THE TRADITION OF *CAPTATIO BENEVOLENTIAE* IN THE MEDIEVAL *ARS DICTAMINIS*: THE ENGLISH ISSUE

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Abstract

The present study aims at highlighting some aspects of the history of the rhetorical device known as *captatio benevolentiae*, or the securing of good-will, within the general framework of the medieval *ars dictaminis*, or the art of letter-writing, and its development in 15th-century English letters and the first vernacular letter-writers of the 16th and 17th centuries, in an attempt to pave the way towards a stylistic and pragmatic study of late Middle English correspondence.
After tracing the evolution of the term in some of the original medieval treatises, to find it inconsistently defined both as a fixed section of the letter and as a device to be used elsewhere, the state of affairs in 15th-century England is focused on, as a study prior to the future analysis of individual letter-collections of the period.

1. introduction

The development of *ars dictaminis* manuals is fairly steady and productive from their beginnings in 11th-century Central Italy, as "a response to the growing demand of the society for instruction in letter-

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-writing" (Lyons and Mahoney 1982:1). The whole of Western Europe seems to have accepted the *dictatores*' main theoretical postulates and practical models, only with some provincial variations due to differences of emphasis (Curtius 1953; Murphy 1974; Vickers 1988).The treatises of Alberic of Monte Cassino, Hugh of Bologna, the 'anonymous' of Bologna, Buoncampagno, Guido de Faba and so many others circulated successfully through Europe, and entered England via France. The situation in England was rather different from that on the Continent, since there is no evidence of a rhetorical tradition of this kind in English until the 15th century, when the first vernacular treatises were produced. Any works prior to that date were either translations or imitations of the Italian style, as opposed to original productions. It is as from the 16th century onwards that 'letter-writers', i.e. manuals on letter-writing, in English, begin to proliferate, some of them running into several editions.

Within the evolution of the genre of the *ars dictaminis*, one parameter which seems fairly fixed is that of the division of the letter into five parts (Vickers 1988: 236)[1]. Not only was this division a fairly established dogma, but also the definitions of each part and the excessive attention given to the salutation or address on the basis of incipient sociolinguistic parameters were a hallmark of such works (Faulhaber 1978: 95; Lyons and Mahoney 1982: 8, 13; Vickers 1988: 236). The history of what came to be known as *captatio benevolentiae*, loosely the second part of the letter (henceforth referred to as *captatio* for short), is slightly blurred as nomenclature and definitions of the term in the hands of the different *dictatores* reveal that a dilemma as to its nature was latent.

The study reported in this paper focuses on that one rhetorical aspect in particular, that of the circumstances concerning the concept of *captatio benevolentiae* or the securing of good-will, i.e. the attempt to render the reader attentive, receptive and open towards the message. The evolution of the term is traced in some of the most influential

[1] A typical example is quoted by Lyons and Mahoney (1982:8): "Alberico of Montecassino, the probable founder of the *ars dictaminis dictaminins* manual, proposes to treat 'the rhetorical division of every speech, that is, the *exordium* or *proemium*, the *narratio*, the *argumentatio* and the *conclusio* (...). To those he adds fifth, the *salutatio*.'" In fact, three-part divisions like that of Boncompagno in the 13th century did not catch on. Later, in the second half of the 14th century, Thomas Sampson in England proposed nine divisions.

medieval treatises in order to delimit its characteristics.[2] It is my contention that the concept of *captatio* is not altogether clear in such manuals. This is not only on the basis of possible terminological fluctuation (*proverbium*, *proemium*, *exordium*); the dilemma in my opinion concerns the inconsistent consideration of the nature of *captatio benevolentiae* as both a specific section of the letter and an instrument of persuasion which could be used almost anywhere else. Yet such apparent confusion does not seem to be acknowledged either by the original *dictatores* or by modern critics of rhetorics (Curtius 1953; Lyons and Mahoney 1982; Vickers 1988). Modern linguistic research has focused on the study of medieval rhetorical treatises in general (Murphy 1974; Camargo 1991) and on the evolution of the genre in England (Denholm-Young 1946; Richardson 1984) as well as on the analysis of surviving letter-collections in particular (Davis 1965; Whigham 1981; Henderson 1993). Most recently, and particularly after the recent compilation of the Helsinki *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*, current research goes a step beyond the mere linguistic analysis to focus on sociolinguistic issues. Such studies concentrate on either the opening *salutatio* or on the body of the letter at large, in which various linguistic parameters susceptible of sociolinguistic study can be isolated (Nevalainen 1994; Raumolin-Brumberg 1996, 1997; Nevalainen & Raumolin-Brumberg 1995).

