necessity I haven't heard too many postmodernists try to critique, much less change). This at least would have given me, and her readers, some bases for determining whether "magic" had indeed occurred. After all, when David Copperfield does his magic, we see the evidence for it right before eyes, even though we know we've been tricked. In Minock's article, we're promised magic but don't get to see one single trick. The tricks we do see in the long theoretical section have been done before—and too many times, for my money!

Minock has made her choices, I suppose; but I sincerely hope hers is one text that will not be "imitated"—by either students or composition scholars who write about imitation in the future.

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Works Cited


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Imitation Pedagogy: Postmodernist or No
A Response to Phillip Arrington

MARY MINOCK

First of all I want to thank Professor Arrington for reading my article. His passion for imitation pedagogy is obvious, if his passion for postmodern theory is less apparent. It is, of course, tempting to take Professor Arrington to task for taking me to task for not pursuing other avenues besides the postmodern to explore imitation pedagogy, for if he was "delighted to find Minock's article in JAC and, just from her title alone, was intrigued by the issue she was about to consider,"
I might remind him that the title advertised my approach. It was "toward a postmodern pedagogy of imitation" that I promised to travel. By virtue of the overwhelming support I would find along the other roads, I could not spend, nor did I consider it appropriate to spend, much of the (preciously short) essay space discussing what I might have seen and who I might have met had I traveled elsewhere. I suspect that it is inaccurate to suggest that "[my] article would leave [my] readers with the quite misleading impression that no one in composition, postmodernist or no, had ever addressed the issue of imitation and its relationship to writing instruction prior to [my] essay." That I do not mention the wealth of other evidence, except to explain that I have no space to properly pursue it, should not imply that I am unaware of it. I suspect that my readers, whether they have studied the question and history of imitation as thoroughly as Professor Arrington and myself, are also aware of it. I would hope that they would say to themselves: "What she is writing here is also supported by classical rhetoric and others in composition. If she concentrates on a triad of famous postmodern thinkers, that is all the more significant. This article interests me enough to reflect on my own practice and to study further the question of imitation."

Rather than taking Professor Arrington to task, I think a better method of rebuttal might be to chronicle my own process of studying and writing about imitation, for, borrowing a postmodern image, I see the space that leads to sympathy for imitation pedagogy as an aperture. He and I, whatever the approach I take in my JAC article, are on the same side. As we have successfully passed beyond the looking glass—the looking glass with its modernist veil that makes us consciously think that all we see in it is our own reflection—we find we are joined by many others. In an irony I clearly mean to suggest, at least here in this response to Professor Arrington, Bakhtin, Derrida and Lacan, as well as Isocrates, Quintilian, the author of the Rhetorica ad Herennium, Erasmus, Ben Jonson, Hugh Blair, Professor Arrington, his coauthor Frank Farmer, myself, the compositionists included in Farmer and Arrington’s 1994 bibliographic review, are on the same side of the issue. Moreover, on this other side of the mirror are scholars from across a range of disciplines, for instance schema researchers from cognitive psychology who assert that leaning is closely dependent upon repeated exposure, anthropologists such as René Girard who see imitation as a liberating act of symbolic violence, and ethnographers such as Homi Bhabha who see the political space of imitation as also an act of resistance—in short, twisting the Derridian terms, the act of repetition is always already an act of assertion of alterity. Certainly such a range of contemporary and past scholars will have different means of passing through the looking glass, and once we are on the other side, we may disagree. Nonetheless, we all have gone beyond seeing only our own reflection in the mirror, a reflection that makes a pedagogy of imitation, postmodernist or no, a less than obvious notion. For even with such overwhelming cross-historical and cross-disciplinary support, we are nonetheless in a curious place. We must be. Why else would Farmer and Arrington have needed to start their 1994 bibliographic review with the report
that "rumors of imitation's death have been greatly exaggerated" (12)? It seems to me that it is valuable to follow several lines of different reasonings that support the important work that we compositionists who are sympathetic to imitation pedagogy must do.

Let me explain a little of my process of writing about imitation, a process that so far has been one of geometric bifurcation. As I write in the JAC article, my first hunches about imitation came from teaching basic students and discovering quite accidently that they could promptly write passable and even witty spot commercials (500). My teaching procedures based on my hunches also were informed by my interest in cognitive psychology, classical rhetoric and liberation politics, as I developed methods to insure that repetition of academic prose, would occur in my classes, but that it would not be perceived by myself or my students as a form of imposition or slavery. In studying the question further, I found several curious breaches in what gradually became a huge interdisciplinary project spawning several conference presentations and articles in progress. The postmodernists, as we know, do not directly speak of pedagogy. Their mention of writing cannot be translated into prescriptions for practice, yet the body of various insights—if taken together or separately—offers help in living without slavery in a veritable world of intertextuality. That fact is one that I wanted to highlight in my JAC article.

