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Chapter Five: Rudolph Agricola

Rudolph Agricola (1444-1485) wrote the most original textbook on writing of the fifteenth century and the first modern rhetoric which can be placed among the classics of the subject, alongside Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian. Agricola lived for ten years in Italy (1469-79), longer than any other early northern humanist, and his *De inventione dialectica*, completed in Dillingen, near Augsburg, on his homeward journey in 1479, was the fruit of his Italian experiences. But he went to Italy already thoroughly educated, and for much of his time in Pavia and Ferrara he lived among northern fellow students, acting as their unofficial tutor in humanistic studies. This experience of teaching writing to advanced students may have encouraged his book's critical approach and its basis in familiarity with the best Latin writing. If he had been a more conventional schoolteacher or a tutor to a young aristocrat his work may have been less original.

Agricola's work is notable for the way he used Latin literary texts to show how dialectic contributes to all aspects of persuasion. He placed the topics of invention at the centre of his work but he analysed the nature of each topic in a new way and showed through analysis of examples how writers have used the arguments and other material the topics generate. He provided the theory for, and the first example of, the significant renaissance genre of dialectical analyses of literary works. He made an original exploration of the relationship between exposition (including narrative) and argument. He directed attention back to emotional persuasion, amplification and disposition. Many of the innovations of Erasmus, Melanchthon and Ramus develop from Agricola's contribution.

Agricola was born Roelof Huusman in Baflo near Groningen on 17 February 1444, the son of a priest, Hendrik Vries, who was elected Abbot of the Benedictine convent at Selwerd the same day his son was born. He remained Abbot until his death in 1480. Thanks to his father's influence Agricola's studies were supported from the income of a farm belonging to the Bishop of Münster. He attended the school of St Martin in Groningen in 1454; in 1456 he matriculated at Erfurt and in 1465 "Rudolphus Agricola ex Baflo prope Groeningen" took first place in the Master of Arts degree at Louvain where he had probably studied for seven years, following a course in Aristotelian logic and natural philosophy. Soon after that he may have begun to study law. In any case by 1469 he was in Italy, studying law at the University of Pavia which attracted many northern students. Although he gave up his law studies he played a full part in the life of the university, giving Latin orations at the installation of three northern rectors (1472-4). At Pavia he lived with several other "Germans", including Johannes Müller (Regiomontanus), Adolph Occo, Johann and Dietrich von Plieningen and Johann von Dalberg. His letters show that he gave private tuition in Latin composition and literature to the last three. In 1475 Agricola moved to Ferrara in order to learn Greek. For a time he was employed by Count Ercole I d'Este as an organist. The von Plieningens and his half-brother Johann had joined him in Ferrara by 1476, when Agricola gave the *Oration in Praise of Philosophy* to inaugurate the university year. While in Ferrara he made several translations from Greek, worked on the texts of Tacitus and the younger Pliny and made the acquaintance of Battista Guarini, Guarino's son, and Ermolao Barbaro.

Presumably he used the fine library which Guarino and the d'Este family had built up, including Guarino's copies of Valla's works, among them *Repastinatio*. Agricola so much valued the progress of his Greek studies that in 1477 he refused the offer of the newly founded Chair of Poetics at Louvain in order to remain in Ferrara. After Dietrich von Plieningen took his law degree Agricola travelled back to Germany with him. They spent much of the summer in Dillingen where Agricola left the completed manuscript of *De inventione dialectica* so that Dietrich could make the fair copy for Adolph Occo.[1]

Agricola's plan for *De inventione dialectica* is straightforward but highly original.[2] Book one is concerned with the topics of invention; book two with the subject-matter of dialectic (the question), its instrument (exposition and argumentation) and training; book three with moving, pleasing and disposition. The table below illustrates the scheme:

Table A: Plan of *De inventione dialectica*

Section		Chapter Nos.
	Book 1	
A	Introduction	1
B	The Topics	
	Introduction to the Topics	2-4
	The Topics	5-19, 21-27
	Discussion of other treatments of them	20, 28, 29
	Book 2	
A	Introductory	
	The deficiency of contemporary dialectic	1
	What is dialectic?	2-3
	Teaching, Moving and Pleasing	4-5
B	Matter	
	The nature of the question	6-8
	Divisions of the question	8-11
	The chief question and its dependents	12-14
C	Instrument	
	Kinds of language use	15-17
	Argumentation	18-21
	Exposition	22-23
	The parts of the oration	24
	The topics belong to dialectic	25

[1] The main sources for the life of Agricola are his letters and six early biographies: Agricola, *Letters* ed. A. van der Laan and F. Akkerman (Assen, 2002), F. Akkerman and A. J. Vanderjagt eds, *Rodolphus Agricola Phrisius* (Leiden, 1988), pp. 3-20, 79-95, 313-27. F. Akkerman is at present editing the early lives of Agricola for the series *Bibliotheca Latinitatis Novae*. All the events in this paragraph are documented in my *Renaissance Argument*, pp. 117-19, from which it is condensed.