To summarise, the main aim of this paper is to throw some light upon the consideration of *captatio*, and to examine what the state of affairs was in the15th-century English letter in general and the first vernacular letter-writers of the 16th and 17th centuries, as a study prior to a future analysis of individual letter-collections of that period.[3]

2. Medieval interpretation of the old rules of the genre

Because oral transmission of messages is an ancient skill, as stated by Plato and Aristotle, and speech was declared by Cicero and Quintilian to be the basis of social order in Rome, written transmission had to wait a long while before meriting attention.[4] Attempts at a

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[2] For present purposes, the original manuals consulted are those contained in Rockinger's edition.

[3] See Sánchez Roura, T. "What's left of *captatio benevolentiae* in 15th-century English letters? A study of the Cely letters." *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*. Forthcoming.

[4] For prescription on letter-writing prior to the 11th century, Lyons and Mahoney quote three works as follows: Carol Lanham. *Salutatio Formulas in Latin Letters*

treatment of letter-writing during the first centuries of our era were not successful (e.g. C. Julius Victor's *Ars rhetorica* in the 4th century), and letter-collections like the *Variae* of Cassiodorus (490-586), however popular, did not suffice for future generations, and the formulary approach from the Carolingian period, rather notarial in nature, suffered "from the inherent defect of narrowness" (Murphy 1974: 202). Medieval rhetoric has been described as fragmented since "externally, the classical texts had survived in a damaged and haphazard state; internally, readers atomized what had been transmitted to fit their own needs" (Vickers 1988: 220). The art became dismembered to "fit the needs and tastes of a different society" (Monfasani 1976: 245-6). It is clear from this background that the *ars dictaminis* is a truly medieval invention, as Murphy puts it, behind which lie "three interrelated phenomena: economic, intellectual and political developments" (Lyons and Mahoney 1982: 4). Along the same lines, Vickers (1988: 233) sees the art of letter-writing as a "typical product of medieval rhetoric's reshaping a tradition to meet new social needs", which Curtius finds "in no way surprising" (1953: 76). The origins of the new manuals of *ars dictaminis* are clearly connected with the Benedictine abbey of Monte Cassino in Central Italy around the year 1087 from the hands of a monk named Alberic.[5] Basically, what Alberic had been doing for some time prior to the composition of his works (*Dictaminum radii* and *Breviarium de dictamine*) was to apply the Ciceronian rhetorical principles concerning the composition of an *oratio* or orally delivered speech to the composition of a written letter, adapting the various parts by making "a critical distinction between *salutatio* and *exordium* which was to become a hallmark of the medieval *ars dictaminis*" (Murphy 1974: 207).[6] It is precisely with this original *exor-*

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to 1200: Syntax, Style and Theory. Münchener Beiträge, 22 (Munich 1975); Paul O. Kristeller. "Philosophy and Rhetoric from Antiquity to the Renaissance. The Middle Ages", *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, pp. 230-33 and William D. Patt. 1978. "The early 'Ars dictaminis' as response to a changing society", *Viator*, 9, 135-55.

[5] Camargo, M. (1991: 30) notes that discussion of who was the first to 'invent' the *ars dictaminis* is useless since "much has obviously been lost, and much was probably never written down; but enough is known to demonstrate that the doctrine o f the *dictatores* was observed in practice for a long time, perhaps several centuries, before it was set down in the treatises that have survived."

