IMITATION AND DECLINE: RHETORICAL THEORY AND PRACTICE IN THE FIRST CENTURY AFTER CHRIST

ELAINE FANTHAM

I N AN earlier paper[1] I attempted to outline Cicero's views on the role of imitation in the training of the orator and in the evolution of oratory itself from generation to generation. We saw that Cicero in *De oratore* used the development of Athenian oratory as an illustration of evolution; and made Isocrates, whose principle of training by imitation Cicero advocated, into the central figure in the process of artistic growth. In *Brutus*, where the history of oratory at Athens served chiefly as a model for the growth of Roman eloquence, evolution was Cicero's main concern and the technique of imitation was allowed to recede. But his rhetorical works dealt too briefly with one question: exactly how did a mature student imitate another man's style? And they left aside another: if imitation promoted evolution of an art toward its highest form, what was imitation's role when decline set in?

The first question is very much Quintilian's business. The *Institutio* is concerned with education from the nursery to the *rostra* (or centumviral court), and in Book 10 Quintilian can make the same general assumptions about a student's general education and technical expertise as Antonius did in *De oratore* 2. 87 f. The reader expects to hear how an orator is educated. But instead of passing immediately to his practical advice on imitation, Quintilian recognizes the logical conflict between the fact of change (here progress) and the intention of reproduction. As a result, his chapter on imitation begins by trying to reconcile the method with the evolution of oratory before it deals with individual precepts. Thus, when we follow his argument in Part I, we shall have to consider imitation first as a cumulative factor in technical evolution before we can focus on the individual student and his technique of imitative composition. Only then can we compare Quintilian's approach with the interpretations of other first-century writers. In Part II I shall consider the belief that Roman oratory was in decline, and illustrate from Quintilian and others the relationship between this belief and their attitude toward rhetorical imitation.[2]

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1. "Imitation and Evolution: The Discussion of Rhetorical Imitation in Cicero *De oratore* 2. 87–97 and Some Related Problems of Ciceronian Theory," *CP* 73 (1978):1–16.

2. In general, see now Gordon Williams, *Change and Decline* (Berkeley, 1978), chaps. 1 and 5. Chap. 1, "Contemporary Analyses of Decline," discusses briefly the views of Seneca the Elder, Velleius, and others, and ends with a detailed analysis of the argument in Tac. *Dial*. Chap. 5, "Thought and Expression," considers *imitatio* and *aemulatio* in poetry, and as forms of rhetorical training, but is not concerned with imitation of particular prose styles.

I: Artis pars magna

The extensive survey of Greek and Roman literature which opens Book 10 of the *Institutio* has a limited purpose: Quintilian is directing his students to the classical authors as models for oratory, and so he emphasizes in particular the genres, the authors, and the aspects of those authors which are suited for imitation. Although his reading list is on an unprecedented scale, his grounds are traditional enough. Theory (*praecepta*) needs the reinforcement of practice in writing if the student is to achieve fluency, but his writing will be aimless and inconsistent in style *citra lectionis exemplum* (10. 1. 2).[3] Thus Book 10 first enumerates the *lectionis exempla* in 1. 46–135, then discusses active imitation, justifying and analyzing it in chapter 2, before proceeding to the chapters on how, what, and even when the student himself should write.

Chapter 2 opens with three simple arguments[4] for the usefulness of imitation. The first is particular to rhetoric, and the verb *invenire* is chosen to suggest rhetorical *inventio*. Although the greatest achievement is innovation, it is also advantageous to follow the direction suggested by successful innovation, "ea quae bene inventa sunt" (10. 2. 1). The second argument is more general, and shows Quintilian's understanding of psychology. It is, he argues, part of human behavior (*omnis vitae ratio*) to copy what we admire in others: this is the way in which children learn handwriting, and men learn to sing or paint or farm. It has been part of Quintilian's approach to education from the beginning of the *Institutio*[5] that he sees the pupil's imitative faculty as an asset to be exploited (1. 3. 1). When he describes the ideal teacher in Book 2, he assumes that the teacher will use this faculty to instill moral precepts: he should give short speeches for his pupils to remember, *because* boys imitate living models more easily than they do the material of books; he should be a man who calls forth love and respect, *because* we are much more eager to imitate those we are fond of (2. 2. 8). Later in Book 2 Quintilian follows the Isocratean pattern in advising the teacher to dictate from time to time complete themes for the pupil to imitate—"materias quas et imitetur puer et interim tamquam suas amet" (2. 4. 12). There is even a short list in 2. 5. 18–20 of literary models suitable for beginners, a foretaste of the full catalog in Book 10. Although he has borrowed the Isocratean analogy from physical crafts,[6] Quintilian has doubtless had personal experi-

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3. Throughout this paper I shall be quoting Quintilian from Michael Winterbottom's text (Oxford, 1970). For the analysis of training into ars, *imitatio*, and *exercitatio* in the Latin tradition, see H. L. Caplan (ed.), *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), 1. 2. 3 and p. 7, n. *c*. It seems to be Isocrates who added imitation to the earlier trinity of *physis (ingenium)*, *episteme (doctrina)*, and *melete (exercitatio)*.

4. Too little has been written on Quintilian's argumentation (see J. Cousin's bibliography, "Quintilien 1935–1959," in *Lustrum* 7 [1962]: 289 f.). On 10. 2, see the discussion by Cousin, *Études sur Quintilien*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1936), pp. 584–88; and G. Kennedy, "An Estimate of Quintilian," *AJP* 83 (1962): 144–45.

5. See Kennedy, *Quintilian* (New York, 1969), p. 43, on child psychology; p. 49, for the references to imitation in Book 2.

6. For Isocrates' recommendation of set-pieces composed by the master, cf. *Against the Sophists* 18; for the analogy from training by observation in crafts, cf. *Antidosis* 205 f.

ence of the value of imitation in children, and is arguing from conviction in 10. 2 as in Book 2.