Another breach in the research that I am pursuing addresses more specifically the work of Arrington, Farmer and Arrington, and Farmer, as well as others in composition. It seems curious to me that in the period of composition research after Dale Sullivan's 1989 lament about the demise of imitation pedagogy with the rise of modernism that composition theorists sympathetic to the practice are nonetheless reticent about advertising their sympathy directly. The evidence: none of the composition theorists that Arrington and Farmer mention in their review couches her or his program with the words "imitatio" or "imitation." A very recent example of a body of composition scholarship supports my point. As I have just now scanned the Program for the 1996 CCCC Convention in Milwaukee, I see no sessions and no papers advertised by their titles to be on imitation. In fact, I do not see the word "imitation." Of course, I believe, as I am sure Professor Arrington believes, that the absence of the word does not tell the entire story. Obviously, the value of Farmer and Arrington's bibliographic essay is that it searches for and finds imitation under other names. But it is only by looking for imitation under aliases that Farmer and Arrington can report that rumors of imitation's death have been greatly exaggerated. And so another question in my research dwells on what in the history of imitation pedagogy might explain our continuing ambivalence. Surely, we cannot simply embrace the many instances of imitation pedagogy before the birth of modernism that occur and reoccur in many manifestations throughout our long rhetorical history. What must we reject in the tradition? How do we ground a contemporary pedagogy of imitation that we can hold without ambivalence?
Another question in my research focuses on the fact that the "chic" postmodernists whose ideas deserve attention seem unaware of (or hostile to) the classical rhetorical tradition. For instance, in a paper I delivered at the Rhetoric Society Conference in May of 1994, I constructed a hypothetical dialogue between Quintilian and Bakhtin, using many direct quotations; at the end of their anachronistic dialogue Quintilian and Bakhtin run in to the philosophers Derrida and Plato. I was pleased to meet Professor Arrington's coauthor, Frank Farmer, at that presentation, and I enjoyed immensely our conversation. And I also was pleased to see later that in an excellent article, Farmer revamps Quintilian's classroom imitation procedures, while carefully exploring Bakhtin's theory of polyvocality in a readable and useful way. Of course, returning to the point I note about our reluctance to speak of imitation, he does so without mentioning the word "imitation."

Since, of course, the Rhetoric Society affords us a rare opportunity to commune with our rhetoric colleagues in speech departments, I also was pleased that when I asked for volunteers to read the parts of Quintilian, Bakhtin, Plato and Derrida in my composed dialogue, I was able to promptly get enough well-spoken members of my audience to provide oral renditions that clearly demonstrated Bakhtin's theme of polyvocality. I raise the question of sound and speech, and its effect on memory, to introduce another project. In my book on orality and literacy in progress, I pursue the oral genesis of imitation pedagogy, a pre-sophistic, pre-writing genesis encased in the bardic tradition that I see as influencing written intertextuality. In a chapter on this topic, that I may amend with a footnote that cites us all, I find that I wrote a final version with hardly a mention of the work that Farmer, Farmer and Arrington, Arrington, Derrida, Lacan, and myself, have published so far. This chapter explains why my students could write spot commercials without instruction. It also explains why a current group of basic writers loaded the bombast of the TV news editorial into their initial academic essays. These students had learned something of writing with their ears, and in imitating the rhetoric, logic, and structural movement of a genre of civic discourse, they proved that with their ears they could learn well. If in my book chapter I explore a different line of research, notably orality theorists such as Alfred Lord and others, who explain how discourse may be structured to make it imitable, I nonetheless reinforce the point I am making here. Support for imitation pedagogy is overwhelming, and rather than to dispense with my postmodern preamble in the JAC article, I would rather expand the territory of imitation.

On the question of my postmodern sources, I wish to argue that compositionists should not eschew "the European postmodern darlings literary scholars have been feeding off of since the mid 1970's." In fact, as I quote Professor Arrington's "feeding off of," and note another correlation raised by anthropologists of eating as symbolic imitation, e.g., in the Christian Eucharist, I think we should continue to feed until we have internalizing postmodern ideas as our own. My reading of Reed Way Dasenbrock is not that Dasenbrock has found Derrida
out to be a fraud. He has found Derrida out to be like most of us who have
progressed beyond Lacan’s mirror stage: Derrida too cannot always see beyond
himself. He also is consciously committed to his intentions. And although I would
agree with Arrington’s (implied) distaste for squirreling ourselves around to
quote from authors that our literary colleagues consider “all the rage,” I think
it is important to encourage much of the good work in composition that has gone
beyond the game of whether Derrida, Lacan (not to mention more difficult
Continental others) are devils or darlings. Perhaps our literary colleagues,
whose concerns, of course, are quite different from our own, have proclaimed
the “ends of theory” (see Herron, et al.) without quite getting down to business.
I am reminded of James Kinneavy’s admonition at a CCCC retrospective on his
career, which I can only loosely quote since I heard him rather than read him,
and like the “original” imitators without recourse to print, I must rely on my
imperfect memory. Kinneavy closed his retrospective by saying we still had
important work to do in integrating postmodern theory into composition. And,
as I remember his last words better, as he had consciously or unconsciously
adapted the old oral strategy of using the seeming non sequitur to aid his
audience’s memory, I now can quote him: “And I couldn’t think of teaching a
composition course anymore without the Net.” Another bifurcation. I have
found a great deal of syntactic imitation among students who write to each other
on computer conference. It seems to me that in composition we are not
encountering the end(s) of theory but the serious second stage. Perhaps it is left
to us to advance the prospect of a postpostmodern. Looked at that way, Derrida
and Lacan are not darlings, but important transitional figures.