[6] The main Ciceronian works used throughout the Middle Ages were Cicero's own *De inventione* and the pseudo-Ciceronian *Ad Herennium*. His letters were not usually proposed as models by the *dictatores* (Murphy 1967: 335; Lyons and Mahoney 1982: 6; Vickers 1988: 216). Sections of the *De inventione* were trans-

dium, apparently separate from the *salutatio* and coming after it in the letter, that we are most concerned. Alberic's 'definition' of the *exordium* or 'preface' includes the following, in which he uses Cicero's words:

(1) Therefore the author should set as the purpose of his preface to render the mind of the reader attentive, receptive and open.[7]

Later in his treatise, Alberic mentions the *colores* of the *exordium*, introducing what seems to be the first medieval use of *captatio benevolentiae*, a phrase which as from the 12th century would be used as a synonym of 'second part of the letter', as we shall see, thus giving rise to the confusion outlined above (Murphy 1974: 206):

(2) Colores autem dico quibus capitur benevolentia, docilitas, attentio.[8]

From the above explanations of Alberic it seems clear that, regarding the *exordium*, a) this is a part of the letter; b) it comes after the *salutatio*; c) its purpose is to secure *benevolentia, docilitas* and *attentio* on the part of the reader. In other words, *captatio* is achieved at this point in the letter –it is a function to be fulfilled there. From this point, in spite of Alberic's explanations, both function and letter-part will become identified in the future. Besides indicating these localization and functional characteristics of the *exordium*, Alberic also notes how such function may be achieved. Thus, after introducing the *colores* of the *exordium*, he focuses on the last item, 'attention', and goes on:

> (3) *So, if you want to render your reader attentive, you ought to offer him words which are true, honorable and useful ... If you want to lay the groundwork for good-will, then you must follow the procedures which are designed to gain attention. Sometimes you*

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lated into French and Italian in the 13th century by Brunetto Latini, who "sees no contradiction between *De inventione* and the newer *ars dictaminis*" (Murphy 1967: 338), since the two 'modes' of speaking and writing have doctrines in common. In fact, according to Lyons and Mahoney (1982: 6) "official communications, particularly important letters, were often read aloud by the recipient or in the recipient's presence and thus at the moment of communication took on the appearance of an oration". It must be noted that no English translation of a Ciceronian work appears until Thomas Wilson's *Arte of Rhetorique* in 1530.

[7] The translation into English is Miller's. See Miller (1973: 133) "Alberic of Monte Cassino –Flowers of Rhetoric" in Prosser, M.H. et al 1973. *Readings in Medieval Rhetoric*; Murphy uses the words "attentive, docile and well-disposed" (1974: 205)

[8] In Miller's translation: "*I would say its colores are those which serve to earn good-will, acceptance and attention*" (1973: 136)

> *may add a reminder of your own dignity, and sometimes you may use a style of exhortation ...*
> *Then, there remains agreeableness, from which path one should never wander if he has time for preparation at all; let him seek brevity and rid himself of obscurity.* (Miller 1973:136-7)

This seems to be the proclamation of the main elements of the *exordium*: good-will will be secured through the attention of the reader in the first place, which is gained through one or more of the following: (1) true, honourable and useful words; (2) a reminder of one's own dignity; (3) a style of exhortation; (4) agreeableness; (5) brevity and clarity. In fact, he reminds the reader elsewhere that "it is sufficient that you tie together the elements of the prologue with brevity. For it is foolish to wax eloquence in the *proem* and then prune the history." (Miller 1973:134).[9] Thus, we find in the work of Alberic the consistent handling of two separate and distinctive terms: *exordium*, on the one hand, indicates the location of one part of the letter, which is defined in terms of, among others, *captatio benevolentiae*; this, in turn, is defined as one of its purposes or functions.

The also influential work of another famous Bolognese *dictator*, Hugh of Bologna, *Rationes dictandi prosaice* (1119-1124) sides essentially with his predecessor Alberic. Thus, concerning the division of the letter into parts, he says in section viii:

> (4) *Preterea trina in epistolis est consideratio: exordium videlicet, atque narratio, et ex istis procedens, certa conclusio.* (Rockinger 1961:56)

The *exordium* being, apparently, the first of three parts (cf. Alberic's earlier distinction between *salutatio* and *exordium* proper).[10] In the same section, he then defines the *exordium* and, acknowledging Cicero's words concerning the *oratio*, he locates it in a position prior to the other sections of the letter.:

> (5) *Est uero exordium secundum tullianam diffinitionem oratio idonee conparans animum auditoris ad reliquam dictionem.* (Rockinger 1961:57)

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[9] The use of the term 'proem' as a synonym of *exordium* is probably an indicator of fluctuations in terminology in light of later development.