[2] R. Agricola, *De inventione dialectica* (Cologne, 1539, reprinted Nieuwkoop, 1967), also re-edited (with German translation) by L. Mundt (Tubingen, 1992), selections translated in J. R. McNally, "Rudolph Agricola's *De inventione Libri Tres*: A Translation of Selected Chapters", *Speech Monographs* 34 (1967), 393-422 (but readers are warned that McNally was using a slightly different edition with different chapter numberings to the Cologne 1539). Good French translations of some chapters in Agricola, *Ecrits sur la dialectique et l'humanisme*, ed. Marc van der Poel (Paris, 1997). Marc van der Poel and I intend to produce a complete English translation.

D	Treatment	
	Knowing the topics and using them	26-30
	Book 3	
A	Moving	
	The handling of emotions	1-3
B	Pleasing	
	Pleasing and Digression	4
	Copia and brevity	5-7
C	Disposition	
	Overall disposition	8-11
	Arranging questions and arguments	12-15
	Exercises, reading and conclusion	16

Even on the basis of this short summary it is clear that the organisation of *De inventione dialectica* is very different from the traditional textbook of rhetoric. Agricola has combined elements from rhetoric and dialectic to produce an original account of the process of composition. So, for example, the section on the topics (1B in the table) is developed from the versions of the topics in Cicero, Quintilian and Boethius; the discussion of the question (2B) draws on Boethius, Aristotle, the rhetoric manuals and original material; the discussion of emotion (3A) draws on Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, Cicero's *De oratore* and Quintilian; and the treatment of disposition (3C) is developed from materials in Aristotle's *Categories*, *Posterior Analytics*, Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* and *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Agricola knew both Aristotelian logic and the rhetorical tradition very well when he wrote his book. In addition, as we shall see, much of the argument is driven by close analysis of Latin literature, especially Virgil, Cicero's *Orations* and the *Declamations* attributed to Quintilian. Reading Valla may have prompted Agricola to emphasize the topics (and suggested some details of the treatment of three topics) but the actual overlap between the *De inventione dialectica* and *Repastinatio* is rather small, and there are numerous specific issues on which Valla and Agricola take different views.[3]

In table B I try to demonstrate Agricola's originality and his wide-ranging use of his source-traditions by listing the main contents of the manuals of rhetoric and dialectic in the usual order in which they occur (in textbooks like *Rhetorica ad Herennium* and Peter of Spain's *Tractatus*). The cross-references aim to show which elements from the traditional syllabi of both subjects are found in *De inventione dialectica* and where Agricola puts them. So, for example, in the table below, the letters 2C and 3C against *exordium* indicate that the issue of the *exordium* is discussed both in section C of book 2 (specifically in chapter 24 on the parts of the oration) and in section C of book 3 (in Agricola's account of disposition).

Table B: Courses in Rhetoric and Dialectic compared with *De inventione dialectica*

Rhetoric	*DID*	Dialectic	*DID*

[3] Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, pp. 244-50.

Invention:		**Predicables** (Genus, Species, Differentia, Properties)	1B
Exordium	2C 3C	**Categories:**	
Narration	2C	Substance	1B
Status theory	2B	Quantity	
Special topics		Relatives	
General topics	1B	Quality	1B
Forms of Argumentation (includes syllogism, induction, enthymeme)	2C	Post-predicaments (Contraries, Meanings of Prior, Kinds of Change)	3C
Refutation	2C	**Proposition:**	
Amplification	3AB	Quantity	2B
Emotional appeals	3A	Quality	2B
Humour		Contraries	1B
Disposition:		Modals	2B
Varying 4 part form	3C	**Syllogism:**	
Argument order	3C	Figures and Moods (List of valid forms of syllogism and conversions between them)	2C
Deliberative Speech		Advice on use of forms	2C
Epideictic Speech	2B	**Topics:**	
Style:		Forms of argumentation (syllogism, induction, enthymeme, example)	2C
3 kinds		Maxims and Differences	
Qualities		List of Topics	1B
Tropes		Definition	1B
Figures		Division	1B
Memory		**Sophisms** (i.e. how to deal with deceptive arguments) **:**	
Delivery		Kinds	
		Strategy	

A comparison of the two tables shows, first, that most of Agricola's teachings draw on the traditional contents of the manuals of rhetoric and dialectic but, second, that he chooses selectively among the materials in both subjects and combines them together in an original framework. The work is unified around the topics and the Ciceronian tasks of the orator (teaching, moving and pleasing). Book one describes the topics; book two shows how material is prepared for dialectical invention (chapters 1-14), how material found using the topics can be presented to an audience (chapters 15-24), and how pupils can be trained to make use of the topics (chapters 26-30). While these two books are devoted to teaching, which Agricola declares to be the most important of the orator's tasks,[4] book three considers the place of the topics in moving and pleasing, and the ways in which the different types of material found through topical invention should be organised into a literary composition. Several of the key ideas of the whole work (teaching, moving

[4] Agricola, *De inventione dialectica*, p. 1.

and pleasing; exposition and argumentation; and the rationale underlying the topics) are presented in the first chapter and returned to at key moments throughout the book.

Agricola offers both restrictive and expansive definitions of his task. On one side dialectical invention is dialectic (i.e. not rhetoric, and especially not the tropes and figures) with the judgement section (the predicables to the syllogism) left out. In another way, though he defines dialectic as concerned with teaching, which he regards as the most important of the three duties of the orator. After he has defended dialectic's right to be considered an art, he opens his main discussion of the nature of dialectic by considering the purpose of language.

