R 14 5, which contains *Liber Apologeticus de omni statu humanae naturae* ('A Defence of Human Nature in Every State'), the earliest extant English university play. *Liber Apologeticus*, written between 1457 and 1461 by Thomas Chaundler, chancellor of Oxford University and Wells Cathedral, is a fascinating morality play in four acts about Man's fall after choosing to follow Sensuality over Reason; Man's culpability after a debate with God; his subsequent trial, debated by the Four Daughters of God; and his restitution, with a final temptation from Fear of Death. The play is often considered to be a mere panegyric offering to Chaundler's patron and friend, Thomas Bekynton, the bishop of Bath and Wells.[30] Yet very few scholars have examined the play and its potential for performance in relation to its parent codex, Cambridge: Trinity College MS R 14 5. As I have done so, I have been struck by the extent to which letters figure within the play and the manuscript. The Trinity College MS contains, in addition to fifteen semi-grisaille illustrations and a poem by Simon de Couvin, a debate dialogue that begins with letters read aloud from Bath and Wells, four letters of correspondence from Thomas Chaundler to Bishop Bekynton, and *Liber Apologeticus*, whose dramatic climax occurs through the delivery of letters.

The fourth act of *Liber Apologeticus* is based on the popular twelfth-century treatise, *On the Custody of the Soul*, attributed to Anselm of Canterbury, and a thirteenth-century Middle English variation, *Sawles Warde*. In the play, Man has just received restitution through the incarnation of Christ, but must still make it through his last days without succumbing to temptation. In order to accomplish this, Christ provides

Man with the Four Cardinal Virtues to protect his ‘household’. With the arrival of two messengers, Fear of Death and Charity, who endeavor to gain entry into Man’s household, the play and treatises begin to follow a similar narrative. The dialogic format of the treatises (after an initial homiletic prologue) fits Chaundler’s dramatic style and thus could be easily incorporated into the play. And yet, it is notable that Chaundler adds the exchange of letters with the arrival of Charity and Fear of Death to heighten the play’s dramatic climax. Moreover, the performance of these letters is not through each messenger’s respective reading, since it is Man who reads the letters aloud to his household. Rather, the true performance of the letters occurs through each messenger’s elaboration of the text’s meaning.

This interpretation is corroborated by Giles Constable, who views the role of the messenger as one who ‘acted to some extent as an envoy or ambassador, transmitting orally not only secret messages or news too dangerous to put into writing, but also the text and message of the letter itself’.[31] Conrad of Mure’s *Summa de arte prosandi*, for instance, explains how important it is that a messenger know the meaning of the letter and be able to transmit this meaning through proper rehearsal: ‘Thus, let the expositor “preview” the letter to be expounded with careful forethought, let him read, reread, and read once again secretly, so that he may more easily disclose and expound the meaning that he has gathered to the lord to whom the letter is sent. For “He who would speak well should premeditate well”’. [32]

In *Liber Apologeticus*, each messenger must supplement the content of the letter and perform its meaning; Fear of Death attempts to instil fear, whereas Charity tries to offer hope. The authenticity of their performances (just like authenticity in letters) determines which character is allowed to remain in the household, that is, which truth should be believed. In response to being asked why he has come, Fear of Death specifically states:

> *Itaque licebit: demones profecto ferentes libros grandes, cathenas preterea igneas. In libris quidem scribuntur universa hominis peccata atque eos ob hoc adducent ut ex ipsis convincatur homo cuius inibi peccata scribuntur, et cathenis igneis ligatam eius animam violenter rapiant in infernum.* [33]
>
> I am allowed to say this: Assuredly there are devils bearing great books and fiery chains. In these books, all the sins of man are written and the devils will bring them for this purpose; since Man whose sins are written in these books may be found guilty on

> account of them, the devils may violently snatch his soul with fiery chains into hell.

Man then reads the letter aloud, asking his counsellors to ‘hear the letter of Death’ (*audite mortis litteras*), which begins:

> *Terminus et finis uniuerse carnis, iusta mors, peccati pena,metus et terror omnibus quos uita uiuificat et quod tegit caro, ultimum et maximum omnium terribilium, homini adhuc in carne relicto usquedum uenero, salutem.*[34]

> End and aim of all flesh, Death, just penalty of sin, fear and terror to all whom life quickens and whom flesh covers, sends to Man still remaining in the flesh until I shall come, the last and most frightful of all terrors, greetings.