The third argument is more artificial, based on the dilemma that we must be either like or unlike what is good; but resemblance seldom arises by nature (in the sense of undirected chance), whereas it frequently results from imitation. We might note that this claim is to some extent contradicted by the criticism advanced against imitation in 10. 2. 10 (below and p. 105). Both arguments are too categorical to allow for the nuances of stylistic imitation, which must be appraised by delicate aesthetic criteria.

Quintilian might have been content to argue from these favorable premises, but instead he presents some serious criticisms of systematic imitation, starting from its apparent advantage—the ease of repetition rather than innovation. The arguments of 10. 2. 4–9 are evolutionary. Since progress depends on innovation, if men in the past had felt no need to create or think beyond what was familiar, there would have been no discoveries. In fact, primitive men innovated without models to copy (10. 2. 4) or teachers (10. 2. 6), and not only invention but development requires something more than imitation. Here Quintilian makes two useful distinctions: the early stage of learning by copying models (as in the case of the child or the craft-apprentice, 10. 2. 2) is marked off from the later formalization of theory by teachers; and discovery (10. 2. 5) is distinguished from development (10. 2. 7). Development in other arts returns the argument in section 8 to the central problem of artistic progress—"nihil autem crescit sola imitatione"—and to the specific art of oratory. The perfect orator can come into being only if it is possible to surpass all previous performers, since not even the greatest orators have possessed every positive quality or been free from every fault.

From this "Platonic"[7] idealism Quintilian falls back to the more realistic goal of matching past achievements, and the next two sections (10. 2. 10–11) are based on the argument from human frailty.[8] The first derives from imagery of marching or walking. The man who tries only to keep up will inevitably fall behind, but he who tries to overtake will at least keep level with his predecessor. The second, which is apparently contradictory, is based on the replication of a craftsman's product: absolute resemblance is unattainable even in nature, so that it will be easier to surpass another's achievement than to duplicate it.

Despite the inherent contradiction, both arguments depend on the discrepancy between intention and performance; yet this same discrepancy must be assumed, if we are to reconcile the pupil's imitation of his model with progress beyond it. As Cicero saw in his comments on Sulpicius, or on Isocrates' contrasted pupils Ephorus and Theopompus,[9] the individuality

7. The concept of the perfect orator derives directly from Cicero's *Orator*, where it is called Platonic. Cicero extrapolates from an idea or form of eloquence the ideal *eloquens* "cui nihil deerat" (*Orat.* 18), "qui omnino nullus umquam fuit" (*Orat.* 19). The ostensible goal of the treatise is to define him, and Cicero declares at *Orat.* 100 that he has done so.

8. For the argument from human frailty, cf. 10. 1. 25 "summi enim sunt, homines tamen"; and the comments on 10. 2. 25 (pp. 107–8).

9. See "Imitation and Evolution," pp. 4–5.

of the imitator ensures that his product will be different from, and, if he is talented, perhaps better than, what he is imitating.

But Quintilian's argument in 10. 2. 11 assumes the inferiority of the imitation, raising the new issue of originality. To modern eyes, judging by post-Romantic criteria, it is this argument which seems most damning against the policy of imitation. As Quintilian expresses it, imitation, like a shadow, or an actor simulating emotion, is always weaker than the original. So in composition, "iis quae in exemplum adsumimus subest natura ac vera vis, contra omnis imitatio ficta est et ad alienum propositum commodatur." Conscious imitation of another man's work has to be compromise: the words of the model have the vigor of spontaneity, but the imitator who copies them will have to subordinate his identity to the model's.

In an aside Quintilian draws the analogy between this relationship and the imitation of real-life cases offered by the fictitious contexts of declamation; inevitably they lack vitality compared with factual cases. This aspect of imitation—fiction seen as an imitation of life—is a leitmotif of Quintilian's criticism of the declamations, and it helps to shape his views on the factors which promote the decline of eloquence. At this point, in 10. 2, the question of fiction is marginal to his argument, but it serves to conceal from the reader that the objection to imitation is left unanswered.

Quintilian might have tried to counter the argument based on the superiority of the original (10. 2. 11) with a disclaimer. He could have said that he is not advocating imitation of content, but merely of form; but he does not. To the rhetorician, form was as significant as content, since the latter was to some extent dictated by circumstances. The criticism made in section 11 is left aside. Instead, by introducing the concept of *imitabilia*—what can, rather than what should, be imitated—Quintilian moves in 10. 2. 12 and 13 from justifying imitation to assuming its validity and examining its methods: the theme of the second half of the chapter, sections 14 to 28, is that of Dionysius' lost third book *Peri mimeseos*, not ἆρα δεῖ ... but πῶς δεῖ μιμεῖσθαι (*Ep. ad Pomp.* 3. 776 Usener–Radermacher).

There is little Latin precedent for Quintilian's account of rhetorical imitation; but, although Cicero said virtually nothing in his major account (*De or.* 2. 87–97) about the details of method, there are two passages from his later works which throw light on what he meant by imitation. In *Brutus* 68 Cicero encourages Brutus to imitate the elder Cato, but at the same time urges him (*a*) to change Cato's unattractive diction (*horridiora verba*);[10] (*b*) to add rhythmic structure (*numeri*); and (*c*) to arrange and reconstruct (*compone et quasi coagmenta*) the phrases so that the language may be more shapely (*aptior*). If stylistic imitation allowed for all these changes, what was left? A quite different procedure is suggested in *De optimo genere oratorum* 14, where Cicero describes how he adapted Demosthenes and Aeschines in

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10. The parallel allusion to "orationes ipsae horridulae Catonis" in *Orat.* 152 confirms that Cicero is criticizing defects of euphony in Cato's *compositio* (hiatus and consonant clashes) rather than individually archaic words. Quintilian uses *horride atque incomposite* in 10. 2. 17, where he discusses students who try to imitate archaic oratory.

translation, "converti . . . ut orator, sententiis iisdem et earum formis tam-
quam figuris, verbis ad nostram consuetudinem aptis. in quibus non verbum
pro verbo necesse habui reddere, sed genus omne verborum vimque servavi."[11]
Imitation, then, could cover either the rephrasing of a primitive Latin
author so as to impose sophisticated *compositio*, or the translation of a
Greek work. But the artistic translator aimed to copy the thought (*sen-
tentiae*) and figures in order to preserve stylistic form and tone. In trans-
lating a Greek model, the same content had to be transferred to the equiva-
lent form in another language; in imitating a model written in the same
language, forms had to be adapted to a new content.

