

## Mimesis, Duality, and Rhetorical Education

Robert Terrill

*The pedagogical strategy of imitatio cultivates particular attitudes and habits that are useful resources for democratic citizens. Specifically, a mimetic pedagogy cultivates duality, as manifest in a faculty of perspective taking and enabled through the close analysis of rhetorical texts. Reviving imitatio as the central component of a rhetorical education entails a productive critique of norms of sincerity that prevail in contemporary culture, and as such constitutes one of the more significant contributions that rhetorical education can make toward enhancing and sustaining democratic culture.*

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Scholars from disparate disciplines have recognized that a reinvigorated rhetorical education might contribute to the training of critically engaged citizens well-suited to a diverse democratic culture. Bryan Garsten, for example, has suggested that training in rhetoric is essential to cultivating a “capacity for practical judgment,” and that living in a culture that disparages rhetoric has crippled our political culture by leaving us without the skills necessary to bring our lived experiences to bear “on a particular case in a way that yields a decision” (174–175). Danielle Allen has argued that it is “time to turn to the imperfect ideals for trust production crafted in the rhetorical tradition” (140–141), and thus to rediscover tactics for repairing some of the fissures that characterize contemporary public culture, particularly but not exclusively with regards to race. And Elizabeth Markovits proposes a program of “rhetorical literacy,” analogous to the enduring calls for media literacy but with the far more vital potential to restore our ability to “talk and listen to one another in our own democracy” (Markovits 174).

This scholarship generally understands the value of rhetorical education as lying in its ability to aid in the production of rhetorical speech. Because rhetorical speech has palpable benefits for public culture, the reasoning goes, then rhetoric should be taught. Teachers of rhetoric certainly can appreciate and endorse such

motives. We often, however, also attribute to rhetorical education a more holistic, and perhaps a more radical, value—it cultivates not only a particular kind of discourse, but also, as David Fleming puts it, “a particular kind of person” (“Course of Study” 172). The point is not that a more instrumental training in speech or writing is somehow divorced from the cultivation of a citizen, of course, but that they are intimately linked. A person who is the product of a rhetorical education can be expected to be “engaged, articulate, resourceful, sympathetic, civil,” having cultivated “ethically framed, action-oriented, intellectual capacities” in the course of being “trained in, conditioned by, and devoted to what was once called *eloquence*” (“Course of Study” 172–173, 180). An education in rhetoric, from this point of view, produces not merely eloquence but also, and more importantly, a *rhetorician*; rhetorical education cultivates “an *acquirable virtue*,” and the pedagogy through which it is cultivated culminates in “*character*.” Ideally, Fleming notes, following James J. Murphy, a student of rhetoric “doesn’t so much *learn* rhetoric as ‘*becomes* rhetorical’” (“Course of Study” 178–179).

Jeffrey Walker has pointed out that Aristotle’s iconic definition at the beginning of the second chapter of the first book of the *Rhetoric*—“rhetoric is a faculty of observing in each case the available means of persuasion”—can be understood to describe rhetoric as “a faculty of critical judgment” concerning the production and assessment of public discourse. Isocrates, Walker notes, characterized the rhetorical education he offered to his students as a “‘gymnastic for the mind,’ the goal of which is to produce persons sufficiently skilled in thought and speech to make a useful contribution to civic life” (“On Rhetorical Traditions”; “Sophist’s Shoes” 148). Its purpose is “to develop a capacity, a *dunamis* of thought and speech, a deeply habituated skill, that can be carried into practical, grown-up, public life—as the student gathers experience and matures” (“On Rhetorical Traditions”). This is not merely some neutral or detached form of “critical thinking,” as that term has been evacuated by some educationists, but a mode of critical judgment that is specifically directed toward civic engagement, “a faculty of civic life disciplined by deep-seated norms of effectiveness and virtue” (Fleming “Becoming Rhetorical” 93). Brian Jackson outlines a broad and growing consensus in the field regarding the ideal product of a rhetorical education not merely as effective discourse but, more significantly, as civically responsible and public-minded people (185–186).

Teachers of rhetoric, then, understand their vocation as something more than merely the training of tongues; we are engaged in the formation of citizens. Walker argues that “without its teaching tradition, rhetoric is not rhetoric, but just another kind of philosophy or literary criticism. The teaching, the production of rhetorically habituated selves in an educational theater devoted to enacting and experiencing a dream of civic life, is what has always distinguished, and still distinguishes, what we do” (“On Rhetorical Traditions”). While it may be gratifying to hear scholars from outside the discipline argue that rhetoric is useful, and even that the low esteem generally accorded rhetoric is at least partially responsible

for some of the perceived deficiencies of contemporary public culture, it is our job to develop a nuanced and productive understanding of the relationships between pedagogical practices and the production of engaged, critical, and effective citizens. It falls to the teachers of rhetoric, in other words, to develop “a rich and effective notion of *practice*” (Fleming “Becoming Rhetorical” 107), especially with regard to pedagogical practice.<sup>1</sup>

This essay contributes to this development by exploring a pedagogical practice intimately associated with the rhetorical tradition: *imitatio*. I argue that this pedagogical technique, in which students analyze exemplary texts and then seek to emulate the most notable features of these texts, fosters attitudes and actions that are desirable in democratic citizens. This form of rhetorical training may be manifest in subsequent discursive production, but I want to suggest that its value exceeds the immediately instrumental—the product of an imitative pedagogy is not merely the production of eloquence, but also the cultivation of a set of habituated attitudes toward fellow citizens. Specifically, I argue that *imitatio*, as a rhetorical pedagogy, cultivates a form of duality that is an especially productive resource for citizenship, and that these doubled attitudes are among the outcomes of a rhetorical education that are its most significant contributions to public culture.

