

Joseph Evans. *The Art of Eloquence: The Sacred Rhetoric of Gardner C. Taylor*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2020. 176 pages. \$19.99.

Five years after his death, the great preacher Gardner Taylor continues to inspire deep research and reflection among homileticians. Dean of the Morehouse School of Religion and ITC homiletics faculty member Joseph Evans carries Taylor's luminous reputation forward in this discerning volume about the rhetorical genius, the style, and the eloquence of a man long known as American's Dean of Preachers. With his close reading of Taylor's sermons and deep insight into white racism in America, Evans helps Taylor to shine, yet again.

The chapters of the book proceed ostensibly according to the five canons of rhetoric—though even this frame proves inadequate for describing Evan's work. From chapters 2–6 Evans reviews and deepens appreciation for Taylor's rhetoric by appeal to well-known elements of rhetoric: invention, discovery, style, memory, and delivery. That said, Evans does three things that make this five-part review unique and powerful in the case of Gardner Taylor. First, Evans reframes the rhetorical tradition itself: discovery is viewed as roughly equivalent to arrangement, eloquence to style, and memory viewed chiefly with respect to helping *listeners* remember an argument. Evans's choice is not arbitrary, but serves chiefly the task of understanding Taylor himself and his rhetorical genius. Second, the vision of rhetoric that lies at the heart of Evans's talent for grasping Taylor is the Scottish *belle lettres* tradition, but with an important twist. Evans pushes back on the notion that such a view can contain Taylor's genius—in fact by appeal to the work of rhetoric of nineteenth-century African American leaders like William G. Allen and Frederick Douglass, Evans makes the point that the Scottish *belle lettres* tradition of rhetoric is transformed precisely in the breach that is social marginalization and deep struggles with matters of liberty and slavery. Evans's vision of Taylor's eloquence comes from just such hybridized rhetoric. Third, Evans is unflinching in relating all matters rhetorical to positionalities under oppression. In Taylor's hands, or better through his voice and preaching, the Scottish *belle lettres* tradition gives way to an eloquence which can only be known in the context of oppression. Evans's encompassing rhetorical concern sometimes takes him to the work of other leading lights: bell hooks, for example, whose writing bears witness to key rhetorical features like “narrative voice.” This is Evans's work at its best: helping the reader to understand Taylor's eloquence through the five canons of rhetoric without reducing Taylor's genius but refracting it through the prism of race in America.

There are admittedly points in the book where Evans's labor of love sounds more like an encomium. But that is not to detract from his contribution at all—this book is not mere hagiography. Speeches of praise, like the encomium, are deeply tied to character to which true eloquence bears witness. How did Quintillian put it?: eloquence is the good man speaking well. Evans assists us to see Taylor up close through his rhetoric, his style, his eloquence.

I find myself grateful for such a work as Evans's. In my work with doctoral students I will play Taylor's sermon on Job 19, “I Know that My Redeemer Liveth,” which appears in two parts on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s14G9EWujJY>. The portrayal on the video is odd: alternative weathered and fading still photos of Taylor accompanied by a crackly recording of a voice that cracks itself...with truth. Yet what it shows is far more than just how it appears. In his fourth chapter on Taylor's style and eloquence, Evans compares eloquence to a beautiful flower held by deep roots in a pot with cracks (79). The cracks reveal something special: the pot's “character helps to understand its narrative.” Evans bids us look deeper to

eloquence as character and to narrative as the “fault line” which helps us to open up eloquence’s peculiar beauty in the rhetoric of Gardner C. Taylor.

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