Quintilian is concerned with the second kind of imitation, and his examples
of poor imitators in 10. 2. 13, who show their lack of original talent in super-
ficiality and pastiche, bear out the warnings of 10. 2. 11. They echo phrases
and rhythms (2. 13), or mannerisms like the Ciceronian *esse videatur* (2. 18;
cf. Tac. *Dial.* 23. 2). They reproduce localized tricks of diction without
achieving the impact of independent thought (*vim dicendi atque inventionis*,
2. 16) because, as Quintilian warned, natural ability (*ingenium*), fertility of
argument (*inventio*), emotive power (*vis*), and fluency (*facilitas*) cannot be
acquired by imitation or training.

Between the good original and the unsuccessful copy two types of distor-
tion have intervened. The first can be described in general terms as incon-
gruity: words current in the original have become obsolete, or sentence
structures are transferred to inappropriate material. The other type is dis-
tortion by exaggeration: because of the students' lack of independent *vis* and
inventio, they exaggerate the stylistic form of the model into *proxima vir-
tutibus vitia*,[12] the deviations associated by traditional rhetoric with each of
the recognized styles. Quintilian's account of these deviations reflects the
Peripatetic preoccupation with the mean between two extremes, just as his
criticisms of incongruity derive from the Peripatetic concept of *to prepon*,[13]
propriety. Propriety also underlies two further cautions. The first forbids
imitating a style for which one is unsuited by deficiency or discrepancy of
temperament (*infirmitas, diversitas naturae*, 10. 2. 19); this is the principle
we have seen illustrated in Cicero's comments on Sulpicius and the pupils

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11. On this passage, see A. Reiff, *Interpretatio Imitatio Aemulatio* (Ph.D. diss., Cologne, 1959;
Bonn, 1961), pp. 40–44. Reiff distinguishes in the preface (p. 8 and n. 12) between literary imitation
and rhetorical "mimesis," but paradoxically Cicero's translations of Aeschines and Demosthenes,
in which he set out to achieve more than *interpretatio* (translation) by matching the style and form
of the originals, will have come very near to imitation in the rhetorical sense, lacking only the
normal feature of independent material.

12. Compare *Rhet. Her.* 4. 10. 15, on the *finitima et propinqua vitia*, with Caplan's note, p. 263,
n. *c*. Quintilian's list, "pro grandibus tumidi, pressis exiles, fortibus temerarii, laetis corrupti, com-
positis exultantes, simplicibus neglegentes," coincides at two points with the Auctor's deviations,
the *figura . . . sufflata*, and the *genus exile*.

13. For this Theophrastan principle, cf. *De or.* 1. 55, 3. 38, and 3. 53 ("qui idem ita moderantur
ut rerum, ut personarum dignitates ferunt, ei sunt in eo genere laudandi laudis, quod ego aptum et
congruens nomino"). See also J. Stroux, *De Theophrasti virtutibus dicendi* (Leipzig, 1912); M.
Pohlenz, "Τὸ πρέπον," *NGG*, 1933, pp. 53–92, on the many aspects of propriety in ethics and
aesthetics. Pohlenz (ibid., p. 85) traces the tradition of literary propriety in the styles and genres,
from Aristotle, through Panaetius and Cicero, to Horace *Ars poetica* (cf. Cousin, *Études*, p. 587)
and Quintilian.

of Isocrates.[14] The second caution bars adopting the diction of other genres: Quintilian insists that "sua cuique proposito lex, suus decor est" (22).[15] In this conservatism he is at variance with the new school of orators, who plundered poetic diction to give *nitor, cultus, pulchritudo* to their eloquence, but he is true to the tradition of Cicero, Varro, and Horace. Although his negative precepts are more explicit than those of Cicero in *De oratore* 2. 87–97, there is nothing in them to conflict with Cicero's account.

However, Quintilian introduces an issue not raised in *De oratore*—the number of models. Just as he advises against imitating characteristics peculiar to one genre, and prefers the common features of all genres, so he deprecates attachment to a single model. Like the Greek professional rivals of the Auctor ad Herennium, like Dionysius of Halicarnassus or Seneca the Elder, Quintilian argues in 10. 2. 24 for the eclectic approach. The hallmark of the eclectics was the anecdote of Zeuxis the painter, who derived his composite portrait of Helen from imitating in paint the separate features of many local beauties. The anecdote appears in Cicero's *De inventione* as the introduction to Book 2 (1–3), but would naturally conflict with the principles of the Auctor ad Herennium.[16] Dionysius relates the story as a preface to his critical selection of classical authors (*archaiōn krisis*), the largest surviving fragment of his lost *Peri mimeseos*. Using the *tupos* metaphor, he twice recommends the anthologizing approach: "You will be able to scrutinize the appearance of classic physiques, like a spectator in a theater, and select the best blooms of their intellect: assembling this feast of erudition, you will be able to stamp out (*tupoun*), not a likeness that fades with time, but the undying beauty of a work of art" (frag. 6. 417. 13–16 U.-R.). He renews this advice at the end of the catalog: "If things which by their own nature give pleasure are blended artistically into the form (*tupos*) of one body of speech, then the diction will be enriched by the admixture" (436. 7–9 U.-R.).

Quintilian has different reasons for advising the imitation of many models. He does not question the supremacy of one great orator (Cicero). Instead, renewing his argument from human frailty, he concludes that, since we cannot hope to imitate any man perfectly and completely (10. 2. 25, repeated in 26), it is better to imitate the special merits of several orators. We may hope thereby to acquire some of the excellences of each, provided we always take care to adopt each feature in the appropriate place.