I begin by suggesting that positing duality as a key product of a rhetorical education places rhetoric in tension with cultural norms that privilege a unified point of view associated with sincerity. And while it might be argued that some cultivation of duality always has been an element of rhetorical skill—for example, through the *dissoi logoi*, or in the rhetorical denial of rhetorical sophistication—a mimetic pedagogy cultivates particular forms of duality that are especially productive. Or, to put it another way, establishing *imitatio* as the gravitational center of duality in rhetorical pedagogy yields a particularly rich and productive understanding of both the role of duality in public culture and the subtleties of its cultivation. In particular, I argue that a mimetic pedagogy encourages students to divide their attention between the exemplar and their own rhetorical production, to appreciate the inherent intertextuality of rhetorical texts, and to engage in a transformative discourse of duality. I conclude by suggesting that a revival of the tradition of mimetic pedagogy within rhetorical studies has broad implications for the impact of rhetorical education.

### Sincerity

Sincerity might inform and characterize a heartfelt effort at persuasion, as when the intended effect of discourse is fully aligned with the authentic commitments

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<sup>1</sup>Fleming himself provides one effort to forge a link between particular pedagogical strategies and citizenship education (“Becoming Rhetorical”).

of the speaker. When a senator believes deeply that the bill she has sponsored will benefit the nation, and urges the support of her colleagues and constituents, she might be called sincere. Sincerity might also refer to, or imply, a promise of some future action, as when a plumber remains committed to her original estimate despite unforeseen complications. And an attribution of sincerity might follow upon an explicit and public show of emotion, for example when a philandering executive weeps as he publicly confesses his transgressions. In these instances, sincerity contributes to effective persuasion as a style of speech that communicates a close alignment between one's mind and one's tongue. As Lionel Trilling puts it, sincerity "as we now use it refers primarily to a congruence between avowal and actual feeling" (2). When people say what they believe, or promise what they deliver, or otherwise show that the words they are saying are inexorably entwined with something firmly rooted in the material or emotional world, it helps to assuage the fear that words have become disconnected from things, that verbiage is empty sound, and that rhetoric is merely rhetoric.<sup>2</sup>

But sincerity has a complex relationship to rhetorical education. To the extent that such pedagogy is designed to prepare citizens for effective rhetorical performance, its priorities lie beyond the mere training of an expressive ability to accurately portray one's self to others. The success of a rhetorical performance is not assessed according to the degree that it expresses a latent or underlying motivation, commitment, or feeling, but instead is judged to succeed or fail depending on the response it stirs in an audience. A speaker might achieve this sort of success by translating private convictions into public speech, but also might not. As a corollary, an audience might be correct to understand a compelling public utterance as an authentic representation of an earnest commitment, but also might not. A rhetorical education cultivates a pervasive self-consciousness about discourse, an ability to stand to one side of linguistic performance—whether one's own or someone else's—and assess it along multiple lines of effectiveness rather than at the single point of authenticity. Of course, this ability can provide the unscrupulous with the means to hoodwink the unprepared, and so a fully sincere discursive world will always be a seductive fantasy. But it would be a fatal fantasy, because a public culture within which enthusiasm for sincerity has been elevated to a "cult of plain speaking" (Haiman 101), and where "the reigning view of rhetorical speech is that it is a disruptive force in politics and a threat to democratic deliberation" (Garsten 3), would not only leave us at the mercy of hucksters and charlatans but also severely cripple the flexibility and perspective-taking that enable us to get along.

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<sup>2</sup>The attributes of sincerity that I am emphasizing here, and their utility within a democratic culture, resemble those associated with *parrhesia*, or "frank speech" (Foucault; Balot). One important difference between the two concepts is that *parrhesia* does not carry with it the connotation of Romantic self-expression that has accrued to our contemporary usage of *sincerity* (Melzer).

The tension between rhetorical education and contemporary norms of sincerity may stem from the fact that “sincerity” derives from Latin and Indo-European roots denoting not only cleanliness, purity, and honesty but also singularity or simplicity.<sup>3</sup> Sincerity is recognized as the style of speech most closely associated with authenticity because it presents the self as whole or undivided. Because “the sincere speaker is unitary,” Markovits points out, “there is no split self, no self-consciousness that would allow the speaker to manipulate her own words for greatest effect” (34)—and thus little room for the linguistic self-consciousness fostered through rhetorical education. An education that disparages rhetoric would emphasize what Richard Lanham has referred to as the “C-B-S” theory of prose, dictating that language ideally should be clear, brief, and concise, “maximally transparent and minimally self-conscious.” Establishing “sincerity as a central evaluative term,” he continues, “implies that there is a central self to be sincere to, a ‘real me’ halfway between the ears,” and consequently that the quality of an utterance is judged according to how closely the utterance adheres to that “real me” (Lanham *Analyzing Prose* 1–2; *Style: An Anti-Textbook*).<sup>4</sup> A rhetorical education, in contrast, would produce citizens who assume a “natural agility in changing orientations,” who dwell “not in a single value-structure but in several,” and who are “thus committed to no single construction of the world”; while such citizens may relinquish “the luxury of a central self,” Lanham argues, they would gain “the tolerance, and usually the sense of humor, that comes from knowing [they]—and others—not only may *think* differently, but may *be* differently” (*Motives of Eloquence* 5).