> At the beginning we said that all language has the object that someone should make someone else share in his or her thoughts. Therefore it is apparent that there should be three things in every speech: the speaker, the hearer and the subject-matter. Consequently there are three points to be observed in speaking: that what the speaker intends should be understood, that the person addressed should listen avidly, and that what is said should be plausible and should be believed. Grammar, which passes on the method of speaking correctly and clearly teaches the first. The second is taught by rhetoric, which provides embellishments and elegance of language, and all the baits for capturing ears. Dialectic consequently seems to claim for itself what is left, that is, to speak convincingly on whatever matter is included in a speech.[5]

Agricola presents the trivium as a whole as a study of the resources of language. Where grammar is concerned with correctness and rhetoric is preoccupied with attracting attention, dialectic's task is to teach the way of speaking convincingly. In book three he shows that the topics assist the speaker in moving and pleasing his audience and argues that it would be pointless to know how to invent material if one did not also learn how to organise it (and logical principles are shown to apply here too). So tasks which would ordinarily (and even on his own definition) belong to rhetoric are here added to dialectical invention. If one thinks about the sequence of the writer's tasks dialectical invention is concerned with the whole process of thinking through the question, finding the arguments, expressing them as argumentation or exposition, working out ways to move and please the audience and arranging all the materials assembled into a structure suited to the task and the audience. What is left to rhetoric is style and in particular the tropes and figures; what is left to dialectic is the detailed working out of the syllogism and other ways of arranging arguments. The main task of thinking about what to say belongs to dialectical invention and will be taught by Agricola. Taking this approach both prompts Agricola to reconsider issues

[5] DID, p. 192: Orationem omnem initio diximus in id paratam esse, ut animi sui participem quisque faceret alium. Tria ergo constat in omni oratione posse oportere, eum qui dicit, eum qui audit, et rem de qua habetur oratio, tresque proinde in dicendo observationes: ut percipi possit quid sibi velit qui dicit; ut cupide audiat cui dicitur; ut probabile sit, habeaturque fides ei, quod dicitur. Primum grammatice docet, quae emendate et aperte loquendi viam tradit. Proximum rhetorice, quae ornatum orationis cultumque et omnes capiendarum aurium illecebras invenit. Quod reliquum igitur est videbitur sibi dialectice vendicare, probabiliter dicere de qualibet re, quae deducitur in orationem.

which the textbooks of rhetoric had taken for granted and asserts the primacy of the topics of invention.

Agricola's original contribution to the topics consisted first in his clear and explicit explanation of the rationale of the topics and the practical method of using them, second in his additions to the list of topics he inherited from Cicero and Boethius, and third in his original investigations of several of the topics.[6] Agricola explains that the topics work because they help people find the connections between things which are needed in order to construct arguments. Both the things in the world and the connections between them are too numerous for anyone to remember them all so dialecticians have listed the kinds of connections which exist between things so that when we need to think about a particular thing (or two things joined in a proposition or a question) we can find out a great deal about it by thinking of it in relation to all the different types of connection. These kinds of connections are the topics and because they lead us to think of arguments we can say that the arguments are within the topics, like precious objects in a treasury.[7] In order to train his readers in using the topics he describes the exercise of topical description (thinking of connections from one particular thing through all the topics in turn) and the way of comparing topical descriptions of two things in order to discover arguments connecting them.[8]

Agricola takes Cicero and Boethius's lists of topics as the starting point for his own list but he consciously aims to remove redundancy and to achieve coherence and completeness.[9] His earliest commentator Phrissemius translated Agricola's description of the organisation of his topics into a diagram, which shows how the system works and which may have inspired Ramus's later graphic representations of his textbooks.

<table>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2">Within the substance of the thing, from which the thing receives what it is</td><td></td><td>Species</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>Property/ Difference</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>Whole</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>Parts</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>Conjugates</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>Internal</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td colspan="2" rowspan="3">Around the substance. Although they inhere to the thing, they bring a certain manner or disposition to it</td><td></td><td>Adjacents</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>Actions</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>Subject</td></tr>
<tr><td>Topics</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>Causes</td><td>Efficient</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td colspan="2" rowspan="2">Cognates, which share their origin</td><td></td><td>Final</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>Results</td><td>Effects</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td colspan="2">Necessarily joined</td><td></td><td></td><td>Destinata</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td colspan="2" rowspan="3">Applicita which added to the thing from outside provide it with a certain</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>Time</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>Place</td></tr>
</table>

[6] Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, pp. 130-67.
[7] DID, p. 9
[8] DID, pp. 362-72.
[9] DID, pp. 14-18, 170-4 Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, pp. 142-50.

		disposition and name			*Connexa*
	External				
					Contingents
					Name of a thing
		Accidents which can exist with or without a thing			Opinions
					Comparisons
					Similars/ Dissimilars
	Joined without necessity				
		Repugnants (the same thing cannot participate in both)			Opposites
					Distantia[10]

Topics are divided into internal and external. Internal topics are either within or around the thing. External topics are either necessarily joined or joined without necessity. In broad terms Agricola's topics are organised into groups corresponding to their distance from the thing itself, starting with elements which are part of the identity of the thing and ending with opposites. Organising the topics in this way is an attempt to instil some order and logic into the list of headings. While this has some explanatory power it is not entirely successful. The list of topics is not logically exhaustive. The topics remain an arbitrary list of headings but Agricola has done more than earlier writers to introduce order into the list.

