Imitation: A classical art for modern composition

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Imitation: A classical art for modern composition

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University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 1991

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IMITATION: A CLASSICAL ART FOR MODERN COMPOSITION

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in English

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ABSTRACT

Imitation, traditionally practiced by ancient scholars such as Cicero and Quintilian, introduced schoolboys to a community of rhetoricians. These young men learned methods of speaking that were acceptable to this community by modeling themselves on older, successful orators. When the discipline of rhetoric began to include composition of written texts, as well as spoken texts, imitation flourished as a viable pedagogy, and students used models like the progymnasmata. Students consciously practiced the linguistic manners of their elders and steeped themselves in the thinking and writing of earlier generations. Imitation flourished in the poetics of the eighteenth century, declining as the Romantic writers emphasized personal originality in composing. The arrangement of imitation in a taxonomy shows instructors and students not only how it has been used in the past, but demonstrates how they can use it for their own instructional needs.

Writing instructors are becoming aware that pedagogical practice and rhetorical theory fit like the warp and woof of a whole cloth. Woven into this cloth is imitation, whose resurgence in the twentieth century aids students in their practice of the craftsmanship of composing and in the search
for artistic excellence. Teachers offer themselves as live models for the students to imitate as they watch the composition instructor struggle during the composing process. The practice of imitation teaches modern students composition techniques, awakens them to the legacy left by writers, and acquaints them with an academic discourse community that stretches from Aristotle to James Berlin.
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Imitate not the composition but the Man... The less we copy the renowned Antients, we shall resemble them the more.

"Conjectures on Original Composition"

Edward Young
Chapter 1

The History of Imitation

Spanning 23 centuries, imitation—the process of imitating a craftsman to learn a craft—was conceived in Aristotle's *mimesis* and fully born in the *imitatio* of the Romans who nurtured it for nearly a thousand years. With the primacy of the Roman Catholic Church, imitation changed only slightly when the medieval Church Fathers insisted on the use of sacred Scripture as models. Renaissance scholars paid painstaking attention to the art of their predecessors and nearly killed imitation with overuse, but neo-classic writers like Alexander Pope revived it, emphasizing that poetic style lived in the legacy from the ancients. However, this revival lasted only until the Romantic period when Blake and Wordsworth finally buried imitation with their declarations that creativity resulted from spontaneity; and personal experience, the Now, was more important than the past. A resurrection began in the early part of this century, as American educators published articles in professional journals stating that imitation could and should be a viable classroom tool. As our century winds down, modeling and imitation provide an adaptable resource for the composition teacher.
William Faulkner once said to students at the University of Mississippi:

Read, read, read. Read everything—trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read! You'll absorb it. Then write. If it is good, you'll find out. (55)

In a separate interview, Faulkner took another tack in his comments about learning to write.

Let the writer take up surgery or bricklaying if he is interested in technique. There is no mechanical way to get the writing done, no short cut. The young writer would be a fool to follow a theory. Teach yourself by your own mistakes; people learn only by error....(244)

Writers who take Faulkner seriously might stop for a moment to consider this advice. Did he mean, in the first instance, that prolific reading alone with no systematic program of instruction would equip the fledgling writer with the means for writing? He might as well have said that a person can learn to build furniture simply by watching a cabinetmaker. In the second instance, is Faulkner asserting that writers have inherent within themselves all the skills of composition and the ability to draw on these skills at will? Is Faulkner really equating technique with a mechanical type of learning, one that encourages students to try out the different methods of writing used by the authors they are reading? This apparent lack of interest in learning any kind of writing technique and the
accompanying advocacy that a writer should "learn by [his] own mistakes" (244) suggests that any one of us can become accomplished writers merely through prolific reading followed by the writing, rewriting and again rewriting of one's own original prose. This philosophy is akin to subjective rhetoric, a theory that will be discussed later.

Learning without a regimen is in direct contrast to learning through imitation which assumes that students will derive direct benefits from a program of study that builds on a foundation of reading the works of other writers, then practicing exercises that teach students to write pieces like those that they have read. Imitation builds originality like a coral reef. Each coral polyp, unique and individual, lives by attaching itself to its dead ancestors, the base on which the entire reef is built. When the polyps die, they add to the strength and beauty of the reef, and more corals attach themselves to the reef, continuing the cycle. Imitation builds on the reef of tradition, and writers add their individual experience and knowledge, producing original works, strengthening the reef for other writers.
Pedagogical Imitation

In Tony Hillerman's novel, *Coyote Waits*, an aged Navajo discusses the metaphysics of the Navajo Way with a young policeman of that tribe. He reminds the young man that their mutual ancestors believed that every created thing had two forms, an inner form and an outer form. The inner form is the substance of the thing, while the outer form is the corporeal element that bestows tangibility (192-3). The inner form of an animal is that which makes it "cat," but the slit of the iris, pointed ears and the triangle of its head give it the recognizable appearance of "cat." In *Metaphysics*, Aristotle, too, separates a thing into two forms, accidental qualities or appearance—color, size, shape—and substance (26), calling substance the "one essential and permanent thing" (xviii) about the object.

Aristotle also says that "something actual is produced from something potential by something actual" (31). He uses the example of human reproduction. Something actual (a child) is produced from something potential (the sperm and the egg) by something actual (the man and the woman). Mimesis is the artistic pursuit of substance and occurs through the process of imitation. In composition, a writer (something actual) is produced from a student (something potential) by the act of imitating (something actual). Imitation asks the students to wear the habits
of writers like clothes: trying on the long sentences of William Faulkner and the short sentences of Ernest Hemingway; fitting the metaphors of Philip Sydney and John Keats to themselves; looking for patterns in the minimalism of Ray Parker and the lushness of Henry James. During this fitting, the writers discover themselves.

Steeped in Greek philosophy, the Roman rhetoricians developed a particular teaching strategy that they used to instruct their young men in the art of rhetoric and the achievement of mimesis. They called this practice imitatio. "Imitatio, or imitation of the practice of others" (Corbett 386) uses as models the works of respected writers. Classical teachers hoped that imitatio would result in the emulation of the best rhetoricians and that this emulation would lead the student to surpass the masters.

Although study and practice were required, the budding rhetorician had to possess some innate talent. Isocrates thought that "ability, whether in speech or in any other activity, is found in those who are well endowed by nature and have been schooled by practical experience" (Clark 7). Isocrates* (436-338 B.C.E.) put his words into action and has been recognized through the centuries as one of the first authentic pedagogues. The Romans, highly

*Dates for historical figures are from The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present.
influenced by Greek thought and philosophy, followed the lead of the Greeks in using imitation to teach rhetoric. Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.) echoed Isocrates, saying that the gift of nature is strengthened by "art, imitation and exercise" (Clark 10). Another influential Roman, Quintilian (ca. 35-96 C.E.), says, "neither precepts nor textbooks are of any value without the assistance of nature" (Clark 14).

Even the most successful teacher and the most talented pupil must have a text with which to work. The nature of pedagogical imitation demands that the student use some extant material, and their traditional myths and epics provided the Romans a somewhat limited repertoire. Although we might expect that the Roman teacher would make use of some contemporary literature as well as the traditional literature, a conservative faction of the bureaucracy must have controlled the payroll. If a teacher wished to remain employed, he used these myths and epics because they were politically and socially safe. Clark says, "From the time of Quintilian on, schoolmasters were paid by the state and they had a natural preference for keeping alive and drawing their salaries" (212).

Imitation required a strong foundation of reading, and as he read, the student immersed himself in the structure and content of his model. "Dionysius of Halicarnassus says that the soul of the reader absorbs a stylistic affinity by continual association" (Fiske 36). The student of rhetoric
needed this "traditional material" at the very marrow of his bones if he hoped to attain the heights of rhetoric. Memorization of the reading served as a sort of transfusion, and the Greeks and Romans both relied heavily on it. Reading combined with avid memorization enabled the student to absorb the material as he learned the writer's style.

Memorization was coupled with analysis as the students examined the model, noting the grammatical structures, the mechanical methods, and the stylistic devices the author used to convey his message. The Romans employed this careful analysis in the training of their young rhetoricians so much that George Fiske insists in *Lucilius and Horace* that "the art of rhetoric was itself the result of the sympathetic and critical study of the great masterpieces of Greek prose and verse, by some of the most discriminating Hellenic minds from Gorgias to Aristotle and the later rhetoricians of The Academy and the Porch" (32).

The greatest contribution to imitation may well have been made by Quintilian who separated grammar and rhetoric. For Quintilian, grammar is a study of poetic; rhetoric is the art of speech.

> [Grammar] is the twofold science of correct discourse and of the interpretation of the poets. Rhetoric on the other hand, is the art of speaking well, and its end is to accomplish things by action. (25)

Quintilian's insistence on maintaining the separation of these two is germane to this discussion because he "specifi-
es that the grammaticus works almost entirely through imitatatio" (Murphy 25), that is through copying or paraphrasing models. Then he insists that "the rhetorician works through a system of precepts" (Murphy 25). These statements give Quintilian the appearance of being an ancestor of those who insist that we acquire language (written or oral) organically rather than mechanically. Language grows and develops in us much as our internal organs develop. Our hearts grow larger as our bodies do; we do not have the experience of having one part of ourselves growing and then another part.

**Medieval Imitation**

By the beginning of the Middle Ages, the tradition of teaching with imitation had been labeled "Ciceronian," because of Cicero's impact on rhetoric (Murphy 8), and was firmly embedded as a pedagogy. Cicero adopted Aristotle's judgment that the orator should be a good or ethical man. He insisted that an audience would identify more closely with an orator whose morals appeared to be of the highest order. The orator used "particular types of thought and diction," and he appeared "upright, well-bred, and virtuous" (Bizzell 240). Ciceronian rhetoric develops a wholistic view of the speaker or writer. Not only is the development of the composition important; the development of the character of the writer is important also. Therefore, the model should be carefully chosen for both morals and talent.