The letter from Death is written as if it were produced for a court of law, using sparse, declarative legal terminology (and clauses, for instance, that begin with the future imperative):

> *Scito quod mors a morsu uetiti cibi nuncupemur, est quo dictum est tibi:* Quocumque die commederis morte morieris.[35]

> Know that we are named Death from the bite of the forbidden fruit, concerning which it has been declared to you: On whatsoever day you shall eat of it, you shall die the death.

At a time when *dictatores* who taught ‘business administration’ were seen as a threat to those teaching grammar and rhetoric in the universities, the style of ‘business administration’ letters would have been detected in this adverse letter from Death. In contrast, the letter from Heaven is florid and poetic (much like Chaundler’s real letters to Bekynton) and describes those who ‘dwell in the house of the Lord’:

> *Ibi bonorum spirituum ordines qui ante Deum assistunt quorum coequa beatitudo de visione Dei et amore nec minuitur, nec finitur, sed semper crescit et permanet, ornatusque eorum mirabiliter choruscans et fulgens.*[36]

> Here are the ranks of the good spirits who stand before God, whose equal blessedness from the vision and from the love of God neither diminishes nor comes to an end, but ever grows and abides, and their ornaments are marvelously aglow and shining.

It may be no coincidence, therefore, that this type of letter is ultimately the one preferred.

There is another performance of letters in Chaundler's debate dialogue, *Libellus de laudibus duarum civitatum*, that may have been written while Chaundler was still a Fellow at New College (and revised for its inclusion in the presentation manuscript). Before the debate begins, there is a prologue and two letters that are read aloud *non in propria persona* by the patron saints of Bath and Wells (Peter and Andrew) on behalf of their citizenry in order to provide justification for the present debate. Chaundler encourages us, however, to view the prologue and letters as an integral part of the performance of the debate. The prologue states, for instance, that Bekynton may be surprised by the vigour and diligence of the thoughts expressed 'when you hear their praises and speeches … about to be spoken' (*quorum laudationes et orationes cum audieris … dicendi*).[37] The letters that follow the prologue likewise actively petition Bekynton (through direct address) to see their town as worthy of his eminence. Gifts are then presented to Bekynton at the conclusion of these letters and the debate formally begins. While the topic of the debate is fictional (which city is to be chosen as the episcopal seat), the performance seems to be connected to an actual event, the commemoration of Bekynton's episcopacy. In the letter from Wells, for instance, Andrew congratulates Bekynton on recently obtaining the bishopric, 'For you illustriously engender all virtues, and now have been decorated with the bishop's mitre' (*tibi enim omnium virtutum genere clarissimo … iam pontificali mitra decorato*).[38] The letters are then incorporated into the debate proper, as the messengers, in the form of the patron saints of Bath and Wells, elaborate the meaning behind the letters, namely, each town's virtue and superiority. The speeches are largely derivative, drawing extensively from Leonardo Bruni's *Laudatio Florentiae urbis* and Pier Decembrio's *De laudibus Mediolanensium urbis panegyricus*.[39] Yet the debate is also riddled with original invective, local references, and humour. Andrew states:

> *Scio, Petre, scio omnium te virorum pessimum, tanta adversum nos malitia calentem, tanta malignitate efferbuisse, ut nos omnesque nostrorum Fontium incolas canino dente non unquam mordere cesses.*[40]
>
> I know you, Peter, to be not only the worst of all men but also a great adversary, being inflamed with malice, seething with spite, so that you may not cease to bite us and all the inhabitants of our Wells with your snarling teeth.

Peter then calls Andrew a wordy windbag and Andrew retorts with a lengthy discussion about how Bath smells like rot and sulphur. Like the performance of the 'mock letters', the *Libellus* presents expectations for the rule of the newly elected Bishop, incorporates humour, and was quite possibly to be performed at Christmas time on behalf of Bekynton and his household. Notably, the letters that precede the debate are dated 23 and 25 December. Thus we have not only extant letters used as part of a performance event (and performed *non in propria persona*), but also a record of the actual performance.

The real letters follow directly on the heels of *Libellus de laudibus*. They are primarily letters of petition: two written while Chaundler was Warden at Winchester College, and two written during his later tenure at New College, Oxford. Each letter illustrates not only the generosity of Bekynton as patron, but also the workings of patron and client reciprocity.