In his handling of the individual topics Agricola adapts and enlarges what Quintilian had done and breaks decisively with Boethius. Where Cicero concentrates on the kinds of argument that can be made from each topic and Boethius adds maxims supposedly guaranteeing the inferences made under each topic Agricola takes the view that the reader needs to understand the nature of each topic relationship in order to make the best use of arguments from each topic and to appreciate their relative strengths. So while earlier writers concentrate on the arguments which can be drawn from the definition of something, Agricola discusses the ways in which definitions are constructed, giving worked examples of definitions of law and state and providing rules for checking well-formed definitions. He regards definition as something which a writer constructs to express his knowledge of some object rather than as something which is given in advance. Both types can be starting points for arguments but the person who knows how to construct definitions will be able to use the topic in more instances and will have a better understanding of the types of argument from definition which will be effective.[11]

In his analysis of causes Agricola tries to understand how will, necessity, purpose and action combine in order to make things happen. He shows that from different points of view the same aspect of a linked chain of cause and effect may be final cause, assisting effect or efficient cause. Thus for the ship-builder the ship is the effect and the final cause is making money from its construction; but for the merchant the ship is an efficient cause enabling him to trade. By investigating the different kinds of cause and the viewpoints of different people Agricola hopes to understand how events can

[10] DID, pp. 22-5.
[11] DID, pp. 26-9, Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, pp. 150-6.

be described as being achieved and what types of responsibility can be inferred from them. Thinking about examples of different kinds of event helps the reader to a richer comprehension of the topic of causes, which can in turn be applied to new situations she or he wants to investigate. By learning how to adapt the topic to different cases one fashions an understanding of the topic which is more flexible and better able to generate ideas.[12]

Agricola is particularly illuminating on the generally neglected topic of similitudes.

> Of all the topics from which arguments are drawn almost none has less strength against a resistant reader than similitude. On the other hand there is none more suitable for the hearer who follows willingly and shows himself apt to be taught. For if it is correctly applied, it opens up a thing and places a sort of picture of it before the mind so that although it does not bring with it the necessity of agreeing, it does cause an implicit reluctance to disagree. Therefore it is not so frequently used for proving things but it is often used by orators for exploring and illuminating things, and is even more often used by poets. In spite of this similitude often has an apearance of proving by the very fact that it shows how something is. Thus when you read that similitude of Quintilian: 'just as a vase with a narrow mouth rejects an excess of liquid but is filled by flowing or pouring gradually' it does not therefore follow that, on account of this, the delicate minds of boys must be taught according to their own strengths, but nonethless, once someone has conceived the matter in his mind according to this image, he persuades himself that it cannot be otherwise.[13]

Agricola's comment here is extremely subtle and perceptive, registering the power of arguments from similitude as well as their limitations. Similitude is not proof but it can be very powerful in conditioning a mind to think in a particular way. Agricola then analyses a simile from Lucan, first to show how similes function logically and then to show how they may be discovered. He tries to find alternative comparators for the point Lucan makes, discussing the implications and advantages of each.[14]

Agricola's approach to the topics is detailed and practical. He analyses factual instances and literary examples to explore the nature of the connection and the types of effect that can be achieved by using it. Although there is a logical aspect to his investigation much of it involves thinking about the different ways words are used and reflecting on the practice of the best writers. He rejects Boethius's maxims because they miss the potential and the

[12] DID, pp. 78-89, Mack, Renaissance Argument, pp. 156-9.
[13] DID, p. 142: Omnium locorum e quibus ducuntur argumenta, nulli fere minus est virium contra renitentem auditorem, quam similitudini. Ad eum vero qui sponte sequitur, docendumque se praebet, accommodatior nullus est. Aperit enim rem (si recte adhibeatur) et quandam eius imaginem subiicit animo, ut cum assentiendi necessitatem non afferat, afferat tacitum dissentiendi pudorem. Quapropter ad probandum non ita crebro, ad explanandum illustrandumque saepe ab oratoribus, a poetis saepius adhibetur. Habet tamen persaepe probantis speciem similitudo, eo ipso, quod rem qualis sit indicat. Itaque cum legis Quintiliani illud: Vascula oris angusti superfusam humoris copiam respuunt, sensim autem influentibus vel instillantibus etiam replentur, non conficitur utique, debere propter hoc tenera puerorum ingenia pro modo virium suarum doceri. Sed tamen concipiendo quisque rem apud animum suum sub hac imagine, persuadet sibi, aliter fieri non posse. Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, 1.2.28.
[14] Lucan, *De bello civile*, V, 335-9, DID, pp. 142-5, Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, pp. 163-5.

complexity of actual arguing by trying to reduce all arguments to maxims which are either entirely obvious (e.g. “whatever is present to the genus is present to the species”) or rather questionable (e.g. “if whatever appears more likely to belong does not belong, nor will what seems less likely to belong”).[15]

Near the beginning of *De inventione dialectica* Agricola proposes that there are two ways of using language to teach an audience. If the audience is willing to believe what we say we can use exposition, that is stating our view as clearly as possible. But if the audience is likely to resist our ideas we will need to use argumentation in order to force them to believe what we say.[16]