One other of Professor Arrington’s points deserves rebuttal. I am aware in
bringing up this point that I might be opening a can of worms. In reference to
“robbing” and plundering, Professor Arrington asserts that Quintilian would
not allow our students such license. He writes: “Quintilian does believe there’s
an ‘essential,’ ‘original’ meaning and intention in an authors’ words that’s
paraphraseable, imitateable, and not to be plundered, no matter how cagey one’s
theoretical justification.” I, of course, agree that Quintilian believes this, and
especially at the point at which he writes his Institutio oratoria, he is a dignified
and sagacious elderly male teacher who seems naturally to empathize
responsibility to sources. Yet on the question of (less sagacious?) license I disagree. In
my significantly long experience teaching composition I can divide my students
into three groups—the smallest group are those who plagiarize, plagiarize with
conscious dishonest intent and with what would be, if not for our intervention,
impunity. Another small but significant group—mostly foreign students who
hold a very different view of cultural legacy—quote and paraphrase without
citation; they are innocent of our Western academic customs; they mean no
dishonesty; these students are talked about at length in Helen Fox’s exploration.
The third group, the overwhelming majority of my students, like Glynda Hull
and Mike Rose’s “Tanya,” who starts out my JAC article, worry too much about
plagiarism. They worry about plagiarism enough that they are often stymied in
their certain unconscious imitations of what they read. I have never found that robbing and plundering an author of her syntax, or creating a climate of playful irreverence, creates a generalizable license. In fact, easing up on the worry about what the mind will do unconsciously enables another conscious idea to be grasped. It is one thing to engage students in a free-for-all with language. It is quite another to teach the etiquette (and situational politics) of citation. In my experience the free-for-all has never interfered with students learning the difference. Addressing a specific query of Professor Arrington, one that I thought I had made clear in my JAC article: the "postmodern" written imitations are counted. After students have completed them they go back to highlight recurring patterns. They then write formal graded essays in response to the same reading. In these essays students cite their conscious paraphrases and quotations.

Professor Arrington, of course, is correct to point to Quintilian's support for the agonistic view of imitation that I present when he suggests that I could have used a quotation from Book X of Quintilian's Institutio on the duty of the paraphrase "to rival and vie with the original in the expression of the same thoughts." Professor Arrington asserts that "Minock could have used this passage in her discussion since it certainly expresses, briefly and clearly, one of Quintilian's keenest 'psychological insights' (493) about imitation, and one that takes a Lacan a good deal longer to express, if he ever quite does." In response I have an even better quotation from Quintilian for Professor Arrington, working from James Murphy's composite translation rather than the Butler translation, which, in this case, I like a little better. Quintilian writes:

It is dishonorable even to rest satisfied with simply equaling what we imitate. For what would have been the case, again, if no one had accomplished more than he whom he copied? We should have nothing in poetry superior to Livius Andronicus, nothing in history better than the Annals of the Pontiffs; we should still sail on rafts; there would be no painting but that of tracing the outlines of the shadow which bodies cast in the sunshine. (133. From Book X.2:7)

I cannot agree that Quintilian’s insights, distanced by the sadnesses of centuries, substitute in whole for the insights of Lacan. I can agree wholeheartedly with Professor Arrington, though, that when it comes to providing memorable quotations, both "briefly and clearly," and for supplying pedagogical and psychological wisdom, Quintilian also is a darling.

I wish to reiterate my appreciation of Professor Arrington for reading my essay, for his response has allowed me to pursue in a small measure some of what had to be cut from or kept from my JAC article. As I remember from my conversation with Frank Farmer at the Rhetoric Society Conference, I understand that Farmer and Arrington are busy writing a book on imitation. I look forward to that book, as I hope Professor Arrington will look forward to reading more of my own work on imitation. In a superb irony that has all of us—all of us including Derrida—consciously asserting our own intentions, and railing against misacknowledgements and misinterpretations, we are nonetheless
imitating. This “agonistic” exchange should help to show that imitation pedagogy is a broad concern that warrants further research and attention. We might see that there is room, room enough for ourselves and others, to pursue our independent research.

And to readers of JAC who may still be on the other side of the aperture, and of our “insiders” debate, I invite you in. Once you contemplate the reality of imitation, you will find plenty of support. All I would hope is that you keep a certain political perspective: that imitation is not, nor should it be perceived of as, a form of imposition or slavery. On the contrary, imitation liberates.

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