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Visions with Voices: The Rhetoric of Memory and Music in Liturgical Drama

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Visions with Voices: The Rhetoric of Memory and Music in Liturgical Drama Jody Enders If the idea that liturgical drama originated in the musical troping of the Mass is now widely accepted, several fundamental questions concerning the rhetoric and reception of music remain nonetheless unanswered. From the earliest Visitatione sepulchri ceremonies to the first liturgical dramas, music helped to communicate aesthetically a devotional message to participants and, later, to worshippers and spectators. While the role of music in the origins of liturgical drama has been discussed by such scholars as William Smoldon, E. Catherine Dunn, and C. Clifford Flanigan, analysis of its remarkable rhetorical power has remained largely suggestive. ¹In the present study, I argue that the time-honored sisterhood of the two discourses of music

and rhetoric played a crucial role in the ontological shift from ritual to representation now known to have given rise to liturgical drama. In the secular as well as the religious register, classical and medieval theorists of music and rhetoric had long underscored the efficacy of music as a form of communication. Before the demise of the ancient Greek *mousike* with the rise of sixteenth-century print culture, music and rhetoric (like music and poetry) were sister arts.² While the modern aesthete may well approach music with the veneration reserved for a true "art for art's sake," extant documents from the rhetorical and musicological corpora demonstrate that such a view is anachronistic. Quintilian, for example, was unequivocal in his insistence on JODY ENDERS, Assistant Professor of French at the University of Illinois, Chicago, has published several articles on the application of classical and medieval rhetorical theory to medieval and Renaissance texts. ³⁴ Jody Enders ³⁵ music studies in an educational program whose influence on the Middle Ages is now the subject of renewed speculation: oratorical training could not be "regarded as complete if it stop short of music, for the teacher of literature has to speak of metre and rhythm. . . ." ³ Similarly, such medieval theorists as Matthew of Vendôme in his *Ars Versificatoria* (c.1175) acknowledged that the power of music could imbue even the most "trifling songs" with meaning: "if melody is excluded . . . then these verses would be like vagrants and freed slaves; they would be like the pruned trunk of a fig tree, a piece of useless wood." ⁴ Those views are borne out increasingly by recent musicological research by Leo Treitler on the "isomorphism" of the "musical grammar" of song and the musicality of the delivered oration. ⁵ Indeed, medieval musical performance and its written notations were intimately connected to the oral and written traditions of language itself. ⁶ Nevertheless, in their haste to attribute the isomorphism of melody and declamation to the interrelations between music and grammar, Treitler and others have neglected the equally significant interrelations between music and rhetoric—interrelations that are particularly relevant to some of the perceived performance anomalies of liturgical drama. Recourse to the rich rhetorical tradition through its two most egregiously neglected canons—memory and delivery—allows us to recast the terms of such oft-posed questions as whether or not nascent religious plays were chanted, spoken, or sung. ⁷ Extrapolating from rhetorical and musicological evidence, I show here that the influential practice of troping shared three important conceptual and performative features with both rhetoric and drama: (1) the exploitation of images (as described in numerous *ars memorandi*); (2) the manipulation of the voice in the sound space to enhance meaning; and, most significantly, (3) the passage from initial pictorial conception to spoken or sung language. A revised focus on memory as a pictorial alphabet which bridged the gulf between conception and performance thus promises to heighten our understanding of the generic ramifications of the liturgical conflation of rhetoric and music. To pursue that line of inquiry, I propose first to reconstruct the conceptual connection between rhetoric and the figurative representation of troping by analyzing the primacy of the image in memory, delivery, and religion. Next, I argue that, in the same way that the memory image engendered the rhetorical ³⁶Comparative Drama speech of delivery, so also did an imagistic conception of the liturgy engender dramatic speech. And, finally, I explore the mnemonic...

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