This is a rhetorical distinction because it has to do with the speaker’s estimate of the audience’s reaction and because it affects the choices the speaker will make about the verbal expression of particular sections of the speech. Characteristically Agricola makes his point about the difference between exposition and argumentation by analysing two passages from Virgil’s *Aeneid*.[17] For Agricola the argumentative and emotional force of Juno’s soliloquy makes it argumentation rather than exposition. He shows that the same material could be expressed in either form depending on the kinds of connections made, the elaboration of the material and the writer or character’s intention. Argumentation here is a matter of density of texture, of the way material is presented. We would also think of this passage from Juno, argumentative though it is, as emotional. As Agricola says, Juno uses arguments to stoke up her anger.

A little later Agricola discusses Sinon’s speech to the Trojans from book 2 of the *Aeneid*, in which he explains the value of the wooden horse and in effect persuades them to take it within their walls, to illustrate the ways in which exposition can contribute to persuasion. His analysis of this speech shows that Sinon sets out a series of propositions (some true, some so connected to the true ones as to be plausible, some not unlikely) which the Trojans then gather together into arguments to persuade themselves that taking the horse inside the walls will give them an advantage.[18] The psychological insight that people are more likely to believe what their own reasoning has persuaded them of is linked to an argument about the way in which an exposition can be organised in order to create belief. Agricola suggests that when we wish to write a convincing exposition the logical connections between the propositions must be there in our minds but should not be stated explicitly. Argumentation, by contrast is a matter of setting out logical connections and of repeating important points.

Now Agricola’s distinction between exposition and argumentation is, as he admits, related to the classical distinction in the plan of the oration between narration and confirmation.[19] But Agricola insists that his way of putting it is more useful, first because it is of more general application outside the oration, second because it recognises the fact that you

[15] DID, pp. 175-6, Boethius, *Opera*, PL 64, 1188B: quae generi adsunt speciei adsunt; 1191A: si id quod magis videtur inesse non inest, nec id quod minus videtur inesse inerit.
[16] DID, pp. 1-2.
[17] *Aeneid*, I, 12ff, 37ff. DID, pp. 258-59.
[18] DID, pp. 262-63. Analysed in Mack, “Rudolph Agricola’s Reading of Literature”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 48 (1985), pp. 23-41.
[19] DID, p. 258.

may need exposition within your confirmation or arguments in your narration, and third because it makes the link between features of linguistic form and decisions which the speaker makes about his or her audience. Now these features of linguistic form can be syllogisms or enthymemes but they can also be figures of emphasis and repetition.

Agricola's main treatment of argumentation falls into four sections. First he outlines the traditional four forms of argumentation (syllogism, enthymeme, induction and example), giving some examples and discussing connections between the forms. Then he considers the ways in which forms of argumentation are used in orations. Analysing examples from Cicero's speeches he shows that orators can use the full forms but that generally they omit parts of the proof which can always be added if they are challenged. He argues that rhetorical commonplaces function as if they were major propositions of syllogisms. In the third section he outlines ways of buttressing incomplete arguments and using subordinate arguments to establish points one needs to prove a case. Finally he describes ways of rebutting arguments both on logical grounds and by exploiting the persona of one's opponent, giving examples of each of the approaches from Cicero.[20]

Agricola outlines his theory of exposition in book 2 chapters 22 and 23. There are three types of exposition: exposition which aims at delighting the audience, which is associated with poetry and which need have no connection with plausibility but may be more effective if it resembles truth; exposition of things which happened in the past, associated with history, in which the writer aims to relate what really happened but does not need to prove that something is true; and exposition intended to create belief, which belongs to oratory, philosophy and pedagogy.

In expositions intended to create belief it is not enough that what you say should be true; you need to make it firm and self-evident because your opponent will be on the alert for any mistake. Every exposition of this kind will need to be both convincing and suited to the argument which follows. An exposition needs three qualities to be convincing: it must be *argumentosa*, which Agricola explains to mean "including the causes or reasons for things, minor as well as major"; it must be *consentanea*, that is to say it must fit in with persons, places, times and facts: the way the story is told must suit the nature of the story. Finally, the exposition must be *consequens*, meaning that later events must follow naturally and almost inevitably from earlier. All these references to times, places, characters and ends coming from beginnings, show that although Agricola writes here about *expositio*, the prime case he has in mind is in fact narrative.[21]

Agricola begins chapter 23 by stating that it is much harder (and more crucial to winning our case) to make an exposition "suited to what we are trying to prove". First of all we need to focus on the point we are aiming to prove and to compare it with the material of the exposition so that we can see which parts of the story help our case and which are more difficult for us. Then we must give try to make the things which are favourable help us as much as possible, not by connecting them with the main headings of our argument, but by fixing them in the audience's minds so that they realise for

[20] DID, pp. 265-93.
[21] DID, pp. 296-9.

themselves what weight these aspects carry. When the audience think these things over the points made will help us all the more because they did not seem like part of the argument.

Ambiguous aspects must be related in such a way as to benefit us and negative aspects must be minimized so that they do us the least possible damage. We may relate points which apparently favour our opponents in ways which make them seem ridiculous or of little value as the basis for proof.