Ironically, classical rhetoric itself began to decay
with the rise in influence of the Roman Catholic Church, a pillar of morality, and in this decay, imitation suffered also. During the early medieval period, the Catholic Church lived with the vivid memories of martyrs, slain because they refused to worship the mythical gods and goddesses of classical literature. The Church required that its new converts repudiate the old gods and mythological figures, and the Church fathers, such as Ambrose and Jerome, wished that these figures not be glorified or held up for emulation, particularly in literature and rhetoric. This requirement posed a dilemma for many of the Fathers who owed their training to classical styles, then found themselves, as in the case of Augustine, obligated by their position in the Church, not only to uphold but to implement Church teachings.

Rather than inaugurate an entirely new system of education, the Church attempted to combine Christianity and Roman rhetoric. As part of this process, St. Augustine (354-430 C.E.), in his *De Doctrina Christiana* (*On Christian Doctrine*) encouraged the use of imitation, carrying its application one step further than the Romans and Greeks in his recommendation that it be used not only for the elementary schoolboy, but also that "mature men may identify the precepts of discourse by reading and hearing good examples of discourse" (Murphy 62). His models, of course, included the Biblical texts that the Church recommended. Thus, he solved the
dilemma, retaining the classical pedagogy of imitation while using Christian models.

In *Medieval Eloquence*, Murphy states that by the twelfth century, pedagogy had entrenched imitation in the English schoolboy’s education where his trivium might include

- model-reading, model-analysis, rule learning (and even memorization), model imitation, written and oral composition, classroom recitation, and classroom criticism by both peers and masters. (206)

By this time, the Church had stabilized enough so that Bernard of Chartres encouraged his students to model their writing on poets and orators, as well as Biblical texts (Murphy 206).

Another classical feature the medieval world adopted was the treatise or handbook on the art of writing well. The ancient Greeks and Romans supported their methods of education by writing numerous treatises and handbooks directed to the education of the student. This practice also existed in the medieval period, until it seemed that almost everyone who wrote about composition did so with the intention of providing a guide.

*Imitation and Exegesis in the Renaissance*

From the fourteenth century to the seventeenth century, the period of the Renaissance, scholars continued to practice imitation using models from the tradition of Cicero and
Horace. In The Light in Troy: Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry, Thomas M. Greene discusses imitation as it was used by the more seasoned writers like Petrarch (1304-1374). The intent of imitative writing in the Renaissance was the creation of significant bodies of literature akin to the models. Rather than destroying the model or its meaning, imitation breathed new life into the model, a fresher meaning derived from contemporary experience.

Renaissance authors used exegesis, an exposition or explanation of the meaning of the texts they studied, so that they might write more effectively. Through exegesis, the writer came to understand the nuances of the model or, as Greene puts it, "its particular timbre and personal force" (42). The Renaissance writer realized that there was a concrete relationship between his world and the world of the ancient Romans and Greeks. Using exegesis and imitation, authors attempted, in their writings, to express their understanding of the literary work of these classical authors. By linking exegesis and imitation, the author created a new work that gave enjoyment to its readers while at the same time it provided a flavor of the old masters. This view of imitation implies that it is the person of maturity and scholarly inclination rather than the beginning schoolboy who will use imitation most effectively. While the Romans regarded imitation as a pedagogical method, the Renaissance writers perceived it as a way to know and under-
stand the history and writing of their classical predecessors.

Renaissance writers imitating classical authors faced a dual problem. What was the meaning of the text imitated? When writers imitated the text, were they really involved in creating something new or were they bound slavishly to the imitated work? Greene attempts an explanation of this exegetical method by using Ben Jonson’s Discoveries as an example.

Imitation of this type (historical) is heuristic because it can come about only through the double process of discovery: on the one hand through a tentative and experimental groping for the subtext in its specificity and otherness, and on the other hand through a groping for the modern poet’s own appropriate voice and idiom. It is this quest, superbly achieved, that lies behind Ben Jonson’s Discoveries, so that the full meaning of that title has to be located in this richly double sense. (42)

Although much of the following discussion is about the use of imitation in poetic rather than rhetoric and may appear to have little bearing on the teaching of composition, the Romantic movement tested itself in the tension created between the value of this poetic legacy and personal inspiration. A major 20th century rhetorical theory, subjective rhetoric, grew out of this tension.

In the Discoveries, Ben Jonson (1572-1637) discusses how one should write poetry. He does not suffer from the agonizing problem of how to understand his classical ancestors.
tors, while at the same time writing some poem that he could truly call his own as the Romantics did. Jonson states that a poet should imitate the writing of some man whom he can truly call great, not just copy that writer, but "draw forth out of the best, and choicest flowers, with the Bee, and turne all into Honey, worke it into one relish, and savour" (94). Jonson implies that one who merely copies the work of another is an animal while one who makes the work a part of himself is truly the human being, the poet. One should copy, not, as a Creture, that swallowes, what it takes in, crude, raw, or indigested; but that feedes with an Apetite, and hath a Stomacke to concoct, devide, and turne all into nourishement. (93)

This is the way that poets train themselves; the soul of the imitated work becomes the flesh and blood of the poet, and he begins to express his own meaning.

**Imitation in the Neo-classic Age**

Neo-classicists shifted the focus of imitation as they attempted to emulate their Greek and Roman ancestors. In the neo-classic vision of imitation, an author's originality came from his thinking about the original model in the light of the thinking and writing of his own age. Neo-classic imitation is allusive and relies on the knowledge of classical forms and texts shared by author and reader. The author's task as a rhetorician was to fuse the ancient with the
modern and in so doing, to "create" a new work of art. In

Lucilius and Horace, George Fiske says that

According to this conception, a work of literary art expresses the result of ages of discrimination devoted to the attainment of a free and harmonious union of form and thought. At the same time it satisfies the sensuous, ethical, and aesthetic ideals of contemporary life and is redolent of that life. (28)

One of the prolific writers of the eighteenth century, Alexander Pope (1688-1734), explains to readers of the Essay on Criticism how writers ought to write. Like the Romans and Greeks, Pope believed that inherent talent was at least half the formula to make a great writer.

In Poets as true Genius is but rare...
Both must alike from Heav’n derive their Light
These born to Judge, as well as those to Write.
(11, 13-14)

Pope enters the nurture/nature debates, which applies to imitation as much as anything else.

First follow NATURE, and your judgement frame
By her just Standard, which is still the same:
Unerring Nature, still divinely bright,
One clear, unchang’d and Universal Light,
Life, force, and Beauty, must to all impart,
At once the Source, and End, and Test of Art.
(70-73)

Pope’s contemporaries, educated in the classics, understood the poetic forms and allusions which he used in his writing. Their educations made them familiar with the same works that Pope imitated in his writing. Pope and other writers of this period did not use imitation as a teaching device; rather they understood imitation as the method a
civilized, educated person would use to compose works acceptable and comprehensible to his colleagues.

In the Essay on Criticism, Pope links Virgil and Homer. He comments that when Virgil began writing The Aeneid, he wanted to take inspiration only from nature like the Romantics.

And but from Nature's fountains scorned to draw
But when to examine every part he came,
Nature and Homer were, he found, the same;
Convinced, amazed, he checks the bold design,
And rules as strict his laboured work confine,
As if the Stagirite o'erlooked each line.
Learn hence for ancient rules a just esteem.
To copy nature is to copy them. (133-140)

A number of Pope's works are imitations of Horatian odes. One of these, "The First Ode of the Fourth Book of Horace," is subtitled "To Venus." In comparing the original Horatian ode to Pope's work, the reader first notices the similarity of the subject of both pieces: the reaction of the aging man to the onslaught of love. Both poets employ common elements, the reign of a loved woman, a specific age of fifty, a "pastoral location," but then Pope places us squarely in his social and political milieu. He refers to "Queen Anne" and requests Venus to direct her love to "Murray," whom the footnote points out is "Lord Chief Justice, 1756-88" (The Poems of Alexander Pope 673). Pope alludes to more classical characters than does Horace (Chloe, The Grace and The Muse), but then he does have available all the literary tradition of Horace and all those after him. Imitation weaves all these figures into a whole cloth that
covers the centuries of writing.

Some of Pope's contemporaries thought of his work as "fine writing" referring indirectly to its imitative quality. While "fine" was sometimes a derogatory term when applied to writing, Joseph Addison, writing in #253 in The Spectator, clarifies its meaning when applying the word to Pope. Addison does not believe that originality is the mark of fine writing. He says "wit and fine writing do not consist so much in advancing things that are new, as in giving things that are known an agreeable turn" (283) and we really cannot say anything new, because everything has been said.

True Wit is Nature to Advantage drest,
What oft was Thought, but ne'er so well Exprest
(297-8)

Other renowned poets taught themselves to write by choosing someone whom they greatly admired, steeping themselves in that person's work, observing style and manner and absorbing the substance of a writer just as those students did during the classical era. Robert Lewis Stevenson called himself "a sedulous ape," and Benjamin Franklin said that he improved his writing and style by paraphrasing passages from The Spectator.

I thought the writing excellent and wished if possible, to imitate it. With this view I took some of the papers,... and without looking at the book try'd to compleat the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should come to hand. (Corbett 498)

In his "Conjectures on Original Composition," Edward
Young best sums up the neo-classic attitude that Alexander Pope's work embodies. Young says that writers should imitate the ancient authors in the proper manner, that is, "imitate not the composition, but the Man....The less we copy the renowned Antients, we shall resemble them the more" (21). He further explains this by saying that the ancient authors, the Greeks and the Romans, imitated nature, and if writers would follow in their footsteps, then they too would be able to imitate nature and achieve mimesis.

**Imitation and the Romantics**

While imitation flourished for 175 years after the time of Ben Jonson and his peers, it began to lose respect at the beginning of the Romantic period when writers stressed originality of vision. William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Percy Bysshe Shelley all believed that the poet should look to nature, to one's own experiences, to one's feelings for the material of good writing. In the *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth (1770-1850) says: "All good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling," (5) and even though he does admit later that "my purpose was to imitate, and, as far as is possible to adopt the very language of men [rather than poets]" (20), his statements later in the *Preface* appear to indicate that personal originality was a necessity. In the composing process, Wordsworth contemplates the subject of his poetry, rather than the works of the ancients.
I have at all times endeavored to look steadily at my subject; consequently there is, I hope, in these poems little falsehood of description, and my ideas are expressed in language fitted to their respective importance. Something must have been gained by this practice, as it is friendly to one property of all good poetry, namely, good sense; but it has necessarily cut me off from a large portion of phrases and figures of speech which from father to son have long been regarded as the common inheritance of poets. (21)

Wordsworth's tone of regret suggests that he sensed that he had cut himself off not only from "phrases and figures of speech" but also from a previously unbroken heritage of language and poetry.

