



Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy (Princeton Legacy Library)

John D. Lyons

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Examples, crucial links between discourse and society's view of reality, have until now been largely neglected in literary criticism. In the first book-length study of the rhetoric of example, John Lyons situates this figure by comparing it with more frequently studied tropes such as metaphor and synecdoche, discusses meanings of the terms example and exemplum, and proposes a set of descriptive concepts for the study of example in early modern literature. Tracing its paradoxical nature back to Aristotle's Rhetoric, Lyons shows how exemplary rhetoric is caught between often competing aims of persuasive general statement and accurate representation. In French and Italian texts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries this dual task was rendered still more challenging by a transition to new sources of examples as the age of discovery brought increased emphasis on observation. The writers of this period were aware of a crisis in exemplary rhetoric, a situation in which serious questions were raised about how authors and audience would find a common ground in interpreting representative instances. Lyons's focus on the strategy of example leads to new readings of six major writers--Machiavelli, Marguerite de Navarre, Montaigne, Pascal, Descartes, and Marie de Lafayette.

Originally published in 1990.

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