[10] By implication throughout the text it may be inferred that he actually divides the letter into 4 parts, which would include the initial *salutatio*, not mentioned here. He does not follow Alberic in this, who divides the letter into five parts.

But what is of utmost importance for our purposes in Hugh's treatise is section ix, which he devotes entirely to what he calls *benevolentia*. Although he does not actually define it, we may infer that it is regarded as a function of the letter, which is to be gained not in one, but in three different parts of it (Murphy 1974: 220).[11] Clearly, it is neither one part of the letter nor is it particularly associated with the *exordium* only:

> *(6) Beniuolentiam quoque in epistolis alio et alio modo tribus in locis captamus.*
> *In salutatione uidelicet primo, si tria uel iiii ad laudem adiectiua ponamus.*
> *In prologo seu exordio, cum mittentem uel cui mittitur aut utrique uel alteri rem aptam conmendamus.*
> *In conclusione etiam, si laudem et conmendationem concludendo repetamus.*
> *De narratione nichil hic dicatur, quoniam in ea beniuolentia non captatur, sed rem meram mere explanare conatur.* (Rockinger 1961:57)[12]

The above considerations constitute a step further with respect to Alberic's conception of *captatio*, in so far as while still considered as a function of the written composition, it is to be fulfilled at more than just one specific place, i.e. in more places than in Alberic's *exordium*), and it is to be done in a certain way, which is clearly explained for each section; these explanations are drastically different form Alberic's more vague indications. In this light, we may consider Hugh's work as consistent and innovative in his treatment of such matters as are of our present concern, since once again both *exordium* and *captatio* are kept apart, but their interrelationship is extended to include other parts of the letter as well, without allowing any room for confusion.

Confusion will arise not much later, when in 1135 the anonymous, also Bolognese, *Rationes dictandi* is published.[13] This most influential work is the one which established the basis of what became

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[11] Murphy does not elaborate on this; he uses this and other passages to prove that Hugh's division of the letter includes the *salutatio*.

[12] From this passage it can already be inferred that Hugh of Bologna actually proposes a four-part division of the letter, the *exordium* being then the second part, as Alberic had also established.

[13] This is the text attributed to Alberic by Rockinger, and which Murphy confirms as anonymous.

known as the 'approved format' concerning the division of the letter into parts, specifically into five parts. The author states in section IV:

> *(7) De partibus epistole: Cuius videlicet quinque sunt partes: salutatio, beneuolentiae captatio, narratio, petitio atque conclusio.* (Rockinger 1961:10)

Here, the second part of the letter is given the label *captatio*, which seems to link together function and part of the letter. The author then proceeds to their definitions, dealing with the *salutatio* in great detail, as had become customary by then; about *captatio* he says in section VI:[14]

> (8) *Beneuolentie captatio est quedam apposita uerborum ordinatio recipientis animum conpetenter alliciens.*

This "certain fit ordering of words" would seem a suitable definition of the second section of the letter, as it was intended to be. The anonymous author immediately proceeds to introduce the concept of the 'five ways' in which to secure *benevolentia*, in terms of author/addressee relationship and matters to be discussed, as follows:

> (9) *Fit autem in epistola quinque modis. a persona uidelicet mittentis, a persona recipientis, ab utraque simul, a rerum effectu, a negotio de quo agitur.* (Rockinger 1961: 18-19)[15]

From the above, it is not quite clear if such sociolinguistic parameters or *modi* are to be considered in the second section of the letter only or anywhere '*in epistola*', which would clash with his definition of *captatio*. Perhaps in an effort to bring both ideas together, at the end of this section the anonymous author puts forward the following idea, which seems to point towards Hugh of Bologna's earlier *tribus in locis*:

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[14] Murphy's account of this is very brief (1974: 220-24). Note that he only gives a partial translation of the original Latin text, although it looks as if it is complete. One has to go to his previous work of 1971 for a full translation of the *Rationes dictandi*.

[15] The paragraph goes on to analyse in more detail these five ways in which to secure good-will. This may be seen as an elaboration on the previous work of Hugh, who had only listed four ways of securing good-will in the prologue or *exordium* along the lines of 'persona mittentis, recipientis, etc.' Note, however, that Hugh offered these possibilities only in connection with the *exordium*, which is apparently similar to the anonymous *captatio benevolentiae*. The anonymous author will further extend the question of securing good will, and therefore the 'five ways', to other parts of the letter. Consequently, confusion begins.