Which approach to imitation—the monotheist or the pluralist—was more conducive to the growth of the individual and to the furtherance of the art?

14. In 10. 2. 19–21 Quintilian is largely recapitulating his discussion at 2. 8. 1–15 of the effect of training upon natural gifts. (It is in 2. 8. 11 that Theopompus and Ephorus put in their inevitable appearance, echoing *De or.* 3. 34.) But Quintilian refines Cicero's principle of modifying temperamental deviations toward the related norm: weak talents are to be developed where their limitations will permit; stronger abilities must be trained in every essential aspect of the trade ("nulla dicendi virtus omittenda est," 2. 8. 13). Above all, the pupil must not be made to attempt what he cannot achieve, nor diverted from some lesser field where he has more prospect of success (2. 8. 14).

15. Cousin, *Études*, p. 587, compares the "descriptas vices . . . operumque colores" of Hor. *AP* 86–116.

16. See *Rhet. Her.* 4. 5. 7 with Caplan's note, p. 242, n. *c*. Caplan argues that the advocacy of a plurality of models was Peripatetic in origin, whereas the earlier *rhetores*, from Korax onward, had provided their own examples. Seneca the Elder comments, "quo plura exempla inspecta sunt, plus in eloquentia proficitur; non est unus, quamvis praecipuus, imitandus, quia numquam par fit imitator auctori" (*Contr.* 1. 1. 6).

Logically, a man who imitates only one model is more likely to produce an
identifiable copy of outdated techniques, while a man who instead selectively
copies aspects of many artists will at least produce work distinguishable from
each of his predecessors' by the presence of features adopted from the others.
Mastery of all their techniques (in so far as they were compatible) would
raise the speaker to a new level of versatility; and versatility was the goal
of Dionysius and Seneca the Elder—and even to some extent of Cicero in
his last phase, when he argued in the *Orator* for the greater stylistic range of
the grand speaker, as opposed to the restraint and limitations of Atticism.
But are versatility and integrity compatible? Can an orator hope to play
Caesar in the *prooemium*, copy Pollio in the *narratio*, imitate Caelius in the
refutatio, write a *confirmatio* in the style of Calvus, and top off the whole
with a Ciceronian *peroratio?*[17] Will such a speech stand as any kind of unified
whole? A letter of Quintilian's pupil Pliny (1. 2) shows that this sort of thing
was attempted. In a speech not identified, Pliny tells his friend Arrianus,
he tried to imitate Demosthenes and Calvus (*nuper meum*, a new taste), but
did not omit the paint-pots of Cicero whenever he could embark on a pleas-
ing digression. Perhaps this speech was less eclectic than it sounds: the imita-
tion of Demosthenes would imply some deliberate *deinotes*, no doubt involv-
ing figures of thought also found in Calvus.[18] Pliny probably recognized the
affinity between Calvus and his model Demosthenes, but the fact remains
that he thought he was imitating not two artists, but three. Yet these post-
classical writers were no fools, nor were their audiences; and we should not
imagine the orator presenting either a carbon copy or a patchwork quilt.
The whole process of imitation clearly could not be superficial, and depended
on a broad general understanding of the classical artist taken as a model.

Only in 10. 2. 27 does Quintilian reach the prerequisite of good imitation,
the close study (the technical verb is *intueri*[19] as in 26) of the model, not as
verbal surface but as instrument of the author's purpose. Assuming that the
model is forensic oratory, Quintilian asks the student to assess the orator's

17. With apologies to Quint. 10. 2. 25, "quid tamen noceret vim Caesaris, asperitatem Caeli,
diligentiam Pollionis, iudicium Calvi, quibusdam in locis adsumere?" Quintilian attaches this sug-
gestion to the discussion in 2. 23 of the different stylistic requirements of separate parts of the
speech: "cum sit diversa non causarum modo inter ipsas condicio sed in singulis etiam causis partium,
sintque alia leniter alia aspere, alia concitate alia remisse, alia docendi alia movendi gratia dicenda."

18. W. D. Lebek, *Verba Prisca* (Göttingen, 1970), p. 90, and Winterbottom, in his review of
Kennedy's *Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World* in *CR* 25 (1975): 66, have pointed out that Calvus
imitated Demosthenes, especially his figures of thought. A. N. Sherwin-White (ed.), *The Letters of
Pliny* (Oxford, 1966), pp. 86–90, discusses this letter as evidence of Pliny's approach to style; relevant
is p. 87: "Pliny owed much to Quintilian's advice that the best orators used the various styles as
appropriate to each particular case" (12. 10. 69, "nec pro causa modo sed pro partibus causae").

19. *Intueri* appears in *De or.* 2. 89 "ut tota mente Crassum atque omni animo intueretur." Cf.
De or. 1. 156 "intuendi sunt nobis non solum oratores sed etiam actores"; *Orat.* 9 "ipsius in mente
insidebat species pulchritudinis eximia quaedam quam intuens in eaque defixus ad illius similitudinem
artem et manum dirigebat. ut igitur in formis et figuris est aliquid perfectum et excellens, cuius ad
cogitatam speciem imitando referuntur eaque sub oculos ipsa non cadit, sic perfectae eloquentiae
speciem animo videmus, effigiem auribus quaerimus." Quintilian applies the verb to the imitative
attention of pupil to teacher in 2. 2. 11, and to imitation of a model at 10. 2. 2 and 26. It corresponds
to the technical use of παρατήρησις at, e.g., Dion. Hal. *Peri mimeseos* 416. 1 and of παρατηρεῖν at
420. 9; the Greek terms ultimately seem to derive from the practice of empirical medicine. *Intueri*
is not entirely an adequate equivalent, since it implies intense immediate attention rather than
continued observation.

success in presenting action and character; to consider his aims, method and arrangement; to see the intentions behind each successive part of the speech; and to measure the achievement of each of the three "functions," proving the case, arousing emotional reaction, and winning popular acceptance.[20] This procedure is perhaps too formalistic, but it is more helpful than the mere selection of meritorious aspects of the recommended classical authors, as in Dionysius' *archaiōn krisis*,[21] or Quintilian's own reading list in 10. 1. 46 f. It is not enough that this kind of dissection should be performed for younger students by the teacher's *praelectio:* if the maturing orator is to control his material effectively he must be able to perform his own analysis, *sine adminiculo*. Only such analysis will give him the understanding for real imitation. "Haec si perviderimus, tum vere imitabimur."