One traditional component of the rhetorical paideia that contributes to the problematic relationship between rhetoric and sincerity is rooted in the *dissoi logoi*, the practice of producing arguments on two sides of an issue. Thomas Sloane argues that “the ancient dialogic practice of generating arguments on both sides of the question” is “of the essence in traditional rhetorical education,” and in particular that it is the “core” of rhetorical invention (11, 3, 30). Generating persuasive arguments on competing sides fosters flexibility and *copía*, and is thus an essential pedagogical practice that encourages a fullness both of ideas and of words. But composing two-sided arguments implies, of course, that at least one of the arguments does not represent the sincerely held conviction of the speaker. As Ronald Greene and Darrin Hicks put it, debating both sides of an issue requires

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<sup>3</sup>Trilling 12; Skeat 555; Jeske 145. The second syllable comes from the Indo-European root *ker*, meaning “to grow,” so that the roots of “sincerity” suggest “one growth” or having a single origin, and thus unadulterated purity. Jeske relates the folk etymology of “sincere” as meaning “without wax,” allegedly referring to the practice of Roman sculptors to use wax to fill in mistakes. Skeat states that this etymology is “unlikely,” while the *Oxford English Dictionary* declares flatly that “there is no probability” in it.

<sup>4</sup>Compare Guignon, describing authenticity: “The basic assumption built into the idea of authenticity is that, lying within each individual, there is a deep, ‘true self’—the ‘Real Me’—in distinction from all that is not really me” (6).

“de-coupling the sincerity principle from the arguments presented by a debater” (101). The citizen engaged in producing both pro and con arguments cannot reliably present the unitary self associated with sincere speech; she is bifurcated, perhaps unable to seem committed to a single position and certainly unable to present her discourse without self-consciousness. This inherent critique of the sincerity norm is one reason for the long-standing place of the *dissoi logoi* in rhetorical pedagogy, as it “grooms one to appreciate the process of debate as a method of democratic decision-making” (Greene and Hicks 102). “Debating both sides,” further, “transforms the student-debater by developing a post-conventional morality—one capable of making moral judgments based on reason and not authority or personal convictions” (120). *Dissoi logoi*, as a practice, contributes to citizen education, then, by nudging students away from their tendency to conflate persuasion with conviction and toward a self-conscious faculty of reasoned judgment.

A second corollary of rhetorical training that emphasizes the ability to sustain a doubled perspective is implied in the observation that rhetorical art is most effective when it effaces itself. The mark of a truly masterful rhetorician, it is often acknowledged, is that her rhetorical discourse displays no hint of rhetorical training. “The smell of the midnight oil emanating from the orator’s study,” Michael Cahn reminds us, “has always been detrimental to his cause” (66). One result of this distrust of rhetoric is a “rhetoric of anti-rhetoric,” a form of rhetorical public discourse that is employed as a critique of rhetoric and as a means through which to dismiss the discourse of one’s opponents (Hesk). But this self-effacement also produces a self-conscious “double deficiency of self-confirmation” (Cahn 66) that sets rhetoric apart from most of the other liberal arts: geometry is not expected to efface itself from geometry, logic from logic, or music from music, but rhetoric cannot lay claim to its own practice. This is one source of rhetoric’s low regard—it cannot even participate in its own defense, but instead invites its practitioners to engage in the “dramatic fiction” that their public address is entirely innocent of rhetorical self-consciousness (Ober 190–191). Rhetoric’s self-denying quality cultivates a duality in its practitioners because they must be both willing to devote themselves to a demanding art and able to mask their devotion. But it is a productive duality, because suppressing rhetorical self-consciousness allows citizens to regard one another as reliable.

*Imitatio*, as a tenet of rhetorical pedagogy, is as central to the tradition as two-sided debate and strategic effacement, but is less often noted as valuable for the crafting of democratic citizens. The student schooled through imitation attends to both her own discourse and the discourse of another, simultaneously, and thus must divide her attention in a way that is similar to that required by two-sided argument and that suggests a similar implied critique of sincerity. Students shaped through a mimetic pedagogy are inherently bifurcated, influenced by their individual motives as well as their understanding of cultural norms and traditions. Such training renders students “simultaneously active and passive” as they are sensitized to the cultural constraints inherent in rhetorical performance

while at the same time schooled in verbal techniques designed to aid in the persuasion of an audience (Leff “Tradition” 139).<sup>5</sup> As with two-sided argumentation, the object is to invite the student out of her accustomed compositional habits and comfortable commitments, and thereby to encourage the sort of reasoned judgments that we imagine are required of engaged democratic citizens.

But one of the charges frequently made against two-sided argument is that it necessitates a divide from “real world” issues, and thus risks a tendency toward a detached Scholastic formalism (Sloane 282–283). Greene and Hicks point out that as a pedagogical technique it does not depend on a direct relationship to the issues and discourses that populate the world outside the academy, and that in fact advocates of switch-side debating often see a “sharp distinction between school and public debate” (105). A mimetic pedagogy, on the other hand, depends for its very effect on its engagement with real-world models. These exemplars, even if separated historically or geographically from students’ lived experience—perhaps especially then—serve as inventional resources whose context and purpose must be analytically engaged together with their artfulness and structure. Such exemplars display not only the tactics that were used in the past to engage a public audience, but also those that might be used in the future. Imitatio might be said to break the “third wall” of the rhetorical classroom, producing an interactive space in which the world outside the classroom necessarily impinges on the education and practice within; the compositional exercises might be lubricated, rather than stigmatized, by the midnight oil, because the norms to which they are made to respond include the pervasive distrust of rhetoric. A mimetic pedagogy does not draw the student inward toward an artificial and insulated schoolroom exercise, but rather outward toward a political culture.