(10) *Est item sepe numero maxima pars captandi beniuolentiam in ipsa salutationis serie. Ideoque taliter moderari debemus epistolas, ut quotiens in salutatione uel mittentis humilitas uel recipientis laudes largius apponuntur, uel statim a narratione uel a peticione reliquum epistole incipiamus, uel satis exiliter et modeste beniuolentiam denotemus.*
In reliquis quoque epistole partibus non modica sepe numero beniuolentia exprimitur. In nominis quidem vocatione dignitatis uel officii honorem uel gloriam indicantis, ut crebro uidelicet ipse recipiens pater, uel dominus, uel pontifex egregius, uel nobilis dux, uel sociorum intimus in uersuum siue distinctionum principiis appelletur.

From the above passages, it is evident that although the anonymous author uses the phrase *captatio benevolentiae* as such, to the extent of allocating it a space in the letter, the fact that he includes the paragraph concerning repetition, rather than mere mobility, betrays an underlying conflict: the consideration of *captatio* as a device to be employed, in fact, throughout the letter, i.e. 'repeated', as opposed to a petrified place, or semi-petrified, i.e. the second part of the letter, in which to fulfill some function or other. However, he seems to resolve the conflict by considering function versus part, and this he does by acknowledging that certain parts of the letter can be moved "without violating correctness" (Murphy 1971:22).[16]

This is how things stand by the time the 'approved format' of the Bolognese School of the 12th century, which was to become popular throughout Western Europe, was established. The original *color* of Alberic's *exordium*, or Hugh of Bologna's careful distinction of it as a function, has now become a standard part of the letter, but which is highly susceptible of not only re-allocating elsewhere, but also sus-

[16] In my opinion, the question of mobility is not so clear-cut, since the securing of good-will can be repeated 'again and again', as opposed to other parts, like the petition, for example, which can move places, but for which repetition is not actually recommended. The anonymous author acknowledges in his section XI that the securing of good-will, written according to the parameters described above, can be placed elsewhere: "Now the Securing of Good-will –which is, of course, written according to the person of the sender or of the recipient or of both at the same time, or according to circumstances – can be placed not improperly in the position of the narration. This is done in such a way that, after the receptive feelings of the recipient are assured by this part, the place of the petition will follow ... Sometimes the Securing of Good-will is even placed after the narration and petition, and a conclusion is not even used in the last place. This is usually done to greatest effect in letters of reply ..." (Murphy, 1971: 22). Remember that placing the securing of good-will either after or instead of the narratio was not considered by Hugh as correct. (see above).

ceptible even of repetition throughout the letter. Perhaps Alberic's original words were not the most felicitous choice to label the second part of the letter. No doubt, "his choice of Latin terms is highly significant, in light of later terminology in the dictamen manuals" (Murphy 1974: 205). Nevertheless, my contention is that we are not dealing with just a problem of terminology but with an ultimate conflict concerning the nature of *captatio*.

3. The Situation in England

The situation in England was rather different from that on the Continent. It is agreed among scholars that England never produced great rhetoricians or *dictatores*, nor were the English known to have been fond of 'documents' in the first place (Richardson 1942: 333; Murphy 1965: 12; Denholm-Young 1969: 47; Murphy 1974: 239; Richardson 1984: 207).[17] Well-known Italian manuscripts did circulate around but there was very little native production.[18] Evidence from lower schools curricula, library catalogues, University documents and literary references together prove that one cannot speak of an English rhetorical tradition prior to the 15th century. Even the statutes of Oxford University "seem to confirm the judgement that systematic training in rhetoric was a feature of the fifteenth century rather than the fourteenth" (Murphy 1965: 13).[19] Two works in the field, those by John Bridges and the well-known Oxford *dictator* Thomas Sampson, are not found until the second half of the 14th century, and

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[17] This opinion about the English goes back to the Middle Ages: a medieval writer, John of Bologna, is quoted by Murphy (1974: 239) to have said: "The English do not love public documents". This is printed in Rockinger, L. (1961: 604): "...habere volunt publicum instrumentum, quod quasi contrarium est in Anglicis".