Then Agricola makes a series of practical points on the basis of examples from Terence, Cicero and the Declamations then attributed to Quintilian. We should always begin our narrative with something favourable. It may be advantageous to begin far back in the history of the case with something which establishes the characters and relationships of the main protagonists. We must always look at the narrative from the opponents' point of view, doing our best to work out which parts are most helpful to them. This will help us to work out how to discuss things which might seem to go against us. Some things which are of real benefit to our opponents we will have to omit.[22]

Agricola's treatment of exposition incorporates most of Quintilian's ideas, but the overall structure and much of the content is very different. Close analysis of poetic and rhetorical texts helps Agricola develop and present his ideas. Agricola rethinks the relationship between narrative and argument. They involve different styles of expression and different approaches to teaching but they often share content. Exposition needs to be shaped according to what we are trying to argue; exposition ought to be *argumentosa*, based on causes, *consentanea*, fitting in with characters, times and places, and *consequens*, moving effectively from beginning to end. The topics of invention will be important for exposition as well as for argumentation. By the same token the significance of argument will be clarified by exposition, and argument will be more successful if it proves conclusions which suit the subjects, characters and circumstances set out in the exposition. Agricola's ideas about narrative and argument are driven by thinking about the audience, its attitudes and responses. Agricola regards thinking about an opponent and imagining that opponent's point of view as making an important contribution to the speaker's presentation of the material.

Turning to the second of the orator's tasks Agricola argues that the topics of invention can help in arousing emotions in an audience. He shows how Vergil and Cicero achieve emotional effects by repeating and amplifying arguments encouraging an emotional reaction.[23] In book three he sets out a general theory of emotion. He defines emotion as an impetus of mind by which we are impelled to desire or reject something more vehemently than we would in a relaxed state of mind.[24] We desire the good or the apparent good and we reject what we believe to be harmful. Therefore in arousing emotion the orator needs to consider two elements: the thing which happens and the person to whom it happens. If the person deserves the thing which happens (whether it is good or bad) the audience is pleased. If the person does not deserve what happens, the audience is moved, to anger if the thing

[22] DID, pp. 302-6.
[23] *Aeneid* 4. 314-16, *Pro Milone*, 34.93-35.98, DID, pp. 199-200.
[24] DID, p. 378: Affectus autem mihi non aliud videtur esse quam impetus quidam animi, quo ad appetendum aversandumve aliquid vehementius quam pro quietu statu mentis impellimur.

undeserved is good, to pity if it is bad. To arouse the emotion of pity, for example, the orator will need to establish both the harshness of the fate and the degree to which it is undeserved. The particular circumstances of the case (or the previous opinions of the audience) may lead the orator to emphasize one or other of these arguments in the speech. Agricola refers to the second book of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* for a comprehensive treatment of the different emotions.[25]

Agricola's main point is that arousing emotions involves a logical calculation based on the way in which an audience can be made to regard a person and a past or future event. In this logical approach to arousing emotion he is generalising and simplifying Aristotle's view. But Aristotle's account of emotion had not really featured in the most widely used rhetoric textbooks of the fifteenth century, Cicero's *De inventione* and the pseudo-Ciceronian *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. So Agricola was directing attention back to Aristotle, presenting Aristotle's views in a form that could be used by students and analysing Latin texts to show the effectiveness of his theory. Within this framework Agricola describes three ways to convey emotions in compositions. First, emotion may be a matter of style, in particular of the choice of vocabulary and of the tone of a passage. Agricola illustrates this by comparing the tone of the three famous Latin satirists, and the very different emotional impacts of Horace and Juvenal. Second, the writer may describe someone in the grip of an emotion. Agricola gives examples from tragedy and epic. Finally an author may wish to arouse a particular emotion in the audience. In this case it will be necessary to focus on the person involved and the thing which happens.[26]

Agricola linked the theory of emotional manipulation to the technique of amplification. If emotions are aroused too quickly they also pass quickly. Orators use amplification to build up emotion gradually. By making the subject they talk about seem great they prepare their audience to expend great emotion on it. You can make something seem important to an audience by linking it to things which are important to everyone or to the deepest interests of a particular audience. More generally things can be made to seem great by comparisons, by dividing a topic into sections and considering each section, and by descriptions.[27] In this section Agricola relies on Quintilian's account of amplification.

But he adds to this a little later in his discussion of *copia* and brevity. Agricola links *copia* to the aim of pleasing an audience. Pleasing can be brought about either by the intrinsic interest and delight of the subject-matter or from the skilfulness of the language in which something is expressed. By thinking about the audience and using the topics one can make comparisons or arguments which appeal to their interests. The doctrine of *copia* teaches writers to add detail to descriptions and fullness of incident to narratives. It encourages writers to multiply questions, to add further arguments and propositions.[28] Although *copia* is presented as an ideal of style, many of the techniques which Agricola recommends for achieving *copia* are derived from dialectic. Taken together Agricola's accounts of amplification and *copia*

[25] DID, p. 380.
[26] DID, pp. 382-84.
[27] DID, pp. 386-91.
[28] DID, pp. 400-03.

constitute a major source for Erasmus's *De copia* (1511), perhaps the most influential rhetoric textbook of the sixteenth century.