### Mimesis

Writing in 1951, Donald Leman Clark noted that to “quote all that was said in praise of imitation would exhaust rather than inform my reader,” and this no doubt would be even more true today (13). Because it was the dominant pedagogical practice in rhetoric at least from Isocrates to Augustine, it would be impossible to provide a complete historical review within the space of a single essay (although McKeon very nearly accomplishes this). For the purposes of my argument, I will concentrate only upon the headwaters of a rhetorical tradition that is especially closely associated with mimetic pedagogy, the tradition that Michael Leff terms “humanistic rhetoric.” Extending from Isocrates through Cicero and Quintilian and from there into the Renaissance, this tradition, as he describes it, is

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<sup>5</sup>The bifurcated citizen that I am suggesting as the outcome of a rhetorical education bears some resemblance to the de-centered self of some contemporary critical theory. See, for example, Rosenau, 42–61; Seigel, 603–650.

characterized by “a suspicious attitude toward abstract theory ... ; a conviction that discourse ... has a constitutive role to play in civic life; a valorization and idealization of eloquence ... ; and a conception of virtue that is decisively linked to political activity” (“Tradition” 136). I would add to this list of key characteristics a commitment to *imitatio* as the ideal means through which these qualities might be inculcated in students. Imitation facilitates the transfer of knowledge without relying on abstract precept, it regards discursive exemplars as worthy of emulation precisely because they are the key components of public culture, it encourages its students to seek out eloquence in all its forms, and it recognizes that these exemplars of eloquence are the medium through which virtues are embodied and passed on.

A rhetorical training informed by these commitments, as Leff points out, was the object of Enlightenment critiques that continue to resonate into the present day, as “it rendered the orator heteronomous and therefore incapable of exercising either imaginative freedom or clear, unfettered reason” (Leff “Tradition” 140). An individual who is the product of a rhetorical education cannot be *sincere*, in other words, in any naïve sense of imagining herself or himself to be a wholly originary genius speaking entirely from the heart (or from divine inspiration). Within a mimetic pedagogy inspiration comes through a productive encounter between the internal talents of the rhetor and external resources of her or his culture and discursive traditions. *Imitatio*, then, might encourage duality in multiple ways, but I will focus on two: it requires students to divide their attention between the immediate requirements of the case at hand and the models they are using as resources, and it structures a dialogic relationship between a critic/rhetor and a text that is perceived to be inherently intertextual.<sup>6</sup> That is, a mimetic pedagogy instills productive habits that disrupt the notions of transparency and authenticity associated with a discourse of sincerity by insisting that the process of rhetorical invention relies on the analysis of texts produced by others, which in turn forces the realization that public texts necessarily bear the imprint of multiple authors.<sup>7</sup> *Imitatio* is not a single-minded process in which the rhetor simply absorbs and then regurgitates another’s ideas, but a double-minded inventive process through which the student rhetor analyzes both the model text and the target situation in order to craft discourse fitted to her purposes, abilities, and audience. As James Jasinski puts it, “*Imitatio* is not the mere repetition or mechanistic reproduction

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<sup>6</sup>Other forms of mimetic practice might include “poetic mimesis,” which concerns the production of art, and most specifically the extent to which art might reproduce nature, and “cultural mimesis,” which concerns the practices through which human cultures define themselves as more like, or less like, one another. However, any attempt to thoroughly differentiate these mimetic practices from one another is doomed to fail. Key texts in these complementary mimetic traditions would include Auerbach and Taussig. Melberg provides a thorough and concise overview of various theories of mimesis.

<sup>7</sup>It might be said that a rhetorical education cultivates an understanding of rhetorical agency as “promiscuous and protean” (Campbell).



of something found in an existing text. It is a complex process that allows historical texts to serve as equipment for future rhetorical production” (201). In order for exercises in mimetic pedagogy to be productive, a certain distance has to be maintained between the model and reader; too much synchrony and overlap would eliminate the space that provides opportunities for invention. Arthur E. Walzer, for example, referring specifically to Isocrates’s use of mimesis, notes that because “the purpose of the instruction is heuristic, the goal would not be to reconcile the different views presented in the different speeches but to discuss the salience of each response in different circumstances as a way to increasing the fullness of students’ experience” (121). The purpose is to expand the inventional range of the student, not to accommodate the models within the gravitational field of the student’s own predilections.

The student engaged in mimetic pedagogy strives to take on some characteristics of the exemplar, but never to *become* the exemplar. A moment of eloquence may have been a fitting response to a particular past situation, but to import it directly into a present situation would be absurd, and perhaps repulsive. While we “might say that the prospect of having someone speak with the greatness of a Churchill or a Cicero is not unattractive,” Bender reminds us, “in practice the particular style and inventions of these speakers, if revived with perfect fidelity, would be strange sounding, encrusted with historical idioms, and probably incapable of moving or enlightening an audience” (344). Or, as Corbett puts it, ancient teachers of rhetoric “did not want to reproduce facsimiles of Demosthenes; they wanted to produce orators who could speak *as effectively as* Demosthenes” (245). Utterances exist as living discourse only in response to a particular exigency. A mimetic pedagogy must aim to sustain the otherness, the strangeness, of the model, maintaining the gap between student and model and thus avoiding an unproductive collapse either of student into model, or model into student.

This specialized hermeneutical activity, through which exemplary texts are rendered available as equipment for further rhetorical invention, is itself two-sided. The student can give her undivided attention neither to explication nor to production, but must engage in each within the context of the other. Corbett describes the two phases of *imitatio* as “analysis” and “genesis”:

Analysis was the stage in which students, under the guidance of the teacher, made a close study of the model to observe how its excellences followed the precepts of art. Genesis was the stage in which students attempt to produce something or to do something similar to the model that had been analyzed. (27)

The reciprocating association of interpretation and production that is fostered through *imitatio* is one of the most salient qualities of the practice. The interpretive act provides the basis for the productive act, even as the interpretive approach is directed by the need to produce a discourse to address a particular situation. Thus, the two steps of rhetorical mimesis in practice become two parts of a

self-sustaining productive cycle. They are so intimately connected, in fact, that they almost would seem to be a centripetal force toward unification rather than a centrifugal force toward fragmentation and duality. As Leff puts it, for example, “while the end of the process [of *imitatio*] is a productive act of invention, this act is so intimately connected to interpretation that production and interpretation virtually coalesce” (“Idea of Rhetoric” 98–99). Worton and Still present a similar picture, drawing on one of Quintilian’s more vivid images: “Imitation as theory and practice presupposes a virtual simultaneity and identification of reading and writing, but it also implies and depends upon a process of transformation. Quintilian’s metaphor for the process is *liquefaction*” (6–7). (They refer to the *Institutio Oratoria* at X.i.19; the metaphor is of mastication). The transformative potential of rhetorical mimesis is discussed below. Here, however, it should be noted that such images risk misrepresenting the level of integration that actually pertains to analysis and genesis within rhetorical mimesis.