[18] Noel Denholm-Young, in his *Collected Papers* traces the steps of the *ars dictaminis* in England. However, no orginal texts are provided. See also Watson, F. (1968: 440-7) who states that there is no evidence for the systematic teaching of rhetoric in England in the Middle Ages. According to him, the first English rhetoric, that of the schoolmaster Leonard Cox, was published in 1524. However, Richardson, H.G. (1942: 333) contends that letter-writing was a subject at the university earlier on: "The earliest mention of *dictamen* is in a statute of a date before 1350: regent masters in grammar were required to be examined as to their competence in the *modus dictandi* before they were licensed"

[19] Also, Murphy, J. (1960: 347) argues that "the statute of 1431 rather than proving the continuous teaching of rhetoric at Oxford, may indicate that formal rhetoric even in the fifteenth century was not yet firmly established and clarified in the Oxford curriculum."

they are brief manuals imitative of the Italian style. The most significant work was written by Thomas Merke, a monk from Westminster, at the very beginning of the 15th century, pointing towards the fact that as from this point there was some interest in Oxford in rhetoric, but he did not have any followers (Murphy 1965: 20; Richardson 1984: 207). All in all, the art of letter writing in England in the fifteenth century was a new skill, although undoubtedly flavoured by the influence of the *dictamen*, which was "a significant factor in both developments – the spread of English letter-writing and the resulting regularization of the written language" (Richardson 1984: 208). The *dictamen*, in the shape of the English Chancery style, together with the advent of the English language into public domain, after King Henry V in the first quarter of the 15th century, furthered the proliferation of private letters, in addition to the already circulating official documents, which had become "the most visible ... model for late medieval epistolary form" (Richardson 1984: 210).[20] The history of English letter-writing had reached a point at which "the public and official use of English by the king, his government and his law courts encouraged the English to communicate among themselves in writing with a freedom and frequency which had been impossible only a few years before" (Richardson 1984: 212-3). Private letters began to flourish after 1420, with the Paston and Stonor papers first, and the Plumpton, Trevelyan and Cely collections within the next fifty years.[21] The fervour with which English people devoted themselves to writing could not wait for the first English letter manuals to appear.[22] Davis comments on the fact that although no manuals from the fifteenth century are preserved,

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[20] He argues that the *dictamen* format most commonly used in England by the end of the 13th century was the *ars notaria*; therefore, he continues, "the distinction between public and private correspondence was blurred" (1984: 209). Constable (1976: 21-2) further supports this view: "there is no clear line of demarcation between public and official 'documents' and unofficial and 'private' letters". Also, when dealing with the conventions of the incipient English letters, Davis (1965: 237) points out that "essentially the same conventions were extremely widely used throughout the fifteenth century, and indeed later, in many official as well as private letters." Richardson (1942: 332) proves how a close analogue of the Italian *ars dictaminis notaria* was already present in Oxford by the end of the 13th century.

[21] For the latest edition of a complete collection of Early English Correspondence, see Nevalainen et al *Corpus of Early English Correspondence*.

[22] The first printed English letter-writing manual, by William Fulwood, *The enemie of idlenesse*, dates from 1568. Others did not take long to appear: Angel Day's *The English Secretoire* (1586); I. Brown's *The Mechant's Avizo* (1589); de la Serre's *The Secretary in Fashion* (1640), etc. which ran into several editions.

"from the regularity of the practice it seems that some must have existed" (1965: 240-1). Some of the extant manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth contain guides to the composition of letters in French, both private and official. These are examples of the continuity of the *ars dictaminis* tradition, "extensions into the vernacular of the study of the *ars dictaminis* which had been pursued widely in Western Europe since the time of Alberic of Monte Cassino in the late eleventh century" (1965:240-1).

Vernacular English letter-writing manuals began to flourish in the 16th century, aided no doubt by the growth of literacy and the printing--press, as well as by humanistic pressure. It is noteworthy to see what has become of *captatio* in these manuals, even if the time span goes beyond our period of study. It seems as if the term *captatio benevolentiae* had vanished; instead, '*exordium*' is preferred to refer to the second part of the letter, and no sections on *captatio* as a function follow, as in their Continental predecessors. Let us illustrate this with two examples from the 16th and 17th centuries. Angell Daye (1586) in *The English Secretoire* established the following parts of the letter: *salutatio* (meaning address), *exordium*, *narratio* or *dispositio*, *confirmatio*, *confutatio*, *peroratio* and subscription. Of the *exordium* he says it is (page 22)[23]:

> *A beginning or induction to the matter to be written of, which is not always after one sort or fashion, but in divers maners, as sometimes by preamble, wherein eyther for our selues, or the cause we write of, or in respect of him, for or to whom we write, we studye to winne favour and allowance of the matter, sometimes by insinuation ... sometimes by similitude...*

This is reminiscent of the 'five ways' of the Continental manuals, but here the 'divers manners' are linked to this particular section of the letter, which is at the beginning.