At the end of the book Agricola turns to disposition. In the rhetoric textbook disposition could become a rather empty category since the treatise on invention was usually organised according to the contents of the oration, beginning with the exordium, continuing with narration and confirmation and ending with the peroration. This left disposition to discuss occasions when one of the four parts might be omitted or when their order might be altered. Disposition could not really be discussed because the textbook assumed that there was only one practical system of organisation for a speech.

Agricola, by contrast, starts his account with a general theory: disposition is defined as "the ordering and distribution of things which shows what belongs and what should be positioned in which places".[29] He distinguishes three kinds of order: natural order (broadly temporal), arbitrary order (when there is no natural order or we choose not to follow it) and artificial order (when we deliberately place later things first, as when the account of Aeneas's voyage precedes the account of the fall of Troy). These three orders are then connected with four kinds of natural order (or four senses of the word *prius*).[30] Then Agricola describes the organisation of a number of texts: Vergil's *Aeneid*, Terence's *Andria*, the histories of Tacitus, Livy and Valerius Maximus and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.[31] He aims to show that the best authors have provided models of a large number of different forms of organisation. This enables him to reject the traditional rhetorical assumption that the four-part oration is the only acceptable form for a work. From such questions of overall organisation (and still working with examples) Agricola descends to consider the order in which one might discuss a series of questions, the order in which a series of arguments might be placed, the ordering of propositions within an argument and the tactical ordering of arguments in a disputation. He shows that in all these cases the ordering of points will depend on the position one wishes to uphold and the audience for whom one is writing. He concludes this section of the work with a broad summary.

> Let us now bring all that pertains to disposition into some sort of summary. The first requirement for anyone who wishes to do well at disposition is that he should lay out in front of him the whole raw material of his invention, that is everything he is thinking of saying. Then he should decide carefully what he wishes to bring about in the mind of the hearer. Then he should compare the things themselves, the parts of the things, the force and nature of them singly and together, first among themselves and then all together with the precepts. Then he will see without difficulty when the order of time should be followed, when things should be separated into their species and single things should be distinguished as if by certain boundaries: when one should be derived from another, depending on whichever is nearest or most suitable. Then he should determine how to please the audience, how to make his point

[29] DID, p. 413: ordo et distributio rerum, quae demonstrat, quid quibus locis conveniat et collocandum sit.
[30] DID, pp. 413-15.
[31] DID, pp. 416-23.

and win it, and what order of questions, argumentations and propositions to observe. Disposition is to be treated thoroughly and with great care, since skill in this part is rightly praised.[32]

For Agricola each composition needs to be planned on the basis of full information about subject-matter, speaker's intention and audience. The writer needs to have an understanding of the principles of ordering and a knowledge of a range of structural forms which have been created by previous writers. Only at the point when all the material for the work has been gathered together should the writer attempt to determine the organisation of the particular work. We need to see this perhaps rather utopian position as a strong and practical response to the rather empty role assigned to disposition by the rhetoric textbook. At the same time we should see it as consonant with one of the abiding principles of rhetoric, which is that rhetoric concerns itself with a very wide range of different skills in the use of language. Where the traditional rhetoric textbook makes this range of skills comprehensible to the student by separating issues and simplifying them, Agricola insists that the most effective way to intervene in practice is to gather all the relevant information together and to apply general principles to each particular case.

Agricola's conclusions are always based on a knowledge of the textbook tradition tempered by critical reflection and analysis of literary examples. This intellectual strength of the text could also cause problems for its audience. As Agricola himself recognised it has the approach and some of the contents of a textbook, yet its discussions of Latin literature are best appreciated by people who are already quite well read.[33] Characteristically he clings to a small number of central doctrines (the topics, exposition and argumentation, reflecting on the audience, notions of priority, the idea of emotion being linked to what is undeserved) but shows that each of these principles must be adapted to the complexities of the particular assignment. As a system this contrasts, for example, with developed theories of status, in which a complicated taxonomy of possibilities is outlined in order that the procedure in each sub-case should be presented as a simple choice. Agricola achieves both an original synthesis of rhetoric and dialectic and a redirection of interest within each field, for example throwing attention back to disposition and techniques of emotional persuasion, within rhetoric, and developing a new approach to the topics of invention, within dialectic.

Among the techniques designed to increase his readers' familiarity with the topics Agricola outlined the technique of dialectical reading. He illustrated this technique with his rhetorical and dialectical analysis of Cicero's *Pro lege Manilia*, which exercised considerable influence on later humanist

[32] Ut ergo quae ad dispositionem pertinent, in summam quandam redigamus: opus est in primis, quisquis bene disponere volet, ut totam inventionis suae sylvam, hoc est, omnia quaecunque dicturus est, velut conspectui suo subiiciat. Tum quid in animo auditoris efficere velit, diligenter expendat. Deinde res ipsas, rerumque partes, et vim naturamque singularum, omniumque, et inter se conferat, et cum praeceptis omnia. Tum non difficulter videbit ubi temporum sequenda ratio, ubi per species res digerenda, et quibusdam velut limitibus singula discernenda, ubi aliud ex alio, et quicque proximum aptissimumve fuerit, ducendum. Tum quid tribuendum voluptati, quomodo victoriae certaminique serviendum, quis quaestionum ordo, quis argumentationum, quis propositionum servandus. Est autem diligenti multaque cura tractanda dispositio, quando veram haec pars ingenii laudem meretur. DID, pp. 449-50.
[33] DID, sig b1v (bound after p. 16).