Wordsworth's predecessors looked at the subject through the eyes of still earlier writers, involving a heavy weight of knowledge with current critical thinking, and in the process creating a new literary work. Because Wordsworth sought originality and used everyday speech, "the language of men," the exegetical learning of the neo-classical writers was useless to him, contaminating his Muse.

Michael Polanyi, a modern philosopher, would take exception to the attitude of Wordsworth and his contemporaries. Polanyi reiterates the conclusions of the neo-classic authors and says that there is a kind of knowledge that he calls tacit, that is "we can know more than we can tell" (18). He explains that all of us possess tacit knowledge and that one means of acquiring that knowledge may be
"indwelling" (17) and further, that "at the turn of the last century, German thinkers postulated that indwelling, or empathy, is the proper means of knowing man and the humanities" (16). Polanyi claims that indwelling results in interiorization and "the pupil gets the feel of the master's skill by indwelling or interiorizing" (30). A writer must copy the exact phraseology of the master just as the student of chess replays the moves of the grandmaster, until even the nuances become part of his being as a writer.

**Modern Education and Imitation**

Polanyi's philosophy addresses problems that the late nineteenth and early twentieth century schools in the United States grappled with in the question of how best to teach students composition. Articles about imitation and modeling began to appear in various journals. Writing in the July 1816 issue of *North American Review*, E.T. Channing assails the proponents of imitation of the classics. He preaches isolationism in the world of American literature, saying "so long as a country is proud of itself, it will repel every encroachment on its native literature" (208). Reminding his readers that when students study the Greek and Roman classics, they have before them only the best of the age without the failures, Channing claims that these students will be less daunted if they have some examples of the failures of the current age. Channing also believes that the use of the classics as models is a means "to force all minds to one
taste and pursuit" (203) and further promotes artificiality by removing the author from living society. However, Channing finally admits that the whole question is one of politics rather than philosophy when he says that this is not really a debate "of the merits of the ancient or any models whatever" (207); rather, the question is whether or not a country can furnish its own models to its own writers. Channing believes that America must "... be the former [shaper] and finisher of its own genius" (207). Charles Sears Baldwin of Columbia University supports Channing as he believes that for imitation to really succeed, the students should imitate contemporary writers.

In the English Journal, June 1914, Lane Cooper addresses the pedagogical use of paraphrase, another imitative technique. He says that paraphrase

corresponds in a way to the training which former generations obtained in working with the ancient classics—and which, luckily, many of our best students are still able to secure. Paraphrasing Burke and Newman ... is not altogether different from translating and otherwise reworking Demosthenes or Cicero. (381)

Cooper goes on to state that such a practice "supplies a worthy substance" (381). He thinks that paraphrase, which was the third step in the imitative practices of the ancients, is instinctive in the student.

In the same year, the English Journal published a longer article by George K. Pattee who argues that imitation is
a worthwhile tool to use when teaching college students to write, although Pattee would choose different models. He claims that the traditional models of imitation, the classical writers, daunt the students because the student knows that "neither he nor his instructor—and perhaps no living writer even—can successfully imitate any of these masters" (463). The students are discouraged before they even attempt the writing. Pattee implies modern students would be encouraged in imitation only by having available the work of poorer quality, so that they would understand that even the classical writers had failures.

This controversy over imitation, of course, is only part of the ongoing dilemma that colleges and universities face as they attempt to come to some satisfactory conclusions about the place of writing instruction in higher education. Perhaps additional insights into writing process and the relationship between teacher and students are necessary before imitation becomes widely accepted and used again.
Chapter 2

Imitation: Taxonomy and Models

Chapter two arranges imitation in a taxonomy of seven levels—dictation, copying, close imitation, paraphrase, loose imitation, behavioral imitation and synthesis. Imitation does not appear in these levels in every rhetorical period; as with other pedagogical tools, one form of imitation was often emphasized at the expense of another. The progymnasmata of the Romans, the ars dictamina of the medievalists, the neo-classic revival of the practices of the Romans and Greeks, and models of letters for young girls in Pamela offer examples of the most common models. One of the most effective contemporary models is the writing teacher writing, and chapter two concludes by discussing the revival of imitation in the form of teacher modeling.

The Taxonomy of Imitation

The Latin modus, from which the word "model" originates, means a "measure or a standard of measurement; manner, mode, way method." Teachers have used models for centuries, especially when their students are attempting to acquire a new skill. One example of this is the manner in which first graders learn to print the alphabet. With a copy
of it in front of them, they trace the letters, then print one on a sheet of paper and compare the letter they have made with the example they have. Catherine Dole calls this copying "conscious imitation" and compares it to "scales and five finger exercises" (427). Copying automatizes some of the steps of composing and provides a method of dealing with the cognitive limitations of younger writers.

In *Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education*, D.L. Clark quotes Isocrates, whom we recognize as the first teacher, as having the clearest image of the ideal model.

> It is my opinion that the study of the philosophy which deals with oratory would make a great advance if we should admire and honour, not those who make the first beginnings in their crafts, but those who are the most finished craftsmen in each, and not those who speak on subjects on which no one has spoken before, but those who know how to speak as no one else could. (151)

Two thousand years later, Alexander Pope echoes these sentiments in "An Essay on Criticism."

> Those Rules of old discover'd, not de-vis'd,  
Are Nature still, but Nature Methodiz'd;  
(88-89)

Only after the Romantic period does anyone question the value of imitating the best that has been produced (see ch. 1).

In choosing models to imitate, the classical writers valued workmanship. When students learned to compose by imitating the masters, they insured that not only the clas-
sical works, but the methods of composing as well, would survive through the ages.

Imitation and modeling fit neatly in a society that prides itself on role models and on-the-job training. In the business class, students work with accounting problems and business calculators. In the science classroom, students actually conduct standardized experiments under the direction of an experienced scientist-teacher. When the classroom is a writing workshop, students can practice writing under the direction of the writer-teacher who models pre-writing, writing and revising strategies.

Imitation itself can be arranged in a taxonomy as follows, a taxonomy that builds on centuries-old practices, uses daily exercises, and gives the student entry into a community of discourse that recognizes the influence of ancient philosophers such as Aristotle and popular novelists such as Stephen King.

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Dictation

A teacher stands before her students. "Take a pencil and paper," she says, "and clear your desks. Today, we'll begin our writing with a dictation exercise." Then she begins reading a paragraph from Annie Dillard's *An American Childhood*, using only the natural pauses of her reading voice as any indication of punctuation. She reads the piece through once, so that students hear the entire selection, then reads slowly through it a second time, and finally reads it a third time at normal speed. As she reads, an observer in the classroom might notice some students writing as quickly as possible to get every word down, while other students frown, straining for nuances or vocal inflections that indicate periods, commas, semi-colons and other punctuation marks. This teacher and her class are practicing dictation, the first and simplest stage of imitation. Dictation forces the students to engage bodies and pens in the single process of penmanship, allowing them to feel writing in action without any pressure to perform the more complex act of composing. Nor are students really involved with mechanics, although they will naturally make some choices about spelling or punctuation. They may not even understand the meaning of what they write. Dictation integrates hearing and writing, physically intensifying language and making a literal leap from oral speech to written words.
**Transcription**

Transcribe (tran-skrīb′) tr. v. -scribbed, -scribing, -scribes 1.a. To write or type a copy; write out fully as from shorthand notes or from an electronic recording medium: transcribe a letter" (1286).

I transcribed the entry above in longhand from the *American Heritage Dictionary* and then transcribed the entry into my computer's memory. Transcription, or copying, accomplishes the same integration of language as dictation, but further intensifies the experience by adding sight to hearing and touch.

During the Middle Ages, imitation began a slow decay as transcription of model letters or the *ars dictaminis* came into use. A document written about 1119 A.D. by Hugh of Bologna exemplifies the *ars*. Entitled *Rationes dictandi prosaice*, this "lesson" on letterwriting contains models of letters for specific situations; Hugh even lists the correct salutations. Some examples of these are "from Pope to Emperor," "from Emperor to Pope," "to a teacher," (Murphy 214) etc. We may infer that Quintilian thought that students would learn to compose their own letters by imitation; Hugh proposes that they simply copy the letter as needed (Murphy 218).

Although James Murphy claims that Hugh's *Ars Dictaminis* is a theory or a manual of letter-writing (219), the inclusion of model letters (*dictaminum*) represents a step back-
ward in the art of composition. Hugh's primary interest was in the salutations (Murphy 217) and some of the phrasing in the body of the letter. He asserted that the proper intonation of address in the salutation was one means of creating "goodwill" (Murphy 217). The *Ars Dictaminis* provides models of letters that were to be copied for appropriate occasions, copying that required no more from the letter writer than knowing who the recipient of his letter was. Once he knew that he was addressing the Pope, his teacher, or his father, the letter writer simply chose the correct model for the occasion and copied it. Murphy also claims that the proliferation of rank in feudal society made set models for letters necessary so that one would not inadvertently offend the recipient of the letter (199).

The following example proclaims the "establishment of a relationship between a ruler and subject.

It is right that those who have promised us unbroken faith should be rewarded by our aid and protection. Now since our faithful subject (name) with the will of God has come to our palace with his arms and has there sworn in our hands to keep his trust and fidelity to us, therefore we decree and command by this present writing that henceforth the said (name) is to be numbered among our *antrustiones* (i.e. dependents). If anyone shall presume to slay him, let him know that he shall have to pay 600 sioldi as a wergeld for him. (201)

Although writers used other forms of imitation as they learned to compose, the next specific instance of model letters occurs in the eighteenth century with the publica-
tion of Samuel Richardson's novel, *Pamela*. The origins of this novel were that of a "letter-writer" (Sale v.). As occurred in the Middle Ages, social practices in 18th century England were changing due to a "rapidly rising middle class" (Sale v.). Therefore, Richardson attempted to put together a set of model letters that young women, away from their families and in the service of another household, could use as a specific occasion demanded. In the introduction to *Pamela*, William Sale comments on the concrete nature of these letters.