Although a mimetic pedagogy seeks to understand the two processes of analysis and genesis as depending on and feeding each other in a productive symbiosis, the rhetor is not expected to find a middle way between interpretation and production, or to synthesize a third practice that entails them both. Rather, a rhetor schooled through *imitatio* learns to oscillate her attention *between* analysis and genesis, so that she constantly is shifting her identity between “interpreter” and “performer.” To draw again upon Quintilian’s digestive metaphor, one must not chew and talk at the same time; a mimetic pedagogy instills the faculty of being able to switch from one to the other, not of being able to do both simultaneously. This is analogous to the “toggle-switch” that Richard Lanham describes as an ability to alternate between attitudes of “looking at” and “looking through” language, studying the form of others’ voices (and your own) in order to more effectively accomplish your own (and others’) instrumental purpose (“‘Q’ Question” 188–190). Such toggling or oscillation also, Lanham argues, is the basis of understanding rhetorical education as cultivating civic virtue; democratic civic life seems to require that we move forward on the impulse of “mixed motives”—play and purpose, game and goal, virtue and virtuosity, individual and community (“Q Question” 188–193). The mixed motives of rhetorical awareness constitute interpretation and production—uneasily coalesced and dynamically liquid, but never fully amalgamated into a bland mash—and their pull and push keep the rhetorical art from slipping into irrelevance either through a fatal rupture with the past or through a tradition-bound calcification.

*Imitatio* not only encourages a doubleness in its students, but it also encourages them to understand public texts as double-voiced. W. Ross Winterowd writes that “every rhetorician must subscribe to the doctrine of imitation, for, obviously, parthenogenesis occurs no more in matters of discourse than in the natural world” (161). His point seems to be that a rhetorical pedagogy brings students to the realization that all rhetorical texts have been formed through the critique and recombination of previous rhetorical texts, and that therefore the analysis of previous

discourse is the foundation for the production of new discourse. The rhetorician cannot subscribe to the ideal of the solitary individual who produces great art through creative genius, but rather must recognize that all effective rhetorical texts are produced through inventive labor within an imitative matrix.

As an interstitial art, rhetoric recognizes the mutual impact of texts upon texts and that rhetorical products are intimately and inevitably connected with other rhetorical products. This recognition militates against reading texts “as a privileged unit of meaning” because they are instead seen both as the progeny of previous texts and as the sources of subsequent texts (Leff, “Idea of Rhetoric” 97). A mimetic pedagogy, thus, instills in a student an awareness that she does not exclusively author even her own discourses, and that therefore she both can and cannot say precisely what it is that she intends to say. She must always be aware not only that she is speaking and acting within a context constituted by what others have said, but also that others have said, in part, what she is saying.

### Memorization, Translation, Paraphrase

As described by Cicero and Quintilian, mimetic pedagogy as a component of rhetorical education depends on three interrelated instructional practices: memorization, translation, and paraphrase. These might be termed intertextual teaching practices, as they encourage the student to “become rhetorical” through specific forms of textual interaction. Together, these pedagogical exercises cultivate the ability to toggle the roles of interpreter and producer, agent and agency, subject and object, and in general instill the verbal flexibility and inventional self-consciousness that are at the core of a rhetorical education and through which students are transformed into citizens.

Of these, translation and paraphrase generally receive the most attention in both the primary and secondary literatures, perhaps because they seem to be more potentially transformative than memorization; it is not surprising that “memory” is the most neglected canon in a culture dedicated to the ideals of sincerity and originary creativity. But Quintilian defends memorization, and in terms that at least suggest its potential for fostering forms of doubleness. His opening comments on memorization recall Isocrates’s view of rhetorical education as a form of gymnastic for the mind by suggesting an analogy to physical exercise: “it is better exercise for the memory to take in other people’s words than one’s own,” he notes, and “those who are trained in this more difficult task will easily fix their own compositions in their mind.” In suggesting that performing the more difficult task of memorizing someone else’s words can make the task of memorizing one’s own words easier, it seems that Quintilian is focused on aiding the student’s effort to express her thoughts most effectively. In this sense, then, memorization seems more inclined to nurture the transparency characteristic of sincerity. However, as Quintilian continues, it becomes clear that he holds a more complex view. Students so trained “will get used to the best models and always have objects of

imitation in their minds,” “will now unconsciously reproduce the style of the speech which they have so thoroughly absorbed,” and “will also acquire a plentiful and choice vocabulary, and a command of Composition and Figures, not now artificially sought but spontaneously appearing, as it were, out of their hoarded treasure” (II.vii.3–4). Here, memorization promotes a willingness to accept another’s words as a resource for one’s own, not to be regurgitated whole but as an inventional provocation and aid. When the rhetor faces the challenges inherent in addressing a particular situation, the memorized figures spontaneously present themselves to provide a fitting shape and structure.