commentaries. Dialectical reading involves both identifying the topics from which an author has derived a particular argument and reconstructing chains of argument underlying a passage from a text. To uncover the argumentative structure of a text it is always necessary to identify the main question being addressed and investigate the way in which a particular passage of argument contributes to that, often via a subsidiary question.[34]

Alongside this form of reading which focuses on the structures unifying a text, Agricola also describes (in his letter *De formando studio*) the technique for compiling a commonplace book, which will enable the fruits of one's reading always to be ready for reuse in one's own compositions. Each page of this notebook would be headed by the name of a subject, such as Friendship, Justice, Mercy. As the student read his Latin texts he would copy especially striking sentences or stories related to this topic on to the appropriate page. As students read they continually asked themselves, whether a particular story, comparison or maxim merited being recorded, and, if so, which heading it should go under. Here Agricola was probably drawing on Guarino's methods of teaching. Agricola's description of the commonplace book was then elaborated by Erasmus and Melanchthon.[35]

De inventione dialectica was at first copied only among Agricola's friends. Agricola himself was without a copy for several years. He once wrote of sending it to the printer but took no steps to do so, and nor did the friends who carefully compiled manuscript collections of his works.[36] It took more than 30 years before the first edition appeared, at Louvain in 1515. The second edition was printed in Cologne in 1520. Thereafter the work enjoyed great success in northern Europe, with many favourable comments, much use of its ideas, commentaries, epitomes, and eventually 44 editions of the text (usually accompanied by a substantial commentary) and 32 of various epitomes. Agricola's work probably succeeded better with a wide audience in the 1520s than it could have in the 1480s because of the reforms which Erasmus and his followers had brought about in grammar schools and in rhetoric teaching, and because of the enthusiastic support of a group of influential teachers who regarded Agricola as an heroic pioneer of northern humanism. People like Sturm, Latomus and Melanchthon, as well as learning from *De inventione dialectica*, created a climate in which its originality could be appreciated and could also be absorbed within an educational programme.[37]

De inventione dialectica was most regularly printed at Cologne, where generally 4 items a decade were produced between 1520 and 1580, with a peak production of 8 editions and 7 epitomes between 1530 and 1544. In all Cologne produced 18 editions and 13 epitomes. Paris produced a similar

[34] DID, pp. 354-60, 461-71, M. van der Poel, "The Scholia in Orationem Pro Lege Manilia" of Rudolph Agricola", *Lias* 24 (1997), pp. 1-35; K. Meerhoff, *Entre logique et littérature* (Orleans, 2001), pp. 25-62, 171-90, Mack, Renaissance Argument, pp. 227-33.

[35] Agricola, *Lucubrationes* (1593), pp. 198-200, Erasmus, *De copia* (1988), pp. 258-63, Melanchthon, *De locis communibus ratio*, *Opera omnia*, xx, cols 695-8, Moss, *Printed commonplace books*, pp. 107-13, 119-26.

[36] Agricola, *Letters*, pp. 117, 141, 155.

[37] L. Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters* (Princeton, 1993) pp. 83-128 has some interesting comments on Erasmus's role in promoting Agricola. Her contention that the text of *De inventione dialectica* was somehow constructed by Alardus and others is incorrect, since manuscripts in Stuttgart and Uppsala which date from the 1490s contain almost the same text as the early editions.

number of items (20 editions and 12 epitomes) over a shorter period (1529-1561) and with a much higher peak. 17 editions and 9 epitomes were produced between 1529 and 1543. At the same time, and for some time after many other versions of the topics were also produced in Paris and Cologne. Agricola's text may have helped create the vogue for the topics but it may also be that many teachers preferred a more traditional version of the work. It looks as though the teaching of Agricola was brought from Louvain to Paris by a group of university teachers including Sturm and Latomus,[38] and that it became a University of Paris intellectual fashion of the 1530s and early 1540s which was eclipsed by the rise of Ramism. Thereafter there was a reduced but regular demand for the text until the more general decline of the humanist version of dialectic (and indeed of publication of Latin rhetoric) around 1580.[39] *De inventione dialectica*'s original synthesis of elements from rhetoric and dialectic caused some problems for teachers. Although it appears in several university syllabuses, there is considerable divergence about how it should be used. It appears sometimes as a humanist introduction to the whole Aristotleian logic syllabus, sometimes replacing or introducing Aristotle's *Topica*, sometimes as the dialectic element within a training which is primarily literary and sometimes as a rhetoric textbook. Some teachers preferred to recommend it as supplementary reading for advanced pupils rather than trying to find a place for it within the syllabus.[40]

[38] K. Meerhoff, "Logique et éloquence: une révolution ramusienne?", in Meerhoff and Moisan eds, *Autour de Ramus* (Montreal, 1997), pp. 87-132 (pp. 97-101).
[39] G.C. Huisman, *Rudolph Agricola: A Bibliography* (Nieuwkoop, 1985), Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, pp. 257-79.
[40] Mack, *Renaissance Argument*, pp. 280-302.