In fact Letter No. 138 is one to be written by a 'father to a daughter in service, on hearing of her master's attempting her virtue,' and Letter No. 139 is a model for the daughter's answer. (vii)

Most of these letters were written from the young woman's point of view with social discourse in mind, while the *ars dictaminis* appear to be more functional in that they addressed legal conventions.

**Close Imitation**

Every writer started as an apprentice in this craft, and imitation introduces the master-writers and their work. The apprentices, imitating given models, practice with the masters, finally breaking away from imitation and into originality. The writer enters this apprenticeship in close imitation.

Close imitation that begins with a single sentence
allows the teacher to demonstrate easily how analysis of the
model precedes the actual imitation. An example might be one
like this:

*The concrete pavement curled along the edge of the*
*river like a black ribbon.*

When the student analyzes this sentence, he takes note that
the subject, "pavement," is modified by the adjective,
"concrete," and the article, "the." An adverb phrase,
"along the edge of the river," modifies the verb "curled,"
which is in the active voice. "Like a black ribbon" is a
simile further defining or describing the pavement. The
sentence contains two prepositional phrases, "along the
edge" and "of the river." The student should take note of
the adjectives and the nouns that they modify.

As I lead the students through this sentence analysis,
I use the chalkboard so that I can erase words and phrases
as the students analyze the sentence. I replace these items
with blank lines that the students must fill in, retaining
the original conjunctions and marking the places of any
prepositional phrases. Then the student writes a new sen-
tence, filling in the blank spaces and using the conjunc-
tions and prepositional phrases as marked. After the stu-
dents have practiced this analysis and close imitation of
sentences several times so that they understand how to use
the method, I supply them with longer paragraphs and passag-
es from essays.
If students continue this practice, they learn how the product of good writing looks; they recognize that syntax, the shape and structure of sentences, paragraphs and essays, contributes to the clarity of meaning, the content of the essay. Close imitation shows students how form (syntax) and content (semantics) are the warp and woof of any piece of writing.

**Paraphrase**

We return to the same classroom where the teacher earlier dictated while her students wrote. She has directed the students through a close analysis and imitation of an essay. Now she is attempting to help her students write a persuasive essay, and to accomplish her goal, she uses another method of imitation.

Because she is introducing the persuasive essay and because imitation is her strategy, this teacher assigns a specific topic. The topic she chooses—animal rights—is of current interest, and because many people, including students, are aware of the issues involved, a topic like this allows the students to use paraphrase, another stage of imitation.

Because one of the aims of imitation is to introduce students to a discourse community, this teacher assigns C.S. Lewis' "Vivisection," accompanying the assignment with careful directions. First, students are to read the essay.
Second, they are asked to rewrite the essay, paraphrasing it in their own words, making sure that the paraphrase captures as accurately as possible the meaning of the original. Then using a structure similar to that of the close imitation they performed earlier, the students are to rewrite the essay. When they finish, the students will have two essays in addition to "Vivisection."

As a final step, the teacher may ask that the students take the opposing point of view and respond to the three essays with one of their own, using any style they wish. This step requires original thought and writing on the part of the students; they are concretely set in an authorial stance of opposition, but they have at hand a storehouse of stylistic techniques and a broader knowledge of the topic. They are not limited, as they may have been before the assignment, to man-on-the-street interviews or articles from magazines. This opposing essay bridges paraphrase and loose imitation.

**Loose Imitation**

After students discover the meaning of a model-essay, they can use loose imitation to experiment with stylistic devices. Loose imitation is similar to structural imitation, but the students are not asked to adhere to the sentence structures. Instead, they are given a sample of writing that uses some specific technique to create a mood for the whole written piece. (See appendix.)
For college freshman, excerpts from Stephen King or Dean Koontz work well for several reasons. Many of our students, usually avid fans of horror movies and fiction, have some familiarity with these two authors who use specific, concrete language to create an almost tangible mood. When he describes the vampire's house in *Salem's Lot*, King piles up long sentences and textural physical details like "sagging," "weathered," and "tattered" (6) to create an impression of abandonment and mystery. Dean Koontz uses color and shape, the contrast of black and white, the shape of the crescent moon reflected in a crescent sand bar to create an eerie opening in *Midnight*. These stylistic devices create a mood of horror and suspense and, because they are so clearly defined, most students can isolate them and imitate them in their own pieces describing everything from worn-out shirts to graveyards. The task of the teacher is to provide students with a variety of examples and sufficient practice so that they assimilate stylistic devices into their own writing habits with regular use. Concrete examples of the success of this method occur when students combine stylistic imitation with sensory impressions and create original metaphors.

*Behavioral Imitation*

In contemporary society, authors seem a secluded breed. Our students' difficulties with writing reflect this percep-
tion. On an everyday basis, our students meet mechanics, cooks, bankers and observe these individuals practicing their trades. Writers, however, seem to hide unless they have a book to promote, and hardly anyone ever observes them as they compose. Because students see only the finished article, story or book, they often think of composing as an art that cannot be learned; they forget that they can learn to play a musical instrument (an artistic accomplishment) or pitch a fastball (a talent all its own to sports lovers). Writing teachers who take the opportunity to use the classroom as a writing workshop and share their writing process with their students, show them a writer at work.

When the teacher stands before a class and practices freewriting on a chalkboard or an overhead, she shows her students that she is subject to the same stresses and blocks as they are, and that writing does not begin in a perfected state. Students learn that writing is more than a product if the teacher is willing to share her struggles with writing at different stages. When the teacher models revision techniques, students learn that rewriting is more than proofreading. If the teacher writes a descriptive essay with the students, and then shows the students how she expands her essay with descriptive language, metaphors, and similes, if the teacher is then willing to hear critical commentary and suggestions from her students, if the teacher re-thinks her writing with the students, and finally shows
them a revised essay, these students have a visual model of a writer at work.

Teachers who offer themselves as writer-models for their students employ a form of imitation, and they call on honorable traditions rooted in the practices of the gymnasium, the classical equivalent of our grammar schools. According to Clark, Roman and Greek writers proposed that their students use additional models, "...not only speakers whom [they] heard, but writers whom [they] read" (148). When these scholars trained students, they suggested that these young men choose for models, the best rhetoricians possible. Cicero imitated Aristotle in his literary methods (Clark 145) and urged one of the students of his day, Sulpicius Rufus, to model himself after Lucius Crassus if he would improve his style (Clark 147). Students of this period had the opportunity to model themselves on living orators; in addition, they were provided ample textual models in the form of the progymnasmata. These models could, and still can, be used at any level of the taxonomy.

The Progymnasmata

In his study, Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education, Donald L. Clark examines the progymnasmata, the classical equivalent of a modern grammar handbook/composition text. Progymnasmata, meaning "for the school," were a set of "elementary exercises in writing and speaking prose themes" (Clark 179); a mention of them in Rhetorica ad Alexandrum confirms their
existence in the fourth century B.C. As late as 1546, the European grammar schools used the *progymnasmata* (Clark 181). Scholars like Theon of Alexandria and Hermogenes of Tarsus, both of the second century B.C., wrote or compiled their own collections of themes and models suitable for the rhetorical task. Included in these collections were derivations from Demosthenes and Plato as well as original writings (Clark 179). Aphthonius, a Greek of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, adapted the work of Herogenes by adding "brief model themes" (180) for the schoolboy to use as a pattern for his composition. These themes gave the students examples to use in their writing, just as we use George Orwell's essays as examples for our students. The *progymnasmata* typically consisted of exercises arranged in levels of difficulty, where one exercise built on the previous one. According to Clark, the students wrote fables, tales, and proverbs while practicing other rhetorical strategies (181).

The Roman schoolboy might begin his imitation on the level of the sentence by practicing a set of exercises that required him to write about a person using the five modes: "direct declarative, indirect declarative, interrogative, enumerative, comparative" (Clark 184). These exercises employ close imitation and require the students to use their own topics to fill in the specific structures that form these sentence types. Because the grammatical structure is given, this exercise reduces the students' cognitive load,
allowing them the opportunity of discovering different aspects and questions about the same topic. They learn that making topic choices involves more than drawing a slip of paper out of a hat; successfully choosing a topic implies a certain breadth of knowledge about it.

A contemporary rendition of these five modes looks like this. Direct declarative: Abraham Lincoln was born in a log cabin. He freed the blacks from slavery. Indirect declarative: Our history books tell us that Abraham Lincoln was determined to force the South to abide by the Emancipation Proclamation. Interrogative mode: Didn’t Abraham Lincoln realize that his insistence on freeing the slaves would lead to the secession of some of the Southern states? Enumerative mode: Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth president of the United States, self-educated lawyer, freed the blacks from slavery, accepted the resignation of Robert E. Lee from the Union, appointed Ulysses S. Grant as head of the Union forces, etc. Comparative: Abraham Lincoln, rather than be ruled by politically wise motives, abolished slavery; rather than save his own life by acceding to the wishes of advisors, persisted in his defense of all Americans; rather than live a completely safe life, went to the theater, where he was assassinated by John Wilkes Boothe.

Then the schoolboy built on the sentences and used these modes in a more complex manner like telling or writing fables in the style of Aesop, then moving on to such sub-
jects as Ovid used in his Metamorphosis. The authors of the progymnasmata urged the student to use the classical epics, myths and histories of his culture in choosing the material for these imitative exercises.

These models teach structure and grammar rather than storytelling or, as Clark says, "the exercise was calculated not to teach narrative movement, but to give the student practice in using grammatical constructions and rhetorical sentence patterns" (185).