In this way, a discourse that has been memorized does not simply reside within the student as an inert or benign parasite, but instead actually exerts a transformative impact, altering the discourse produced by the student, much as the DNA of some viruses intermingles with their hosts. The student, then, is no longer merely the student, but a hybrid entity composed in part of the discourses she has memorized. By way of analogy, consider Kenneth Burke’s explanation of *identification*. As he puts it in his *Rhetoric of Motives*:

In being identified with B, A is “substantially one” with a person other than himself. Yet at the same time he remains unique, an individual locus of motives. Thus he is both joined and separate, at once a distinct substance and consubstantial with another. (21)

Similarly, in a mimetic pedagogy the imitator might be said to *identify* with the exemplar, perhaps so that the exemplar becomes an integral part of the student, but she is never fully absorbed.

With regard to translation and paraphrase, the potential for duality is even more pronounced. While translation, for example, would seem by definition an effort to duplicate the meaning of an original, both Cicero and Quintilian not only recognize that exact duplication is impossible but also understand this impossibility as an opportunity. Cicero, “often considered the founder of Western translation theory” (Robinson 7), recommended that students “translate freely Greek speeches of the most eminent orators” as a way to learn to deploy the “best words—and yet quite familiar ones” and to coin, by imitation and analogy, “certain words such as would be new to our people” (*De Oratore* I.xxxiv.155). Elsewhere Cicero describes himself as translating “as an orator,” which he distinguishes from an effort to produce a “word for word” copy of an original; the purpose instead is “keeping the same ideas and the forms, or as one might say, the ‘figures’ of thought, but in language which conforms to our usage” (*De optimo genere oratorum* 5.14–15). For Cicero, the value of translation for an orator is not in the faithful duplication of an original text, but in the invention of a new text that relies upon the form or shape of the original, modifying even those as necessary. Quintilian agrees, noting that “when we translate them [Greeks texts], we are free to use the best possible words, for the words we use will all be our own.

As to Figures ... we simply cannot help contriving many of these, and of various kinds, because Latin idiom is often different from Greek” (X.v.3). The slippage between the original and the translation, in other words, provides an opportunity for invention. Because the student can neither fully inhabit the language of the model nor bring that other language fully into her own, translation requires a two-sided linguistic awareness: the student must attempt to reproduce the meaning of the original while at the same time she must invent new words and figures. The resulting text stands alongside the model, both like and unlike the original but in no way intrinsically inferior to it, thus disrupting the implied deprecation of duplicates that characterizes a culture dedicated to sincerity.

While Cicero and Quintilian are largely in agreement about the value of translation as a mimetic activity they part ways with regard to paraphrase. Cicero describes his youthful practice of paraphrasing, which incorporated memorization in ways that forecast Quintilian’s later comments: the young Cicero would select “some poetry, the most impressive to be found,” or “read as much of some speech as I could keep in my memory, and then declaim upon the actual subject-matter of my reading, choosing as far as possible different words.” But his enthusiasm for paraphrase waned, because he found that “those words which best befitted each subject, and were the most elegant and in fact the best, had been already seized upon” by the composers of his models (*De oratore* I.xxxiv.154). He came to believe that using the same words as the original “profited me nothing,” while using different words caused him to produce only an inferior copy. Thus Cicero finds himself bound by a common critique of mimesis—that it produces either a mindless duplicate or an inferior copy—and finds his way out of it by turning to translation.

Quintilian’s enthusiasm for paraphrase remained undiminished, however, because he does not see it leading inevitably toward Cicero’s dilemma. He declares, instead, that: “I do not want Paraphrase to be a mere passive reproduction, but to rival and vie with the original in expressing the same thoughts” (X.v.4–5). Rather than the inferior copy imagined by Cicero, for Quintilian the new text is personified as a rival entity, a sort of doppelganger, for the original. The two texts compete with one another, making the doubleness explicit; as in translation, for Quintilian paraphrase results in two texts that are not distinguished by a hierarchical relationship, and the student is asked to oscillate her or his attention between the two of them. Responding explicitly to Cicero, Quintilian acknowledges that “If there were only one way of saying a thing well, we might legitimately suppose that our predecessors blocked the road for us; but in fact there are countless ways, and many roads lead to the same destination” (X.v.7–8). This passage leads Clark to suggest that Quintilian understood paraphrase to be a “free and more creative act than it seems to have appeared to Cicero,” and that he “expected his students, in effect, to write or speak a new theme on the same subject, saying the same thing that his author had said, but changing the tone of the style as well as the words,” in a manner similar to that in which students of musical composition are required to

write “variations on a theme composed by a master” (19–21). Elaine Fantham pushes this idea further, arguing that for Quintilian paraphrase presented a form of “competitive imitation,” through which the student attempts to surpass the eloquence of the model (109). It even might be argued that Quintilian is here enacting his ideal form of paraphrase, as he exceeds the limitations of his own model, Cicero. For Quintilian, paraphrase entails an interpretive engagement with the model, in which its rhetorical strategies are mined as resources for alternative statements on related themes. Paraphrase, then, perhaps to a greater degree than either memorization or translation, presents an especially salient critique of sincerity. Here the rhetorician-in-training is not merely quoting another’s text, nor following the form of internalized models, nor improvising in the inevitable aporia between different languages; she is, rather, producing her own text through an active and self-conscious alteration of a model. The potential for duality in such practice is clear when Quintilian goes on to suggest that it can be useful to paraphrase even one’s own writing, “deliberately taking up some thoughts and turning them in as many ways as possible, just as one shape after another can be made out of the same piece of wax.” The purpose of such exercises is to develop, as Quintilian puts it, “the capacity to expand what is by nature brief, amplify the insignificant, vary the monotonous, lend charm to what has been already set out, and speak well and at length on a limited subject” (X.v.9–11).