These real (and model) letters are not private correspondences between patron and client, but rather public declarations of a patronal relationship that spanned the period from approximately 1443 until Bekynton's death in 1465. Thus, it might be useful to view the Trinity College MS as an *ars dictandi*, insofar as it contains real/model letters, letters as orations, and fictive legalistic and florid-style letters that were presented within the framework of performance and preserved for pedagogical and entertainment value.

My purpose has been to suggest that there was a tradition of university drama before the Tudor period by demonstrating how *ars dictaminis* could be the basis for pedagogical and recreative performance within medieval English universities. The many ways in which letters intersect with performance (as witnessed in the Trinity College MS) indicate that a complementary and productive relationship existed long before their vogue in the Early Modern period. *Ars dictaminis* is but one entry point. We may also consider, for instance, *commendatio* speeches and disputations to find similar performance possibilities. Medieval pedagogy is thus very capable of supporting multi-faceted, 'exploratory' performance practices, provided that we do not limit our investigation to play texts.

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1. *REED: Oxford* edited John R. Elliott Jr, Alan H. Nelson, Alexandra F. Johnston, and Diana Wyatt, 2 vols (University of Toronto Press, 2004) *2* 602–603.
2. Frederick Boas *University Drama in the Tudor Age* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1914) 1. Alan Nelson states, 'University drama in England is essentially a postmedieval phenomenon'; 'The Universities' in *Contexts for Early English Drama* edited Marianne Briscoe and John Coldewey (Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1989) 137–149 at 137. See also Jonathan Walker's introduction in *Early Modern Academic Drama* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008) 1–18.
3. Boas *University Drama* 14.
4. Alan Nelson *REED: Cambridge* 2 vols (University of Toronto Press, 1989) *2* 810.
5. Joel Altman creates an influential paradigm, which separates humanist inquiry and innovation from medieval didacticism and orthodoxy in *The Tudor Play of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978) 17.
6. Paul Sullivan 'Playing the Lord: Tudor *Vulgaria* and the Rehearsal of Ambition' *English Literary History 75* (2008) 179–96, especially 183.
7. Sullivan 'Playing the Lord' 185.
8. See, for instance, John R. Elliott, Jr 'Drama' in *Seventeenth-Century Oxford* edited Nicholas Tyacke, 8 vols (The History of the University of Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1997) *4* 641–58. See also William Davenport 'Wisdom and the Drama of Ideas' in *Fifteenth-Century English Drama* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman & Littlefield, 1982) 79–105, especially 92–6.
9. Martin Camargo makes a clear distinction between *ars dictaminis* and *ars dictandi*, referring to the former as the 'discipline' of letter writing and prose composition, and the latter as the 'textbook' of letter writing and prose composition; *Ars dictaminis*, *Ars dictandi* (Typologie des Sources du Moyen Âge Occidental 60; Turnhout: Brepols, 1991) 20.
10. Martin Camargo 'If You Can't Join Them, Beat Them; or, When Grammar Met Business Writing (in Fifteenth-Century Oxford)' in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present* edited Carol Poster and Linda Mitchell (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007) 67–87 at 69. For a Latin edition of the statutes see *Statuta Antiqua Universitatis Oxoniensis* edited Strickland Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), especially 240:25–8.

11 Camargo 'If You Can't Join Them' 73–4.

12. James J. Murphy discusses and charts their comparative rhetorical components in *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) 225.

13. Ronald Witt 'Medieval "Ars Dictaminis" and the Beginnings of Humanism: a New Construction of the Problem' *Renaissance Quarterly 35* (Spring, 1982) 1–35 at 9.

14. Giles Constable *Letters and Letter-Collections* (Typologie des Sources du Moyen Âge fasc. 17; Turnhout: Brepols, 1976) 50–51; Malcolm Richardson 'The *Ars dictaminis*, the Formulary, and the Medieval Practice' in *Letter-Writing Manuals and Instruction from Antiquity to the Present* edited Carol Poster and Linda Mitchell (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2007) 52–66 at 56.

15. Martin Camargo 'Special Delivery: Were Medieval Letter Writers Trained in Performance?' in *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages* edited Mary Carruthers (Cambridge UP, 2010) 173–89 at 176. For other important discussions of classroom performance, see Martin Camargo 'Medieval Rhetoric Delivers; or, Where Chaucer Learned How to Act' in *New Medieval Literatures* 9 (2008) 41–62 and Marjorie Curry Woods 'Boys Will Be Women: Musings on Classroom Nostalgia and the Chaucerian Audience(s)' in *Speaking Images: Essays in Honor of V.A. Kolve* edited Robert F. Yeager and Charlotte C. Morse (Ashville, NC: Pegasus Press, 2001) 143–66.