One kind of imitation that allowed the Roman student to exercise his knowledge of the fables, tales and myths was grammatical paraphrase, the virtual equivalent of close translation, or rhetorical paraphrase, which implies the transformation of the original with deliberate creative purpose by application of the principles of rhetoric. (Fiske 36)

Grammatical paraphrase concentrates on using the same theme or topic of the original, while improving the style. For instance, Quintilian thought that an exercise in paraphrasing poetry into prose might "help to elevate prose style" (Clark 173).

The Progymnasmata in the Renaissance

Although we think of the Renaissance as being a revival of the arts, some of the practices of the Romans persisted. One of these practices, says Clark, was the use of the progymnasmata which emerged nearly unchanged into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (180) during which they
were translated from Greek into Latin by the schoolmasters (180). One of these, Reinhard Lorich, compiled a version of ancient rhetorical exercises, adding to it quotations from Quintilian and Hermogones (180). Clark states that one of the reasons the *progymnasmata* succeeded during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was because they gave "patterns for the boys to follow" (181); the exercises were cumulative, increasing in difficulty and always adding to the student's body of knowledge (181).

The Dutch scholar, Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536), wrote his own version of the *progymnasmata*, a book of model sentences, *De Duplici Copia Verborum Ac Rerum*. In *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, Edward P.J. Corbett says that Erasmus emphasized that although the students could learn from copying, they should also be able to employ paraphrase and write one sentence in as many as 150 different ways (496).

**Synthesis**

Michael Polanyi believes that humans learn through a process he calls "indwelling" (18). "Chess players," he writes, "enter into a master's spirit by rehearsing the games he played, to discover what he had in mind" (30). Writers who use imitation to learn their craft have the same intent. Exploring the master’s mind by copying and paraphrasing his masterpiece leads the writer to an understanding of how the writerly mind works. When a writer assim-
lates these actions, she also brings her own experience and spirit to the writing, integrating her thought with the master's, thus creating an original composition. Perhaps a personal example will serve to illustrate this process.

I had not intended to write a Masters thesis, but when I discovered, almost by accident, how imitating sentences and paragraphs helped students in the composing process, I decided that I would like to explore imitation in more detail. The Masters thesis topic is born. At that point, two years ago, I had no idea how to begin. I asked several of my professors, and one of them said to me, "The only way you really learn how to write a thesis is by writing it." Another suggested that I go to the library and look at sample theses. Of course, the Graduate College issues its manual for writing theses and requires strict adherence to the mechanical structure they lay out. I am the chess student in Polanyi's example, but as I began to read the material for my thesis, apply my own experience to that material, and then organized what I was learning into the required shape, I discovered that I did, indeed, know how to write a thesis. I cannot explain how I know, although I could detail the steps that I walked on this writing journey. Integrating my personal writing voice and teaching experience with the required structures and the research materials have led me to an original composition. In just the same way, imitation leads its students via structure and experience to
originality.

The final step in the taxonomy of imitation, synthesis, leads the student into originality, the ultimate goal of imitation from the beginning. Having steeped themselves in the language, culled through a variety of models, tried on styles for fit, and worked at integrating these styles into their own writing, students discover that a particular writing style has emerged. Models furnish students with elegant examples of writing that theory alone cannot provide. Students employ thinking, reading, and writing in the observation of the master writer they study. Imitation reveals the writer within the student or, in the double sense of the word as Ben Jonson uses it, writers discover themselves in imitation.
Chapter 3

Rhetorical Theory and Imitation

Chapter three discusses four rhetorical theories: the subjective, the transactional, the objective, and the epistemic. James Berlin, writing in Rhetoric and Reality, calls rhetoric "the production of spoken and written texts" (1) and provides equally simple explanations of rhetorical theory; his work serves as the basis for much of this chapter. Theory remains barren without the espousal of practical application, and each of the four rhetorical styles has come to fruition in a particular pedagogy of composition. Can imitation effectively serve both the teacher and the student in these rhetorical theories and pedagogies?

Subjective Rhetoric

Subjective rhetoric places the responsibility for making meaning entirely within the individual and asserts that as many of us as there are, that number of meanings exist. Each individual attempts to share meaning in dialogue with others. The language of this rhetoric falls into two categories. The first is a language of correction, that is, as the writers or speakers engage in the attempt to interpret meaning or reality to one another, their listeners
respond by correcting what they perceive as false or in error. Writer and audience hope, through this exchange, to arrive at meaning. The second language is that of original metaphor, and it is this language that connects the practitioner of subjective rhetoric with the Romantic writers. The nearest expression that the individual can make in his attempt to convey the truth of his own vision to others is original metaphor.

Expressionistic rhetoric, one type of subjective theory, exhibits many of the same characteristics as romanticism. No matter how much we may wish to communicate with one another (and if we subscribe to the philosophy of the Romantic writers, we probably won't believe that we can), our meaning is only shared on the level of original metaphor. Berlin claims that this theory isolates the writer because reality is a "personal and private construct," a "private vision suggested through metaphor" (13).

The pedagogy of subjective theory assumes that "the student can learn to write, but writing cannot be taught" (Berlin 13), suggesting that the writing teacher provides the environment, shows the student how to use various tools and strategies, and presents the student with other pieces of writing, but that the student will have to sit in some quiet place, waiting for inspiration or revelation. While students can share this revelation in their writing, they cannot impose it as meaning. Students discover original
metaphor by using "analogical exercises" (Berlin 14); they keep a record of their observations of the world around them, and authenticate the meaning of experience and observation by participation in peer groups.

The subjective theory of rhetoric is the least useful of the four theories to the teacher in the classroom, lending itself poorly to imitation, because it denies the existence of a discourse community and transforms the audience into an encounter group for the writer; it limits writers to an internal vision of meaning and abandons them to the solitude of their inner voice. However, this rhetoric can become the starting point on the journey out to the community of the world. For instance, because I know from experience that my students have very little knowledge of the classics, indeed of any kind of books outside their required texts, I allow them to begin their writing lives from this subjective point of view, while I introduce them to the discourse community of the classroom. During the practice of expressive writing, students discover who they are, and then they can move into the practice of transactional writing as they learn their place in the world.

Transactional Rhetoric

Transactional writing is a component of the second major rhetorical theory described by Berlin. According to transactional theory, the interaction of writer, subject and audience in a particular rhetorical situation creates mean-
ing, and this meaning changes as the players in the situation change. The interaction in the situation is played out through the medium of language. Both classical rhetoric and cognitive rhetoric belong to this category.

Transactional rhetorical theory, with its emphasis on meaning occurring in the exchange among writer, audience and subject, uses imitation as a listening device that enables student writers to communicate with writers from any age. Students, as the audience of a particular writer, paraphrase an essay, so that they understand in their own language the meaning of the writer. In the process of paraphrase, the meaning may change slightly, depending on the words that the student uses.

Classical rhetoric and cognitive rhetoric are examples of transactional theory. Edward P. J. Corbett, one of the leaders of classical rhetoric in the twentieth century, assumes that the skills necessary for writing can be taught by using a three-pronged curriculum of precept, imitation, and practice (xi). This pedagogy insists that not only must students know how to apply rules of grammar, but that they must have an opportunity to practice this use. The student should be completely involved with the practice of composition to best learn the skills. Corbett points out that Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian ... brought together a set of precepts to aid their students in acquiring those skills [of composition], but they were sensible enough to recognize that one does not acquire a skill simply by studying rules;
one must also submit to the discipline provided by imitation and practice. (xi)

In this pedagogy, the students work through a taxonomy of imitation while they are engaged in the search for meaning. Dictation and copying require the attention of the senses of hearing, sight and touch. Close imitation shows the student how different writers use various structures to achieve certain effects for a specific audience. Through the process of paraphrase, students learn how they are connected with other writers from different centuries; paraphrase also assures an understanding of the ideas of previous writers since students must convey the same ideas as closely as possible in their own words. Paraphrase introduces students to the writers of any century and provides an entire group with common ground in the search for meaning. In loose imitation, the students have more latitude to analyze and practice the styles that will achieve certain effects without chaining them (the students) to exact structures, and it is in this step that students begin to feel the fit of their own styles. Berlin quotes Corbett, saying that "what most of our students need, even the bright ones, is careful, systematized guidance at every step in the writing process" (157). Imitation guides the student of classical rhetoric through a series of writing procedures--the writings of the writer.

Cognitive rhetoric, another class of transactional theory, guides the student through imitation of the writer
writing. This rhetoric espouses writing process, asserts that writing is recursive, and declares that meaning is discovered in that process. Because cognitive rhetoric emphasizes the process—how writers write rather than what they write—imitation serves cognitive pedagogy most fully when the students can imitate writing in action. The writing teacher writing stands as the natural model of imitation in a classroom situation.

Isocrates recognized that teachers are practical models for their students to emulate. Clark says that "Isocrates knew that he was a classic in his own age and had announced that students should take their teacher as a model" (151). Teachers of writing would do well to take this to heart and write with their students so that they can see a writer in action. Our students still don’t seem to realize that a draft is only a draft, subject to revision. If they can watch a teacher use prewriting techniques, if they can hear the essays that their peers are in the process of writing, and then watch as the teacher revises her own writing on-site, so to speak, then the students have the opportunity to model their writing process on a concrete example.

In the practice of transactional rhetoric, writers struggle to find meaning in the entire writing context. Students write in their personal voice, the one they have exercised and developed during expressive writing and begin to attach themselves to the broader community of writers.
Transactional rhetoric recognizes the value of imitating both writer and text and extends the filaments of knowledge from the past, inviting the students to anchor themselves in the web of humanity. Imitating the developed writer in his writing processes while examining the texts of imitated models for pattern, style and coherency connects the students to the community as they develop their writing skills. As students discover themselves and meaning in their writing processes, they are also preparing to join specific discourse communities, each with its specific vision of meaning. They are preparing to enter the practice of a kind of objective rhetoric.