Much later, De la Serre (1640) in *The Secretary in Fashion*, offers a much simpler division of the letter into superscription (by which he means address), *exordium*, discourse, conclusion and subscription. Of the *exordium* he says:

> *An ordinary exordium contains some small complement to insinuate your self into his favour to whom you write, and a short proposal of what you intend to say. But we do not use any such thing*

[23] Although he actually calls the *exordium* the first part of the letter, he admits of an initial *salutatio*.

> *but onely in long letters, which speak of affairs of concernment. For otherwise we presently fall upon the matter.*

The study of the medieval English letter still deserves more scholarly attention in the field of linguistics and modern research is now indeed focusing on this area. Historical pragmatics and historical sociolinguistics are making very valuable contributions for an understanding of the English language and society in the fifteenth century, a time from which no letter-writing manuals are preserved, and yet letter-collections are. One of the first steps, in the best *dictator* fashion and for present purposes, would be to examine the overall constitution of the letter and its division into parts, in order to focus on *captatio benevolentiae* once again. On the basis of extant material, Hall (1908) established a division into nine parts, along the lines of the royal document format (Richardson 1984; Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995):[24]

1. address
2. salutation
3. notification
4. exposition
5. disposition or injunction
6. final clause (a. injunction; b. proviso)
7. valediction and *appreciato*
8. attestation
9. date

Richardson argues that a significant number of private letters were written following the format of the Chancery, as exposed above by Hall, while at the same time he compares this division with Davis' (1965) 'supposed' division of the 15th-century English letter into seven parts, which he quotes:

> *Our finest authority on the English fifteenth-century private letter, Norman Davis, divides it [my emphasis] into seven parts: 1) the address ... 2) a commendation ...; 3) an inquiry about the recipient's health ...; 4) a prayer for the recipient's health ...; 5) a clause deferentially offering news of the writer's welfare ...; 7) thanks to God for it.*[25]

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[24] See Hall (1908).

[25] Richardson's quoting of Davis' division is not complete since he omits section 6: "a report of the writer's good health 'at the making of this letter'". (Davis 1965: 236)

I do not share this comparison because in my opinion both Hall and Davis are talking about different things. A quick glance at Davis' 'division' will reveal that substantial sections like the narration, a possible petition or the farewell are missing from it, something which Davis was not likely to have 'forgotten' to mention. My belief is that while Hall is dividing the whole letter into parts, Davis is only referring to the opening sections of the letter; if we go to his original passage we can read that:

> *Fifteenth-century letters in English of a formal, respectful kind very often* ***open*** [my emphasis] *with a long sequence of conventional phrases and sentences constructed with minor variations upon a regular pattern.*[2] [original footnote] *Even when some of the possible components are not present the same order of the main items is observed. The full scale, seen best in letters from children to parents, includes seven divisions, some with subdivisions, thus* ... [he then proceeds to enumerate the seven subdivisions, not six, of the opening of the letter]

'Open' is the key word to interpret correctly the following lines offering a seven-part division, not of the letter as a whole, but of the **opening** of the letter, as Davis had clearly indicated at the beginning. Moreover, his footnote (after the word 'pattern') is also highly revealing since in it he identifies his seven parts with the original *salutatio* and *captatio benevolentiae* only (1965: 236).[26] It should be clear, therefore, that Davis is not dealing with the complete letter but only with the opening sections in great detail.[27] If one interprets the divisions into parts offered by Davis and Hall as analyses of the same thing, as Richardson seems to do, it is not surprising, then, that the conclusion should be that private letters "follow a format that is closer to that of the Chancery," as outlined by Hall, than to Davis' Anglo-Norman models, since Davis' division does not appear to be a complete one (Richardson 1984: 213).[28] Having clarified matters, it is my

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[26] "These correspond to the *salutatio* and *benevolentiae captatio* of the *dictatores*."