Even so, Quintilian is not content. Concern for the growth of the art leads him to hope for a bonus—the *propria bona* of the ideal student. This tension between his advocacy of imitation and his desire for progress also comes out in 10. 5, where he discusses the imitative exercises of translation and paraphrase.[22] Cicero in *De oratore* 1. 154–55 had preferred translation from Greek to paraphrase of Latin authors, because he felt inhibited from using a Latin phrase if it occurred already in his model.[23] Paraphrase, even self-variation, was a talent valued in the orator or poet (we may recall Cicero's praise of Archias for composing multiple versions of a theme on demand);[24] and Quintilian himself prefers paraphrase, openly disagreeing with Cicero, because of its challenge to achieve expression independent of the original. "Neque ego paraphrasim esse interpretationem tantum volo, sed circa eosdem sensus certamen atque aemulationem" (10. 5. 5). This competitive imitation (as in 10. 2. 10 and 27) satisfies his desire for both imitation and development. Paradoxically, while paraphrase supports the ability to compose (*facultas*, 10. 5. 10), it also fosters innovation of form, and operates against the continuity of style which had been Cicero's original reason for encouraging imitation.

Since Quintilian is concerned in 10. 5 with writing, he passes over[25] Cicero's

20. This is virtually the procedure of the *praelectio*, which he describes at 2. 4. 6–9.

21. My comment intends no criticism of Dionysius, since the text of *Peri mimeseos* survives only in fragments. Dionysius may have supplied such recommendations in his lost Book 3.

22. For an analysis of methods of training in ancient imitation, see D. L. Clark, "Imitation: Theory and Practice in Roman Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 37 (1951): esp. 15–18.

23. In *Brut*. 310 he adds as justification the greater wealth of rhetorical ornament in Greek which fostered the development of such features in Latin, and the need to communicate with Greek rhetoricians (who probably knew no Latin). The point is repeated and expanded by Quintilian in 10. 5. 3. See also Pliny *Ep*. 7. 9. 1 on the merits of translation as an exercise: "praeterea imitatione optimorum similia inveniendi facultas paratur."

24. Compare *Arch*. 18 ("quotiens ego hunc vidi, cum litteram scripsisset nullam, magnum numerum optimorum versuum de eis ipsis rebus . . . dicere ex tempore, quotiens revocatum eandem rem dicere commutatis verbis atque sententiis") with Quint. 10. 5. 7 ("an vero ipsi non bis ac saepius de eadem re dicimus et quidem continuas nonnumquam sententias?").

25. See, however, 2. 7. 2–3 where he argues that the pupil should memorize not his own juvenile material, but "electos ex orationibus vel historiis aliove quo genere dignorum ea cura voluminum locos. . . . nam . . . adsuescent optimis, semperque habebunt intra se quod imitentur et iam non sentientes formam orationis illam quam mente penitus acceperint exprimet." Cicero at *De or*. 1. 157 sees memorizing only as a training for the memory, and does not distinguish between learning one's own compositions and the more valuable experience of memorizing a work of art.

other recommendation (*De or.* 1. 157) of learning by heart, although it would lodge phrases and rhythms in the memory patterns of the student, and memorized material, properly assimilated, would help him to form an idiom of his own.

Assimilation is the hidden element which memorization and analysis of classical models would contribute to the student, in different degrees. Assimilation requires both concentration and a lapse of time. The thorough analysis of the model prescribed in 10. 2. 27 is a preliminary which should be kept distinct from reproduction of the model's qualities in the student's own work. Quintilian shows in chapter 2 that he appreciates this requirement, but he has expressed the idea more vividly in his introduction to the reading list, at 10. 1. 19, where he explains the need for digestion of what is read: "repetamus autem et tractemus et, ut cibos mansos ac prope liquefactos demittimus quo facilius digerantur, ita lectio non cruda, sed multa iteratione mollita et velut confecta memoriae imitationique tradatur."

This image is also fundamental to the more positive conception of imitation outlined by Seneca the Younger in a letter (84) in which he discusses the proper relationship between a writer's studies and his literary output. He starts from the famous image of the bees blending the nectar of different flowers into the new flavor of honey (84. 3 and 5), and then explores the analogy of digestion. "The foods we take in are a burden as long as they retain their own nature and remain solid in the digestive tract; only when they have been changed from their former nature do they turn into vitality and blood. We should ensure the same effect on the nourishment of our intellects, not letting what we take in remain unchanged, or it will be foreign to us. We must digest it, or else it will merely enter our [receptive] memory, and not the [active] intellect" (84. 7). Seneca argues in eclectic terms but claims that, whether a man imitates many writers or one single model, the alien sources of his style, arguments, and thoughts will be imperceptible, if he impresses his own contours on the raw material from his chosen models, so that they are fused into one entity ("si . . . omnibus quae ex quo voluit exemplari traxit formam suam impressit ut in unitatem illa competant," 84. 8).[26]

The image and the emphasis have changed. Now the *tupos* or *forma*[27] belongs to the imitator and is imposed by him on the blended raw materials of his predecessors—as though they provided the wax, and he the die or stamp; the inversion is perhaps to be expected from so confident a stylist as Seneca. While one might welcome his approach as much closer to modern concepts of literary identity, its importance to the present discussion lies in the theme of transformation. Both the image of the bees and the analogy from digestion imply a period of subconscious or automatic change between the collection of the raw materials and the final product. The self-conscious aspect of imitation—analysis, memorizing, paraphrasing—has to be followed for a time by the less self-conscious activities of the brain before the models will begin to act upon the literary personality of the new artist. When he

26. The text is disputed here; see L. D. Reynolds' apparatus criticus in the 1965 OCT.
27. For the *tupos* image in Greek mimetic theory see "Imitation and Evolution," n. 37.

comes to write, there must be no deliberate,[28] continuing process of imitation. While his words appear to be spontaneous in form and content, they will actually have absorbed the merits of his chosen models—the models' rhythms and dictions, as well as their methods of reasoning, will contribute to the new identity.