**Objective Rhetoric**

Central to the theory of objective rhetoric is the belief that meaning exists specifically in one form, independent and transparent, always present and available to everyone. This objective rhetoric, according to James Berlin, "denied the role of the writer, reader, and language in arriving at meaning...[and] placed truth in the external world, existing prior to the individual's perception of it" (36). Berlin further states that objective rhetoric gives the writer a way to record exactly the reality he perceives, as he proceeds in his task of "collecting sense data and arriving at generalizations" (8), and language is simply a tool for transcribing that reality. Objective theory resembles the scientific community in its emphasis on linguistic
manners, style, and correctness and its assumption that if a writer demonstrates her ability to apply these technical attributes, then she too has achieved her goal: meaning.

The corresponding pedagogy of objective rhetoric, the current-traditional, seeks to provide the student with the proper tools to transcribe observations. The student wields these tools, these modes of discourse—description, narration, exposition and argument—to convey the results of her search to the world. As she labors, she discovers that language can be a barrier to truth, but it is in the proper use of the modes that the student discovers a path over the barrier. The signposts of style, mechanics and usage direct the student on her way, as she discerns how best to compose the message for her audience. The current-traditional pedagogy has clear-cut rules which the teacher can clearly articulate, and the student can comprehend. There is no need for invention or any other heuristic since the truth that the student is trying to get at already exists.

Because the focus of this tradition is style and form, rather than content, an instructor can teach writing with any subject using the modal approach. The teacher assigns a topic, water conservation for instance, and asks the students to write about that topic in each of the four modes. With the descriptive mode, the students focus on water usage in Las Vegas at the present. They use their senses in a data gathering process to feed their descriptions. Using
the narrative mode, the students relate the story of another place, like the Owens Valley in California, providing an example of what could happen in Las Vegas. Narration carries the students into exposition, as they clarify and explain the situation, presenting all the arguments for and against our present system of water usage. Finally, in the argumentative mode, the student takes a position on water use in Las Vegas. An exercise like this allows the students to practice composing in all four of the modes; when they have completed these composing tasks, they should be able to transfer the skills they have learned and write about assigned topics from car repair to Portrait of a Lady.

Imitation is another method of using the modal approach. If students are reading George Orwell's "A Hanging," they first dissect the piece in order to see how Orwell uses specific details, sentence structures and sensory perceptions. The students also note the mode which the essay fits. (Orwell employs more than one mode in this particular essay.) The teacher may suggest that the students pick one or two sentences from the piece and begin a close imitation. She might even ask the students to use a topic of their own choosing and imitate the entire essay. An analysis of the sentences of the writer followed by a step-by-step imitation of those sentences enables the students to learn the structure of correct discourse as well as gaining some familiarity with linguistic manners. In this way,
close imitation helps fulfill the current-traditional aim of correctness without specifically teaching mechanics.

A freer way to learn those writing manners than close imitation is loose imitation and paraphrase. The writer is not being asked to discover any new truth in his writing. The student attempts to share meaning with the imitated author by paraphrasing the work of the original author and then composing a composition that conveys the same meaning. The student is asked to paraphrase the essay to learn to create a mood as Orwell does with his description of the light or as a way to learn what it is that the writer is saying. However, since the current-traditionalist emphasizes correct usage and elegant style, both close and loose imitation allow the student to practice acceptable forms. When students analyze model essays for stylistic value and then write an essay that attempts to emulate those styles, they learn through this imitation how to act correctly within the discourse community.

Although the student writing that results from the current-traditional pedagogy has usually been dry, boring and full of jargon, imitation of lively expository essays that use a personal voice can provide relief. When students see that professionals write in a style that is clear and enjoyable, they can attempt to emulate this kind of writing with their own voices.

Once students have reached competency in writing, they
may find that they do, indeed, share the meaning of their discourse community, in this case, the "academy." For this community, meaning exists in a single form. We embroider the edges with metaphor as we struggle to understand it, but we share a single truth. We have arrived at an objective rhetoric that is not elite, because all the members of the community have access to it through the writing process. This, I think, is true for each particular discourse community, because human beings require a common goal or need that binds them into communities. For example, as soon as various groups in churches find that they no longer share in the central beliefs, they split off. As a result, we have Lutherans, Calvinists, Reformed Latter Day Saints and so forth.

Epistemic Rhetoric

Epistemology is concerned with how we know what we know, and epistemic theory suggests that language creates reality. However, we might understand epistemic rhetoric more easily if we say that language lets us share reality, see reality, understand reality. A tree, after all, is still a tree in its essential "treeness," whether anyone knows or says the word "tree." But an understanding of treeness occurs in the discussion of how a tree is made, what it looks like, what its apparent qualities are. In epistemic rhetoric, we hear overtones of Aristotle's mimesis, where the artist-writer attempts to convey the essence
of the thing imitated as closely as possible.

Each discourse community has its own language (Berlin 167) and only those who understand the rules of its language can be a part of the community. Often, according to Berlin, "this knowledge is tacit" (167). Epistemic rhetoric transforms writers by imitation, so that they share in this tacit knowledge. They practice the exchange of language so that they learn reality and meaning. Through the practice of imitation, writers try on different realities, feeling the sense and power of language in this practice, and finally coming into their own language—originality. They achieve originality through understanding, and these writers become stepping-stones for other writers.

Like the other rhetorical theories, epistemic theory asserts that there is a particular way in which students can know meaning. They engage in this search within a discourse community whose intention is not only to define meaning but to create reality. Language is epistemic rhetoric's tool in this search. The community has a tacit agreement on the meaning of language, and the discovery of that meaning occurs in the process of composing. The writer makes discoveries about herself; she makes discoveries about her topic; she discovers what it is she is writing about as she writes.

An example of this occurred in one of my English com-
position classes. In the process of composing an essay, one of my students transcribed a story told to him when he was a child. "The Prop Man" is a gruesome anecdote about a B-52 bomber crash on Bainbridge Island in Washington State. According to the story, several of the crew members walked away from the crash, seeking help for one of their companions who had been speared by the sheared propellor of the plane. When they returned with the medics, the crewmen found only a trail of bloody footsteps bisected by a thin line in the dirt. Ever since then, the "prop man," his wound healed around the propellor, ranges the island, terrifying its children and providing grist for campfire stories.

Initially, the student wrote the story in much the same way that I have. But as he continued revision, he began to write about the changes that occurred in himself—the loss of fear and the maturation into courage—as he grew up. In the final writing, he called this story a part of the childhood mythology that nourishes our memories and makes them precious to us. This student's discovery of himself as an adult and the recognition of "childhood mythology" as an abstract theme shared by others is, I believe, a simplified example of how epistemic rhetoric operates. The concept of "childhood mythology" did not exist for this student until he discovered it in the writing process.

Imitation served this student in this situation, by giving him a point at which to begin his composing. He
started by writing down, transcribing a simple story, and then integrating it into the given structure of the comparison/contrast essay. His success in the discoveries that he made is due in some part to the fact that he determined the content of the essay himself.

Epistemic rhetoric exists at the other end of the scale from subjective rhetoric. Too much faith and imagination is required for me to believe that reality is non-existent without language. I look at a tree and know that even if I cannot name it, it stands as tangible as the hair on my head. I know that other things have existence whether or not I or anyone else has the language to "say" them into existence.

The Rhetorical Theories in Practice

One last example from a university classroom may serve as an analogy for these rhetorical theories and the way each functions in the search for meaning. An instructor had assigned a comparison/contrast essay to her freshman English class. The essay was shaped by the sentence "Once I was...; now I am...". Although the students were asked to draw on personal experience to provide the illustration of the comparison, they were to attempt to provide a broader context than personal experience by using reflective writing.

One young woman wrote an essay relating the experience she had as a student moving from a school in New York where
she viewed herself as competent, successful and correct in the use of the English language, to a school in Texas with a large population of Hispanic immigrants. One day the students were reading essays in class, and assuming that the Hispanic students would have such a language barrier that they would be unable to understand her, the student directed her reading to the teacher. The teacher’s response after she listened to the student was something to the effect of, "I can see that we’re going to have to teach you to speak." Suddenly the young woman found herself in a situation where she was no longer correct. However, her assumption was simply that she should learn the behavior and speech acceptable in the situation, and she became so proficient at this that a few years later, one of her friends asked her if she knew who she really was.

The student in her New York classroom, where she was competent, successful, and correct, resembles objective rhetoric. Meaning has one hue and is attainable through competency and correctness. However, when the student moved to Texas, she discovered, much to her chagrin, that she was isolated in her language, just as subjective rhetoric isolates its believers. She found that she was unable to communicate even with the teacher, who she had been taught to believe was the holder of meaning. She took on a protective coloration that allowed her to live in the situation, but until her friend questioned her identity, she did not real-
ize that she had none.

When she read the comparison essay to her college classmates, two of whom were Hispanic, the writer simply thought that she was writing a narrative of what had happened. One of the Hispanic students, however, told her, "I thought that you hated me." During the ensuing classroom discussion, the students discovered how much language can change what they view as reality (epistemic rhetoric).

The classroom in the university showed the student that reality is different when seen from another's point of view, in this case that of the minority student, but in this situation, the students were able to discuss their understandings about the subject in the same manner that those who work with transactional rhetoric share meaning. As a result, they learn that reality encompasses more than narrow personal experience.

As the instructor of the class and I discussed this incident, we found that we came to another understanding of the meaning, the reality, than that which occurred for these students. We saw that the racial backgrounds and expectations of the class as a whole, allowed a discovery to occur that might not have been possible in a homogenous group. We speculated on what might have happened if the class had been entirely Caucasian. Probably none of the students would have had a very strong reaction at all; they would have understood that the English language they used was,
indeed, the "correct" language.

An instructor sets up the rhetorical situation for her students, and the acting out of this situation is linked heavily to rhetorical belief. In objective rhetoric, the students are dependent on the teacher as the repository of meaning; in the transactional and the epistemic, the teacher is more likely to serve as a model for students as they participate in the search. Subjective rhetoric requires only that the teacher serve as a facilitator.