16. Camargo 'Special Delivery' 177.

17. *REED: Oxford* edited Elliott and others, 798. The reign of the King of Beans would last through to Candlemas (or around 2 February 2) and would entitle the king to impose 'exercises' or impart 'ridiculous' punishments on those who had received misdemeanours over the course of the Christmas season, as well as listen to speeches from his exalted chair.

18. *REED: Oxford* 798.

19. *REED: Oxford* 927.

20. *REED: Oxford* 950. This entry is from Merton College Register, fol. 239^{v}.

21. *REED: Oxford* 950.

22. Boas in *University Drama* 5 and Elliot in *REED: Oxford* 798 are particularly insistent that Wood does not accurately depict the 'antiquity of the custom', and yet do not offer any alternative timeframe. For the letters, see Oxford: All Souls College, MS Arch 182, fols 91^{r}–94^{v}; British Library, MS Harley 5398, fols 128^{r}–131^{v}, 132^{v}–133^{r}; British Library, Cotton MS Julius F VII, fols 129^{r}–135^{r}; British Library, MS Royal 10 B IX, fols 32^{v}–33^{v}, 127^{r}–132^{v}, 170^{v}–174^{r}, 178^{r}–195^{v}; Oxford: Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 828, fols 173^{v}–176^{v}; Cambridge: Corpus Christi College MS 358, fols 20^{v}–21^{v}; Lambeth Palace Library MS 221, fols 159^{v}–160^{r}.

23. Stephen Nichols defines the 'manuscript matrix' as the 'historical fact that medieval texts were written in a manuscript format which is both multivoiced and temporally open-ended', 'Philology and Its Discontents', in *The Future of the Middle Ages: Medieval Literature in the 1990s*, edited William Paden (Gainesville:

University Press of Florida, 1994) 119. Elliott sees these practices, for instance, as relating specifically to Merton College, though there are two late references to St. John's College and a somewhat ambiguous reference to Canterbury College.

24. *REED: Oxford* 799, 1081.
25. *REED: Oxford* 799, 1081.
26. *REED: Oxford* 799, 1081.
27. *Registrum annalium Collegii Mertonensis* edited H.E. Salter *Oxford Historical Society 76* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923) xvii–xix.
28. Camargo 'If You Can't Join Them' 68.
29. This is corroborated by Sir George F. Warner and Julius P. Gilson in *Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Old Royal and King's Collections in the British Museum* 4 vols (London: The Trustees of the British Museum, 1921) *1* 314–21.
30. The analysis by M.R. James sets the precedent that influences subsequent scholars to view the Trinity College MS as being a panegyric for Bekynton in *The Chaundler MSS* (London: J.B. Nichols and Sons, 1916) 9.
31. Constable *Letters and Letter-Collections* 53.
32. Camargo 'Where's the Brief?' 5–6.
33. Thomas Chaundler *Liber Apologeticus de Omni Statu Humanae Naturae* edited Doris Enright-Clark Shoukri (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1974) 146–7; Cambridge: Trinity College MS R 14 5, fol. 32r.
34. Chaundler *Liber Apologeticus* 148–9; Cambridge: Trinity College MS R 14 5, fol. 32r.
35. Chaundler *Liber Apologeticus* 148–9; Cambridge: Trinity College MS R 14 5, fol. 32v.
36. Chaundler *Liber Apologeticus* 156–7; Cambridge: Trinity College MS R 14 5, fol. 34r.
37. Thomas Chaundler *Libellus de laudibus duarum civitatum* edited George Williams *Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archaeology and Natural History Society 19* (1873): 99–121 at 100; Cambridge: Trinity College MS R 14 5, fol. 36v.
38. Chaundler *Libellus de laudibus* 102; Cambridge: Trinity College MS R 14 5, fol. 37r.
39. Shirley Bridges was the first to discover these sources in 'Thomas Chaundler', 2 vols (unpublished BLitt dissertation, Oxford University, 1949) *1* 135–8. David Rundle provides a full account of these references in 'Of Republics and Tyrants: Aspects of Quattrocento Humanist Writings and their Reception in England, c. 1400–c. 1460' (unpublished DPhil dissertation, University of Oxford, 1997) 272.
40. Chaundler *Libellus de laudibus* 104; Cambridge: Trinity College MS R 14 5, fol. 38r.