Seneca seems to have in mind the mature writer and a wider range of writing: the whole genre of epideictic, including popular writing on ethics and natural science. It would be unfair to accuse Quintilian of narrowness because his precepts for the student in the rhetorical school allow less scope for what we call originality. In the orator's world, subject matter is imposed by practical relevance and governed by non-aesthetic limitations such as political expediency, or the definition of guilt under a given legal heading. There is little use for the originality of imagination which we praise so highly in works of poetry or fiction. It is a discriminating teacher who can recommend, as Quintilian does, the analysis of the aims and methods of a literary model; only understanding of these aims, rather than familiarity with their outcome[29] in the finished work, will help the student to assimilate the techniques of the model and adapt them to his own needs. Yet we have seen that Quintilian goes beyond mere assimilation in the last, forward-looking, section of his discussion. If the new orator contributes his *propria bona* (10. 2. 27), it is still possible for a theorist to combine Quintilian's faith in imitation with an evolutionary approach to his art. Cicero had added his own skills to those mastered by Antonius and Crassus, the models of his youth. A hundred years later Quintilian argues for the prospect of continued development in his own post-classical period, on the grounds that the sheer abundance of great models should favor, not hinder, the creation of the perfect orator: "nam erit haec quoque laus eorum, ut priores superasse, posteros docuisse dicantur" (10. 2. 28).

II: *Brevique tempore ad nihilum ventura*

In Book 10 we find Quintilian in an optimistic vein. At the end of his critical account of Roman orators, he pauses to praise contemporary oratory. The forum, he claims, is still adorned by major talents, and mature orators continue to emulate the traditional great models, while students of energy and high ideals are in turn imitating the mature orators (10. 1. 122).

But there was another side to the story. Quintilian finds it necessary to follow his reassuring account of the contemporary scene with severe condemnations of Seneca's "corruptum et omnibus vitiis fractum dicendi genus" (10. 1. 125), the more so because the young men, showing more partisanship than accuracy in their imitation of Seneca's style, have degenerated as much from Seneca as Seneca himself had from the *antiqui* (126). Whatever optimism Quintilian may parade as a teacher, in an effort to encourage the next generation, he was sufficiently alarmed to write a work, *De causis cor-*

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28. As in Quint. 2. 7. 3 (quoted more fully in n. 25): "iam non sentientes formam . . . expriment."
29. Compare the distinction of Arist. *Soph. El.* 184a3, criticizing the method of teaching from models used by Gorgias and his successors: οὐ γὰρ τέχνην ἀλλὰ τὰ ἀπὸ τῆς τέχνης διδόντες παιδεύειν ὑπελάμβανον.

ruptae eloquentiae,[30] on the dangers of current trends in oratory; and the
Institutio itself is full of protests against fashionable ostentation. Indeed the
final chapter is haunted by the acknowledgment that the best of oratory is
past ("verum ut transeundi spes non sit, magna tamen est dignitas subse-
quendi") and by the fear that, when arts have reached their acme, "quod
optimum sit idem ultimum esset" (12. 11. 28). The decline of eloquence had
long been a hackneyed complaint.[31] Sixty years earlier the elder Seneca had
accepted decline as a fact, and associated it, as did Velleius,[32] with the law
of organic decay. Although the theme was so overdone that it earned a
parody in the opening chapters of Petronius' *Satiricon*, it continued to be
discussed in earnest by Quintilian and after him[33] by Tacitus' conversation-
alists in the *Dialogus de oratoribus*. If he admitted contemporary decline,
Quintilian would have to explain the relationship between imitation and the
new corrupted style. He could attribute the decline to neglect of imitation,
or to incompetent and misdirected imitation of models that were either in-
trinsically faulty or inappropriate to the context. Some of these ideas are
suggested in Seneca the Elder's comments; others by the traditionalist
Messalla in Tacitus' discussion, while the modernist Aper naturally takes a
radically opposed approach in interpreting both facts and theory. Part II of
this paper is concerned to illustrate, from these mutually independent writers,
how they reconciled the practice, or neglect, of imitation with the prevailing
belief in the decay of eloquence.

Writing in the time of Tiberius, Seneca had praised his sons in the preface
to his first book of *Controversiae* because they sought out models not only
from contemporary orators, but from the previous age. Like Quintilian, he
recommended imitation of more than one model, since the imitator could
never match his exemplar: "numquam par fit imitator auctori. haec rei
natura est, semper citra veritatem est similitudo" (*Contr.* 1. 1. 6). The old
Platonic antithesis of truth and imitation is revived, and, while the reader is
urged to reproduce his model, it is recognized that any reproduction is in-
herently inferior to the original. Seneca compares eloquence to an evolving
species, which has lived through its prime (the Ciceronian age) to a period