Imitation introduces fledgling writers to a discourse community, teaching them not only the linguistic manners of the community but also the preferred forms of writing. The literary writer becomes acquainted with the MLA Style Manual and the language of literary allusions preferred by those who study literature. The scientist organizes his writing into the structures accepted by the scientific community, using APA style and correct scientific terminology. When he presents his finding to the community of scientists using correct format and language, the community is more likely to believe that the work is not flawed by a less than rigorous investigation of the problem that their colleague is exploring. Every lawyer and every judge uses the "legalese" that is so incomprehensible to the uninitiated. Each discourse community becomes cohesive through its language, which Jerome Bruner calls "cognitive coin" (191), and imitation can facilitate that cohesiveness.
What is the best that can be said of each of these rhetorical theories? Certainly, they seem to be attempts to categorize the beliefs of writing teachers, if not the writing teachers themselves. The inherent flaw in these attempts is that rhetorical theory cannot neatly mesh a writing teacher into a slot fitted with all the cogs and wheels of one theory. Although each one of us who teaches writing may recognize that we adopt major portions of the beliefs and practices of a specific theory, we usually cross its boundaries in our daily teaching and use some portion of another theory. Therefore, in any discussion of these rhetorical theories, we need to remember that categories and classifications are artificial, static devices holding the theory like microscopic slides so that we can inspect, dissect and examine. In the classroom, with live students and active teachers, rhetoric ceases to be a specimen and becomes vital and living.
Chapter 4

Practical Applications of Imitation

Chapter four, a narrative of personal experience, discusses a semester of freshman composition, during which teacher modeling (behavioral imitation) was the primary method of teaching. The teacher demonstrated revision and participated in the grading process as a writer. This chapter explores the advantages of a system that allows the teacher exposure to the same criteria and judgment process that students experience. While it introduces students to the larger discourse community of the "academy," the immediate benefit of this system is that it creates a community of writers, writing.

* * *

Most of my freshman composition students demonstrate competency in writing the narrative essay although some of them do require at least one attempt to break out of familiar high school models like the five paragraph theme. When my students misunderstand the intent of the composition class, practice in writing during a writing workshop, they become stilted and incoherent in their writing. But when they approach writing as a process, rather than stare at the product of another writer in a textbook, they become freed
to learn how to write. By calling upon their own experiences as topics for writing, students have a wealth of material at their fingertips and can begin to concentrate on the writing rather than the "creative" aspect.

As the students reflect on a particular experience, they develop a "mental construct in response to that experience and categorize it iconically" (Sipple 31), that is, whenever a similar experience is mentioned afterward, the students have designed some formal mental process which allows them to understand the experience without reliving it. Although cognitive researchers are interested in "the structures of the human mind with which they believe people are able to generate language" (Sipple 32), as a composition instructor I am more interested that my students learn to control this generation of language. I want to help them attain this control. One effective method I've found is to model writing behavior for them to imitate, and expressive writing provides a natural starting point for this, both from a cognitive point of view and from the point of view of a teacher model who wishes to demonstrate skills of writing rather than knowledge. The teacher can begin immediately to teach writing without building a knowledge base.

Personal writing enables the students to practice "perceptual categorization strategies" that Jerome Bruner describes in his studies of learning. The students respond to their own experiences, examining them through the lens of
writing. Then the students step from the perceptual to the conceptual, that is they use writing to describe abstractions or to apply what they have learned from their own experience to imagined situations.

I begin my classes by explaining the concept of a writing workshop; I promise that I will write with my students, and I demonstrate some of my writing strategies for them. Then I assign a general topic. One topic requires the students to write about some loss they have experienced. I do not limit their choice of topic in any other way; they may write about any loss—a pet, a parent, a job or an inanimate object. The students draw on prior writing experiences and use the narrative form, incorporating sensory details, figurative language, and dialogue to make the story readable, interesting and coherent. It is important to encourage students to draw on their own resources of vocabulary, voice and style. My experience in the classroom has shown me that the students are more successful if the teacher writes with the students using the same topics, rather than asking them to imitate some other essay about loss. This teacher modeling is important because during this process the teacher gives her students specific examples that illustrate criteria of good writing—specific, concrete language, coherence and organization, and readability—in a way not possible with
some of the traditional textbooks with their checklists and helpful hints.

Teacher presentation of herself as a model writer seems to me to be an integral part of both the writing process and imitation. I use several different techniques to model writing, one of them the simple one of composing sentences on the chalkboard, while I am defining the different varieties. The more complex modeling requires a rough draft of an essay and the overhead projector and the following process.

I bring in my first draft of the essay that we are writing. First, I read it to the students, then I put it on the overhead and begin to revise. During the revision process, I think out loud and encourage the students to break in with any questions or suggestions they might have. Sometimes they ask for more clarification about particular situations or point out that I seem to be drifting away from the point of my story. These kinds of comments indicate to me that they understand how I am organizing my essay around a focal point; I refer back to this when we discuss their essays.

I explain why I make particular word choices or why I choose to include certain details for a particular audience. One incident last spring while I used this process gave me an excellent chance to point out how important audience awareness is to the writer. The piece that I was modeling was the story of the day I lost my three-year old daughter
when she followed her brother to the store. She had to cross a busy street, essentially a truck route in the small town where we lived, and I described the trucks as "eighteen-wheeled monsters." I explained to my students that if I were writing this piece for my peers in that small town I could simply have used the word "trucks", but here in Las Vegas too many people might have thought I was referring to pickup trucks, which would lessen the impact of the story.

The fruit of this modeling appeared several weeks later. Another student was presenting her paper to the class, and they asked her why she had not included a detail that seemed fairly minor to her, but which added impact and detail for her readers. In her essay, she compared her life with her father before and after her parents divorced. However, she neglected to mention that her father moved just several houses away from the family after the divorce. This single detail increased the "showing" of the narrative and enhanced the drama of her story.

Students' rough drafts often reflect grammatical problems, most commonly sentence fragments and run-on sentences. Rather than tell the students that their sentences are incorrect, I write various types of sentences on the board: simple sentences with the subject, verb, object order, (and the one students most commonly use), the balanced sentence with its independent clauses, the periodic sentence, and the parallel sentence. I ask the students to compose similar
sentences. By writing imitations of these models, students remind themselves how these sentences are made. Then I direct the students to go back to their essays and count the number of sentences of each type, telling them that a typical essay should consist of a mix of approximately 50% simple sentences and 50% of all the remaining types. The students then revise their essays on the sentence level, combining or restructuring sentences as necessary. Because it is pointless to revise sentences that will be deleted during the early drafts of the composing process, I use this exercise as one of the final steps before publication. This imitation utilizes the knowledge of grammar that the students already possess in addition to the concrete modeling that I perform; it also raises the readability of the essays to a level expected from a college student.

Expository and persuasive writing provide a forum for other imitative techniques that build on the writing skills previously acquired. The instructor uses the practice of modeling in a more indirect way in these essay types. For instance, if the students and I are reading Martin Luther King's "Letter from the Birmingham Jail," we examine the language King uses to appeal to the white clergymen when he addresses them as "men of genuine goodwill" (652), assuming that "none of [them] would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes" (653).
When the students examine these concrete examples of appeal to an audience, they learn to assess the makeup of their own audience, so that they can compose appropriate addresses that will bolster their arguments. This form of imitation encourages students to use tactics similar to King's in a classroom writing situation.

Students read a broad range of essays from contemporary writers like Annie Dillard to classical writers like Samuel Johnson. One method of learning the message of the writer is paraphrase, one of the steps of imitation. If students paraphrase a writer who uses language that seems obscure to them, they come to a more complete understanding of what the author means and gain a familiarity with writing techniques used at various periods of history. Paraphrase also serves to make students aware that language changes as time changes, and we need to be careful about reading contemporary meaning into archaic language. Imitation provides insight into the history of composition as well as fluency in the use of composition techniques.

This understanding of older essays is one excellent means of preparing students to enter other English courses. When students are confident in their writing skills, they are able to respond in their own voice to what they read no matter the time period. They are also able to recognize the difference between what they read of their own ex-
perience into the writer's words and what of his own experiences the writer was actually trying to communicate.

Although the Romans and Greeks used imitation as the dominant means of teaching rhetoric, imitation is only one tool among many that contemporary teachers have. For its best and wisest use, the teacher should understand what the goals and objectives of the class are, and then choose carefully from the various different classes of imitation to gain the best effect for the student. Classical imitation of the works of ancient authors might most profitably be used in an upper level composition course where students presumably recognize the worth of their own writing style and voice and wish to enhance that style with a wider variety of techniques. Using imitation on this level is facilitated because these students are most likely English majors with a working knowledge of literature, and the instructor is free to discuss the use of such techniques in the models she uses. Such a discussion can also profitably include why a writer can use ancient forms to discuss modern problems.

Jerome Bruner says that most humans appear to have gone through a complete cycle of cognitive development by age 12 (13). This means that most children have accomplished perceptual and conceptual tasks, and learning transference has taken place. The child can apply what he has learned to new learning tasks. Because of these preparatory years, we should be able to assume that when students enroll in fresh-
man composition, they have a complete cognitive base to build on. If the student has problems with mechanics, structure or some other disability in handling the language, a remedial or preparatory class that uses imitation of model sentences and paragraphs can provide set exercises in both grammar and writing, all within the context of composition. These exercises should be designed to help the student gain fluency in writing along with correct usage. I cannot stress too much that mechanics and usage should always be taught in the context of writing. Donald Graves, a researcher of writing, says that too often our society sees writing less as a craft than a set of facts to be learned: correct spellings, rules for punctuating sentences, vocabulary words, grammatical terms, and even formulas for constructing essays.... (80)

Sometimes, we as college composition teachers find ourselves guilty of perpetuating this reasoning when we emphasize correctness at the expense of voice, style and expression. On the other hand, we do our students no service if we neglect to teach them the importance of proofreading and editing as an integral part of the writing process. This is one answer to the critic like George Pattee who says that imitation of classical models depends so much on the good polished writing that has come down to us that students using those models will be defeated before they start because they believe that they cannot attain the quality of writing. My answer to Pattee is that students
need to know that writing is not finished until it has been polished, revised, and edited, and the end result of this process is a crafted piece that can resemble one of these models.