These, of course, are the very qualities of rhetoric that mark its danger in a culture dedicated to sincerity, for they signal a willingness to alter nature rather than merely portray it. But they also are the qualities that qualify rhetoric as the fundamental liberal art in a diverse democracy. Memorization and translation seem less like withered and withering classroom exercises, in this context, and more like training in the important ability to appreciate the arguments of others as resources for the invention of one’s own reply, and thus perhaps to engage in a sort of talk that makes deliberation possible. To be able to recognize the limitations of translation, and to celebrate them as inventive openings, is to be able to approach the unfamiliar perspectives of civic strangers as opportunities for cooperative invention rather than as moments of potential cooptation, misunderstanding, or silence. Paraphrase, as Quintilian understood it, facilitates deliberation as it constitutes the common ground upon which competing discourses can vie without becoming mutually incomprehensible. Memorization, translation, and paraphrase, then, are not stultifying schoolroom routines but rather are the techniques through which we might invent the new discourses that will draw our culture into a coherence that does not mandate uniformity—in Allen’s terms, into a culture that replaces a reverence for “oneness” with an appreciation for “wholeness” (87).

### Transformative Duality

A significant, and not unintended, corollary of *imitatio* is that the student becomes extraordinarily culturally literate, sensitive to the myriad ways that the past may

exert its influence upon the present and future. “Unlike the romantic and, at least to a certain extent, systematic approaches to invention,” as Jasinski puts it, “the imitative model locates speakers and writers in a world of *other texts and voices* that help to shape the generation of discourse” (329). Such a student imagines herself neither to be declaiming in isolation nor speaking into the ether, but always to be in dialogue with innumerable other texts and thus formed, in part, through them. “A student trained to imitate models, to speak in different ways” Bender argues, can “conform language and reasoning to the capacities of different audiences, and thus create that consubstantiality between speaker and audience, the rhetorically created scene of community” (344). Within such a community, the goal of a rhetorical education is not to be able to recite great examples of past eloquence but rather to develop “a faculty for judging when to use a strategy and how to embody it appropriately in a concrete case” (Leff, “Idea of Rhetoric” 98). The particular form of duality fostered through an imitative pedagogy is the catalyst through which cultural and discursive traditions are reinterpreted and redeployed.

The effective orator must be able to apprehend, respond to, and participate in a flow of events unfolding synchronically through time, while at the same time working from models that allow her to mimic another intelligence engaged in a similarly fluid, though diachronic, critical practice. In this way, *imitatio* supports the production of new ideas and new forms, as culture and tradition are revised, refashioned, and even resisted. Sharon Crowley understands imitation as encouraging students to “perfect the presentation of an old theme through adding, changing, or omitting” (24), and “perfecting,” in this case, refers not to improving the extent to which the copy resembles the model, but to transforming the historical model so that it more perfectly addresses the requirements of a specific contemporary situation. Within a mimetic pedagogy, students learn to see public texts collectively as a quickened reservoir of inventional resources, as models to critique and emulate—not as a museum in the colloquial sense as a place where dead relics are silently displayed, but rather in a constitutive sense as a place where muses are summoned in a tumultuous intertextuality. Far from encouraging students to become entrapped within the confines of tradition, therefore, a mimetic pedagogy actually provides students with attitudes and resources that encourage them to contribute to cultural change.

This transformative potential of *imitatio* stems, in part, from the inherent duality it encourages in its students. It entails a “creative reenactment” of past discourses and as such is a primary constituent of rhetorical invention (Haskins 76). As enacted within a rhetorical education through exercises including memorization, translation, and paraphrase, a mimetic pedagogy does not encourage mechanical reproduction. Indeed, *imitatio* stands against such instruction and is intended, instead, to foster rhetorical judgment, the ability to apprehend the available means of persuasion in each particular case as it is unfolding through time. As such, individuals who have been trained in the rhetorical arts are explicitly and irreversibly self-conscious about their rhetorical performances, so that while they

may motivate and even inspire, they can never be utterly transparent—indeed, it is their performative self-awareness that marks them, in part, as rhetoricians. And this is a faculty that cannot be gained through an instrumental memorization and application of precept, but only through a sustained encounter and exchange with exemplary texts.

It may be helpful to characterize the duality I am ascribing to mimetic pedagogy as something very much like an attitude, as defined by Burke. Attitudes are, for instance, “incipient acts” (*Attitudes* 348, *Grammar* 242–243), meaning that an attitude is preparatory or anticipatory to action, exhibiting a potential that is likely to be realized, “a general disposition (involving thought and action) to respond (by thought and action) in a particular way” (Wolin 100). Attitude often is manifest as style; as Vito Signorile puts it, attitude signifies “an *approach*, something ... like a *style*, which guides the action” (89). In his well-known formulation from *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke puts it this way: “to build something with a hammer would involve an instrument, or ‘agency’; to build with diligence would involve an ‘attitude,’ a ‘how’” (443). A doubled attitude, then, would entail not only an orientation toward action but also a leaning toward acting, a habit of engaging with the world and with others in a doubled manner and a motivation to do so.

Cultivating such an attitude would not be anathema to the constitution of individual agency or voice, but would nurture it. A pedagogy for citizenship that depends on the slavish copying of others would undermine a democratic culture dependent on the ability of its citizens to craft effective public address. It would seem a recipe for a dull uniformity rather than a healthy agonism. But a mimetic pedagogy grounded in a revival of the practices described here would cultivate attitudes of citizenship that would encourage perhaps the most vital and potentially transformative of democratic acts—inhabiting another’s point of view. A doubled attitude would not only enable citizens to assemble an effective public voice of their own, through the thorough study of prior public voices, but also would inform that voice itself. Frank M. Farmer and Phillip K. Arrington have suggested that the student “who has imitated or ‘tried on’ many selves is sooner able to lay claim to one of her own than the student writer who is constantly implored to ‘be yourself’ or ‘be original,’ ” and that imitation should be “understood as a dialogue with, not a parroting of, *the language of the other*, without whom no such thing as ‘a language of one’s own’ would be possible” (22, 28). But at least of equal importance is that mimetic pedagogy fosters an understanding of the self as an inherently doubled product of the ongoing dialogues that characterize a democratic culture; *imitatio* does cultivate the invention of an individual voice, in the sense of one that is a unique amalgamation, but it is an individual voice characterized by duality.