[27] In that same article, later on Davis refers to the transition from the salutatio and commendation towards the narration, "which any of the fifteenth-century collections of letters will amply illustrate." (1965: 238), further proving that the letter has obviously got more parts than those seven outlined at the beginning.

[28] Nevalainen, T. & H. Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 545) seem to accept Richardson's postulates: "According to Richardson (1984), this Chancery model was also followed in private correspondence in the fifteenth century more closely than the Anglo-Norman models that had appeared in formularies throughout the previous century (cf. Davis 1965)"

contention that both models are, quite likely, not incompatible, since Hall deals with the whole letter and Davis only with the opening sections. A possible model would then be a combination of both, with Hall's complete outline as the basis and with Davis' detailed subdivision of the opening into parts 2 to 7 included in Hall's salutation, always bearing in mind that some of the components in either the salutation or the rest of the letter may not have been present. (Davis 1965: 236; Richardson 1984: 214).[29] Richardson finally acknowledges the unity of style in fifteenth-century epistolary form both in private and official documents, conforming to the general format of the *dictamen*, which "provided an established and prescribed epistolary style which eliminated most of the problems of form and wording facing more modern letter-writers" (1984: 217). Most authors seem to agree that the general style of fifteenth-century letters is formulaic. However, one may reformulate such a sweeping statement wondering whether it is the underlying or rather the superficial forms that are stereotyped. In other words, is it the pragmatics of *captatio* that is formulaic or its actual wording? Davis points in this direction when, in connection with the opening clauses of the letter, he says: "Though the wording admits of a good deal of variety, the sentiments are stereotyped and the phrases may fairly be called formulas." (1965: 236).[30]

4. Conclusion

This survey has aimed at portraying the history of *captatio* within the general framework of the medieval *ars dictaminis* and its development in the first English letter-writers. We cannot speak of evolution in terms of progression from a simple entity into another more complex one, but rather of apparent fluctuation of terminology, at the root of which there may be a deeper conflict regarding the nature of *captatio*. It is evident that other parts of the letter are more clear-cut than

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[29] Also, in a recent paper presented at the SEDERI X International Conference, a preliminary approach towards analysing the parts of the fifteenth-century letter using the Cely letters as corpus of study has been attempted (Sánchez Roura, M.T. (1999) "Epistolary formulae in late Middle English commercial correspondence: the Cely letters". Salamanca:Asociación española de Estudios enacentistas Ingleses 10. In press)

[30] For a discussion on the pragmatics of *captatio* and its formulaic or otherwise charcater, see Sánchez Roura, T. The pragmatics of *captatio benevolentiae* in the Cely letters. ESSE 5, Helsinki, 2000 and *Captatio benevolentiae* in 15th-century English commercial letters: conventional formulae or free choice?. IIICEHL, Santiago, 2000.

this one, if indeed *captatio* is such a part; and that they are less problematic in terms of subject matter and location. Their names indeed suggest a near-perfect function-location relationship (cf. *salutatio* and beginning, *narratio* and middle, *conclusio* and end). In the case of *captatio*, as we have seen, there are those who consider it a function and consistently define it in terms of 'when' (the 'what' being given another label, like *exordium*, etc), and there are those who try to define it in terms of 'what', like any other part of the letter, but only to find themselves elaborating on the different locations in which it can be found, or whether it can be repeated or not and so on, providing thus, in my opinion, a not very consistent theory. In an effort to bring together the different theories concerning *captatio*, we could summarise them by saying that the function of the second part of the letter is to secure the good-will of the reader, but that good-will is also secured elsewhere. In other words, the second part of the letter and *captatio* are not related on a one-to-one basis. If this is so then, the selection of the label 'captatio benevolentiae' is, in my opinion, a rather unfortunate and misleading one. The situation in England in the 15th century seems to have been one imitative of Italian models but ready to give birth to native manuals. Private letters among the literate classes were not only written, but rather proliferated in a short period of time. The rules that guided the composition of those letters have not been handed down to us, but they must no doubt have existed. Such rules in general and those concerning *captatio* in particular must be deduced from an analysis of the letters themselves. It has been the purpose of this paper to pave the way towards that deduction.

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