30. Attested at Quint. 6. *praef.* 3 "eum quoque librum quem de causis corruptae eloquentiae
emisi," and 5. 12. 23 "sed haec et in alio nobis tractata sunt opere et in hoc saepe repetenda."
Kennedy, *Quintilian*, p. 23, points out that the title of the work need not imply a belief that all
eloquence had been corrupted; it may also have been written only to analyze the particular trends
in oratory which Quintilian saw as corrupt, and which he describes specifically at 12. 10. 73. (Other
references to corrupt style occur at 4. 2. 122, 127; 8. 3. 6–8, 23, 58, 76; 8. 6. 52, 73.)
   31. For ancient treatment of this theme, see Caplan, "The Decline of Eloquence at Rome in the
First Century A.D.," in A. King and H. North (eds.), *Of Eloquence: Studies in Ancient and Medieval
Rhetoric* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1970), pp. 160–95; and Kennedy, *The Art of Rhetoric in the Roman World*
(Princeton, 1973), pp. 446–64 (on Longinus, Josephus, Velleius, Seneca the Elder, Petronius, Per-
sius), pp. 494–96 (on the *De causis*), and pp. 515–26 (on Tacitus' *Dialogus*). Kennedy believes that
the earliest treatment of decline is Longinus' (*On the Sublime* 44), in Greek and concerned with
Greek oratory; discussions, then, originated not from the changed political climate of imperial
Rome, but from the self-conscious nostalgia of Greek classicism.
   32. See "Imitation and Evolution," pp. 15–16.
   33. For the chronology of Tacitus' *Dialogus* and its relation to Quintilian's *Institutio*, see R.
Güngerich, "Der *Dialogus* des Tacitus und Quintilians *Institutio Oratoria*," *CP* 46 (1951): 159–64;
and the bibliography cited in Kennedy, *Art of Rhetoric*, p. 522, n. 37.

of decay. Though his strictures against contemporary oratory are expressed less in literary than in moral, and specifically in sexual, terms, he returns, via the theme of "le style c'est l'homme même," to diction and imitation in 1. 1. 10. The corrupt new orators are blamed for choosing models as corrupt as themselves (also, despite the inconsistency, for plagiarizing the *sententiae* of the great), thereby compounding the defects of their own *ingenia* with the defects of the models they have chosen to copy. Their compositions are a product of two ingredients, natural temperament (*ingenia*) and choice of model (*voluntas*), and both are at fault.

Quintilian finds the same mannered effeminacy in productions of the time of Domitian, but divides responsibility for the decay between the artificiality of training in declamation and the affectation of over-ornamented style. In both criticisms, the concept of imitation plays an important role.

It is the declamations which provoke Quintilian's first reference to his now lost *De causis* at 5. 12. 17. He recalls the original function of declamation: to train for the battles of the courts young men who were to experience frequent exposure to these conflicts.[34] The present emasculation of style results from a new concern with mere pleasure and display, when men deviate from the faithful representation of real pleading ("olim ab illa vera imagine orandi recesserunt," 17): the cure lies in restoring training conditions to the closest possible simulation of real life ("quam maxime potest componat se ad imitationem veritatis," 22). Quintilian is condemning failure to imitate "reality," but the Ciceronian battle imagery shows that he is not measuring oratory against the Platonic ideal of Cicero's *Orator* (*perfectae eloquentiae spes, Orat.* 9; cf. 18) but against the real life of the Roman forum. Quintilian's phrase, *imitatio veritatis*, echoes the use in *De oratore* 2. 94,[35] where oratory is distinguished as a genre by its concern with representing real life.[36]

Earlier Quintilian had alluded to the original form of declamation practiced by Demetrius of Phalerum ("fictas ad imitationem fori consiliorumque materias," 2. 4. 41–42) as a proper kind of imitation, referring to another (unnamed) work, almost certainly the *De causis*, for his account of its origin. Quintilian postpones comment on the evil of corrupt declamatory practice until 2. 10, where he again casts his criticism in terms of imitation. Repudiating the extravagant and fantastic themes of present-day declamations, he calls for material *quam simillimae veritati*[37] (2. 10. 4), argues that the declamation should copy the real situation for which it is intended as training, and reformulates his demands at the end of the section in 2. 10. 12: "quare declamatio, quoniam est iudiciorum consiliorumque imago, similis esse debet veritati." These passages, 2. 10. 1–12 and 5. 12. 17–22, are two versions of

34. For the battle metaphor, compare *ad pugnam forensem* (5. 12. 17) and "initurus . . . frequenter forensium certaminum pugnam" (5. 12. 22).

35. See "Imitation and Evolution," pp. 9–10 and n. 26.

36. Quintilian uses the criterion of realism in recommending history to the student of rhetoric in 2. 4. 2: "grammaticis autem poeticas [*sc.* narrationes] dedimus; apud rhetorem initium sit historica, tanto robustior quia verior."

37. Compare 2. 10. 2 "veritati proximam imaginem reddit"; 2. 10. 3 "culpa docentium reccidit ut inter praecipuas quae corrumperent eloquentiam causas licentia atque inscitia declamantium fuerit." (Cf. Messalla at *Dial.* 28. 2.)

the same protest, to which the concept *veritatem imitari*, simulation of real public life, is central.

In style too orators are becoming corrupt, and Quintilian sees misdirected imitation as one cause of affected style. He discusses in 2. 5, as later in 10. 1, the choice of models for stylistic imitation, and follows his list of those recommended (2. 5. 18–20) with a caution against copying either the archaic roughness of Cato Censorius and the Gracchi, or the new, wanton, florid style (*recens lascivia*). His language here (2. 5. 22–24) is echoed in his condemnation of Seneca the Younger in 10. 1. 125–31: Seneca's style is a dangerous influence because of the very attractiveness of its faults, which invite imitation and so lead to worse extravagances (129). Detailed analysis of contemporary mannerisms would not be relevant to the argument of this paper, but Quintilian's attitude toward them may be summed up in his recognition of a change for the worse at 2. 5. 24: "dicendi mutavimus genus, et ultra nobis quam oportebat indulsimus."

This mannerism and distortion make it necessary for Quintilian to urge criteria of propriety and restraint in his own discussion of imitation, which we considered earlier (10. 2, see pp. 106–7). To him the change in style is a willful deviation, the product of a deliberate choice of the wrong models (in this opinion he echoes Seneca the Elder's "talia habent exempla qualia ingenia") and a training increasingly remote from the realities of public life.