## Conclusion

A rhetorical education enhances analytical or expressive faculties, but it does so for the express purpose of preparing for a vigorous engagement in civic life.



Rhetorical education, as Brian Jackson reminds us, entails the “*training of a capacity* in the students that can be, and according to this model of education, *ought* to be used in public life” (181, 185). Furthermore, the rhetorical *paideia* mobilizes an ancient association between verbal acuity and civic engagement. Not only does the former enable the latter, but a rhetorical education is animated by the confidence that the habits cultivated in an effort to achieve eloquence are analogous to those that must be cultivated in actively engaged citizens. Robert Hariman explains it this way: “Because a process of literal imitation is not useful, students have to not only acquire expertise but also learn to use it according to standards of opportunity, propriety, and originality, which in turn are resources for civic leadership” (222–223). Although an imitative pedagogy might seem to have an inherently conservative tendency, it is intended as a powerful medium through which citizens are presented with models for civic, not merely civil, engagement.

Democracy cannot proceed by sincerity alone. A culture ruled by a strict adherence to norms of sincerity—to the extent that such norms might encourage unitary individuals to engage one another in the construction of a uniform culture— would be characterized by hierarchies and traditions calcified as impenetrable obstacles to the flow of forms and ideas that nourishes public life. Citizens in such a culture would be encouraged toward the continual “self-surveillance” associated with authenticity, “aimed at finding out exactly what one wants and how one feels about things” in an attempt to achieve a “total transparency of self to self” (Guignon 8), and as a result the rhetorical faculty through which individuals seek to construct a culture with one another would grow stagnant. Such citizens would become “aphasic,” to use Allen’s term, lacking productive ways of speaking to one another. Other pedagogical practices are available, most notably the two-sided argumentation associated with the *dissoi logoi*, but *imitatio* cultivates a particular and interrelated set of habits of thought and action that are especially productive for democratic citizenship: a divided attention that requires students to attend to both their own rhetorical production and that of others in an oscillation that discourages a solipsistic isolation; intertextual pedagogies that enable students to track the multiple influences of prior (and future) rhetorical discourse; and a potentially transformative duality that enables and encourages inhabiting unfamiliar perspectives.

One of the terms for duality that I have avoided throughout this essay is *duplicity*. It is a term that is especially provocative, as it calls to mind not only the doubleness that I have been arguing is associated with mimetic pedagogy but also the anxiety about deception that persistently plays at the edges of rhetorical pedagogy in general and *imitatio* in particular. Skill in rhetoric does not make one an inveterate liar. But it does cultivate an understanding “that it is *sometimes* justified to lie” (Hesk 175). A rhetorician might be understood as duplicitous in two senses; she is divided or doubled in the several ways described above, and she cannot be trusted to present herself as a unitary, unified, monological entity.

In 1957 Richard Murphy critiqued switch-side debating by asserting that because a “public statement is a public commitment,” a debater should not be asked to defend a position to which she is not actually committed (2; Greene and Hicks 103–105). An analogous case could be made against *imitatio*, for it requires students to acknowledge that any discourse they produce is not fully the product of their own personal convictions. And the self-effacement of rhetoric requires students to pretend that they are less sophisticated than they really are. Our collective distrust of these doubled motives of rhetoric have contributed to the rise of our current culture of sincerity, with all its evident dysfunction. As Markovits points out, our reverence for sincerity “is meant to counter the potential for manipulative speech or outright trickery in a deliberative democracy” (25). Sincerity is so completely prized because the duplicity at the other end of the spectrum is so utterly suspect.

A revival of mimetic pedagogy might redress the problematic effects of the utter disparagement of duplicity. Although a large part of our distrust of *imitatio* might be traced to “the Romantic antithesis between imitation and originality,” as Fantham reminds us, such simplified notions “do little justice to the insight, subtlety, and flexibility with which imitation was encouraged by the best ancient teachers” (115). Reviving the tradition of *imitatio* would help to answer the call for a greater role for rhetoric in contemporary public culture, and in particular it would help to clarify the implications of the particular pedagogical techniques on which such an expanded role would rely. The benefits of a mimetic pedagogy would include a heightened awareness of the performativity of public life and a willingness to take it seriously, the recognition of the parallel dualities inherent in persuasion and democratic culture, and perhaps especially the replacing of discourses of monologic sincerity with ways of speaking that acknowledge and deploy a double-voiced multiperspectivism (Allen 16, 87). These habits of mind invite the rhetor to see herself as enfolded in culture, and in turn to understand that culture constantly is being remade through the discursive intermingling of past form and present circumstance. The duality fostered through rhetorical imitation is manifest in the ability to invite different perspectives into one’s head without fully assimilating them, to translate freely another’s discourse into a more familiar idiom while preserving its distinction, to view innovation and tradition as complementary rather than contradictory, to produce new texts that everyone knows are not wholly new. As an antidote to the obstacles of consensus, this doubled attitude recognizes that we cannot come together if each one of us is seamlessly unified. The ability to memorize, translate, and paraphrase the discourse of others, and thus to engage such discourse with the intention of producing doubled texts, is perhaps the essential skill that rhetorical training can contribute toward the invention of a robust culture. Simply, if rhetoric is to participate in a revitalizing of the quality of democratic public discourse, then we must recognize and renew *imitatio* in all its duality.

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