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business instruction, and seen (from at least the fourteenth century) as something external to the university curriculum and taught for the purpose of preparing students for careers in business administration.¹⁰ Two different types of instruction produced two different styles of letter writing. Grammar masters or instructors at the university, for instance, emphasized rhetorical stylistics that could be found in contemporary prose and verse literature. Business *dictatores*, on the other hand, preferred a sparse structure (with little rhetorical flourish), resembling the format of legal documents such as deeds and testaments.¹¹ These pedagogical and stylistic differences will be important later.

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

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

In addition to performance-based structure of letters and instructional precepts of *ars dictaminis*, there is recorded evidence that letters were performed outside the classroom, but still within the confines of the university, during the sixteenth century at both Oxford and Cambridge. Seventeenth-century antiquarian Anthony Wood, for instance, describes a