Tacitus' *Dialogus de oratoribus* appears to offer us something different in presenting both sides of the question. His classicist Messalla explains the decline in eloquence on the basis of sins of omission: "desidia parentum et neglegentia iuvenum et inscientia praecipientium et oblivione moris antiqui" (28. 2). For him oratory is suffering from a failure to know and imitate the tradition.[38] The modernist Aper had earlier disputed this decline, criticizing the traditional manner and forms, and deriding those who are still imitating them, with their ubiquitous *esse videatur*, and the other tricks "quae tamen sola mirantur atque exprimunt ii, qui se antiquos oratores vocitant" (23. 1). Unfortunately Aper's legitimate mockery of the *servum pecus* is undermined by the positive criteria of merit which he sets up in 20: there he accepts the audience as a yardstick; and it is a frivolous audience, impatient, wandering to and fro, demanding glamor and appeal (*laetitia, pulchritudo*, 20. 3), even *poeticus decor*. The new style brings delight to the ears.[39] The brilliant, con-

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38. Speaking of the old and new training, Messalla shows himself a mere echo of Quintilian. Compare the military metaphor "pugnare in proelio disceret" (34. 3), the "vera et incorrupta eloquentia" of the good old days (34. 4), and the standard condemnation of the contemporary audience (34. 5) and of unrealistic declamations (35. 5). One point of language reverses the terminology of Cicero and Quintilian, the praise of the good instructor as providing "faciem eloquentiae non imaginem." Here *imago* is not the true likeness, but the hollow shadow contrasted with the embodied features; but this is purely a *verbi controversia*. Messalla continues with the traditional reference to the material of declamations as *abhorrens a veritate* (35. 4) and the contrast with the courts ("cum ad veros iudices ventum," 35. 5 just before the lacuna).

39. This is not to deny that Cicero, too, saw public approval as the yardstick of oratory at, e.g., *De or.* 1. 12, 223, 228–33. Cf. *Brut.* 185 "quod enim probat multitudo, hoc idem doctis probandum est" (followed by a subtle distinction between the judgment of the connoisseur and the crowd at 193) and 283 "a multitudine et a foro, cui nata eloquentia est, devorabatur." The difference lies in the public itself, which was more dilettante, less principled, and less committed to political life in Tacitus' day than it had been in Cicero's prime.

cealed art of Tacitus allows the meretricious debasement of the *dolce stil nuovo* to be conveyed by its own advocate, and we are convinced more effectively than we could have been by the strictures of a Quintilian or a Messalla. Rejection of the tradition, then, is not a cause but a symptom of the cultural malaise.

If we synthesize our evidence, we find that contemporary orators were failing in part because they imitated clumsily and superficially what was good in the original: we may instance the Ciceroniasts. Others failed because they imitated models that were intrinsically bad ("talia habent exempla qualia ingenia," Sen. *Contr.* 1. 1. 11), or because public taste and their own inclinations led them to admire, emulate, and extend the *dulcia vitia* of their favorites. The Roman critics did not take the line which has been forcibly put in George Kennedy's recent history of rhetoric in the Roman world. Criticizing the Greek Atticists of the last century B.C. for their concern with imitation, he argues that Roman imitation of classical Greek literature was creative and successful, but "when Latin literature is itself classic enough to be imitated, the process had equally dreary results"[40]—as if it were the fact of imitating predecessors in the same language that hastened the degeneration of Roman eloquence. In an earlier paper specifically on Quintilian Kennedy had been more just. "The doctrine of imitation had taken hold of the Greek critical world in the Hellenistic period shortly after creativity had failed . . . in Latin there was less reason for it until the literary achievements of the first century B.C. began to fade into the past."[41] This sequence would make imitation a symptom, not a cause, of decline. But was it either? Eloquence declined from Cicero's time to Quintilian's, yet thanks to Roman study of Greek theory, imitation was advocated for the student as vigorously in *De oratore* as in the *Institutio*. Certainly it would seem that imitation was never absent from the theory of rhetorical training at Rome. Mistrust of *imitatio* is natural to modern critics in the light of the Romantic antithesis between imitation and originality, but they do little justice to the insight, subtlety, and flexibility with which imitation was encouraged by the best ancient teachers. I hope this paper and its companion piece, "Imitation and Evolution," have done something to bring out the sanity and the fundamental usefulness of the ancient approach.

I do not believe it is possible to present a satisfactory analysis of the decline of eloquence, but I would like to end, like Tacitus, with a reminder of oratory's changed circumstances. We have seen that, where Roman orators of the first century after Christ turned their backs on the past, as Aper did, their product was geared to an idle and pretentious public. Oratory was always an applied art, chosen in the first place by the man who would use it for success in his relations with men, whether senate, people, or emperor; if a man loved the creative use of language in description or narrative, or philosophical argument, for its own sake, he would divert his talent into another genre. Given the applied nature of the art, how was the orator to use

40. *The Art of Rhetoric*, p. 243.
41. "An Estimate of Quintilian," p. 144.

it for the civilian heroism of defense or attack which Cicero's Crassus had idealized in *De oratore?*[42] Successful attack was possible only against guaranteed victims: the delatory oratory of Aper might sparkle, but the certainty of his destructive success inspired disgust. Successful defense had little scope, but the related art of encomium was always welcome when lavished on the *sapientissimus et unus.* Again the tone and content were foreordained, and only in ornament could men innovate. With a capable imperial administration there was no need for the *suasio* of deliberative oratory; with a perverted or despotic administration there was no possibility of a *dissuasio.* In short, for any man of action and principle, oratory finally became irrelevant or futile.[43]

Of the orators, some used their skill to impress the audience, applying the display of epideictic to the "real world" of public life; others doggedly persevered in the study of the rhetorical classics, hoping to maintain the constructive relationship between the past and their own generation which had been taught by the theorist under the rubric of *imitatio.* But neither choice could rescue their performance from the mediocrity to which a changed society had doomed them.

Trinity College,
University of Toronto

42. *De or.* 1. 32; cf. Antonius' eulogy in 2. 35.
43. This point is made by Kennedy, "Estimate," p. 146, but I am not convinced that there was any real scope for oratory in the "new type of orator" whom Kennedy proposes, "a civil servant with technical training, rather than a swayer of senate and people." We have many of these today and derive little inspiration from their words.