If the writing teacher writes with the students, as Donald Graves urges, if that writing takes place in the classroom often and consistently, if teacher and students alike respond to the writing, and if, like any other author, students have opportunities to publish, then they experience growth and maturity in writing. This growth includes corrections of problems in the writing. Much of this correction occurs because the teacher and students comment immediately on the work, reinforcing the good writing and showing, by questions they ask or observations that they make, that the writing is confusing either because of unclear structures or lack of information.

One of the important factors in this composing process, says Nancy Martin, a colleague of James Britton, is the use of models, not as exemplars for direct, close imitation, but as references to which the students return again and again while they are gaining proficiency and fluency as a writer (121). When students reach the level of college freshmen, one of the most effective referential models is the writing teacher who writes with the class. No student should have to write in isolation; she may write in solitude, but she ought to know that other solitary writers struggle as she
does. When the writer returns to the classroom, she can check the reference point by listening to the writing the teacher has produced, by watching her at the various steps in her writing, and by walking alongside her through her revision process. Immediately following this student response to the teacher's draft, the students respond to one another's writing and receive response on their own drafts, modeling their action after the instructor. When the students have the writing teacher as a model, they learn how growth in writing occurs. Usually, we begin by writing what we have inside ourselves (expressive writing). In the classroom, students learn that they must translate this interior monologue (transcription) into a form suitable for a specific audience. The writer becomes outer-directed and engages in transactional writing. The teacher, by example, shows the students how to harmonize what they think and what they know and communicate that to their discourse community. The teacher acknowledges her own voice in her writing, demonstrating to the students that her personality, intact in her writing, keeps her essays fresh and lively.

One of the long standing dilemmas a teacher faces in this modeling stance is that of attaching a final score or grade to the published essay the student hands in. This has been described as the "coach/judge" dilemma. How can I effectively act as the reference model for the student and as a writer with writer when students know that I will also
be the judge of their effort? Team scoring has solved this problem by freeing me from the task of judging my own students. Although I assume this responsibility for another teacher/model, I can go the whole way with my fellow/student writers and put my work up for judgment with theirs. This allows me to act as a model in every aspect of writing.

Although some English professors, as stated in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, believe that "literature provided teachable content, something to write about other than oneself or arbitrarily chosen subjects in which the teacher was not an expert" (Bizzell 904), the same literature can be useful as a reference model rather than a writing source. Teachers ought to move from the barren textbooks of composition, those skeletons of grammar and mechanics, and introduce students to the living flesh of books. Almost any book is good for this, but I would provide a variety of literature that runs the gamut of contemporary novels through Victorian works, romantic poetry, Chaucer and classical Roman and Greek fables, myths and epics. Let the student taste of all these. Sometimes some piece or author particularly fascinates a student, who will read voraciously, then attempt the same kind of writing just to see what happens.

One of my students had this kind of experience when she read Loren Eisely's anthropological narrative, *Night Country*. Shirley had already published several short stories
and, because of her practice, was one of the most experienced writers in that section of freshman composition. She commented that she had never read anything by Eisely before, and that the exposure to reading him encouraged her in an attempt at a different genre.

Another student in a different section of freshman composition read everything by Willa Cather that she could find, and then, because she admired her so much wrote a piece deliberately imitating Cather's voice and tone. The experiences of these students and their teachers indicates that imitation operates in the classroom informally, so it may be well for us to take advantage of that informal operation.

Some students have expressed concern when they discover that paraphrase or close imitation or some other step in the taxonomy forces them into a writing stance that feels uncomfortable or appears to cramp their own style. One student complained that her major was communications where she had learned to pay close attention to column size or the specific requirements of press releases and advertising flyers that required the greatest amount of information be delivered in a given space. She stated that she had developed a style of writing in accordance with these standards. I had asked her to imitate various authors and pieces of their writing: Mark Twain's "Life on the Mississippi"; "William Least Heat Moon's "Nameless, Tennessee"; Dick Gregory's
"Shame" and other essays by modern and contemporary writers. Earlier in the course, the same student had paraphrased "Affectation" by Samuel Johnson. Commenting on that attempt, she noticed that she had had to use several more words and sentences in her paraphrase to convey the same ideas that Johnson did.

I interviewed the student, asking her to compare her experiences with close imitation and loose imitation. Noting that close imitation was the most "interesting and challenging" due to "focus on one type or style of writing" (Hess) she also discovered that she used a thesaurus frequently in close imitation, but that she was satisfied with her own vocabulary in the loose imitation. Close imitation sent her reaching for an English mechanics handbook, while the style she used in loose imitation was so familiar that she knew the rules intimately.

This student was assigned a series of seven imitative assignments from the book Models for Writers: Short Essays for Composition, while the eighth assignment of the series read simply: "Please write an essay on a topic of your own choosing. The essay can be personal experience; it can be a persuasive essay; it can be anything you want it to be." I hoped to discover some process operating in this student's choice of topic, and when we talked in the final interview, she stated that she wanted to write about her own accomplishments. She graduated from UNLV last spring after
spending four years, not only carrying a full load of studies, but also working forty hours a week so that she could put herself through school.

Possibly the most valuable comment that she made was that after writing an essay in which she imitated the techniques of classification used in, "Friends, Good Friends-- and Such Good Friends" by Judith Viorst, she had revised a research paper written for a biology class. The original paper was a description of amniocentesis, but her revision contained five additional pages of classification of diseases that doctors detect with that procedure. This alone seems proof that imitation is a valuable tool that we as composition teachers can share with our students, one that they can carry into other areas with them.

I have come to believe that composing is three-dimensional: art, craft and performance. Beneath the conventional wisdom that asserts that artists are naturally talented lies the fact that natural talent can be developed through practice. All human beings who develop normally possess the natural talent of language; language lies innate within us, raw and unrefined. The craft of writing, of refining and shaping this language to a definite purpose can be taught. Our students learn rules of grammar, stylistic devices and principles of organization for their essay writing. We teach these directly in formats ranging from memorization to workbook exercises, teaching these rules indirectly and in
context when we show students the practical applications as they work on the skills of composition.

Performance occurs in the process of writing, and like other performances, becomes easier with practice. Performance includes not only the writing of the well-developed sentence and the finely-tuned metaphor; it culminates in the published work, whether that is in the final piece handed into the instructor or an essay written for the New Yorker. Performance assumes that a judging process will occur, whether that be a grade or a rave review. If the teacher wishes to act as an effective model, it is essential that her performance also demonstrate the same qualities that Cicero's ethical man possessed. Modern students, like the ancient audience, are most attentive and emulate more readily the behavior of someone whom they admire. Let them judge the teacher as a worthy model.

Teachers and their teaching practices vary widely. We acquire certain practices with our experiences in the classroom, and most of us constantly evaluate our performances. Although each of us may prefer one rhetorical theory over another, or one style of writing over another, it seems likely that even those which we do not acknowledge openly spice our teaching practices. It is essential that we recognize the fragility of either practice or theory when we force them to stand alone unless we wish to keep company with William Faulkner and his prolific reader. While
Faulkner's saturation method of learning to write may serve the occasional genius who is naturally gifted with a talent for composing, most of our students will benefit greatly from the practice of imitation. Practice fleshes out the skeleton of theory; theory invigorates the soul of practice. Imitation enlivens both.
APPENDIX

Exercises for imitation

"There was a smell of Time in the air tonight. What did Time smell like? Like dust and clocks and people. And if you wondered what Time sounded like, it sounded like water running in a dark cave and voices crying and dirt dropping down upon hollow box lids and rain. And, going further, what did Time look like? Time looked like snow dropping silently into a black room or it looked like a silent film in an ancient theater, one hundred billion faces falling like those New Year's balloons, down and down into nothing. That was how Time smelled and looked and sounded, and tonight you could almost touch Time."

From a short story by Ray Bradbury

"They had walked in single file down the path, and even in the open one stayed behind the other. Both were dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons. Both wore black, shapeless hats and both carried tight blanket rolls slung over their shoulders. The first man was small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features. Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, a thin and bony nose. Behind him walked his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide sloping shoulders, and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws. His arms did not swing at his sides, but hung loosely."

From Of Mice and Men by John Steinbeck

Students were asked to imitate the Bradbury piece; they were also instructed to write a description of two characters using Steinbeck's description of George and Lenny. One student, Carol Meyers, used the results as part of an essay about strength.
There was the feel of strength in his presence. It felt like rocks and sweat and confidence. And if you ever wondered what strength sounded like, you would hear silent tears on a pitch black night, and muscles screaming, and thoughts echoing in an empty room, and wind. And going further, strength looked like aged hands holding a newborn infant, or a fragile flower pushing up through the soil, or endless mountains stretching like springtime rainbows, up and up into nothing. That was how strength felt and looked and sounded, and today, across the water, you could almost taste strength.

The two men walked down the sandy beach toward the crystal blue waters of Lake Michigan. Both were dressed in cotton shorts and wore lightweight coats with silver zippers. Both wore navy blue sailor's caps, and both carried an end of the catamaran sail between them. The first man, my grandfather, was tall and thin, light of face, with thoughtful eyes, and gentle, strong hands, muscular arms, a square, set chin. Behind him walked Uncle Paul, a short man, with a round face, large, dark eyes, and broad, curved shoulders; and he walked slowly, slightly off-balance, as if he had never regained his land legs. One arm held on to the sail while the other was stuck out to the side for steadiness.

— Carol Meyers

When I slide under a barbed-wire fence, cross a field and run over a sycamore trunk felled across the water, I'm on a little island shaped like a tear in the middle of Tinker Creek. On one side of the creek is a steep forested bank; the water is swift and deep on that side of the island. On the other side is the level field I walked through next to the steers' pasture; the water between the field and the island is shallow and sluggish. In summer's low water, flags and bulrushes grow along a series of shallow pools cooled by the lazy current. Water striders patrol the surface film, crayfish hump along the silt bottom eating filth, frogs shout and glare, and shiners and small bream hide among roots from the sulky green heron's eyes.

From Pilgrim at Tinker Creek by Annie Dillard

Student imitation of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek

"When you come onto a desert lodge, ending a hot dusty road, and see a western type adobe ranch house surrounded by
the tall, ancient cottonwood trees, you're on a spot like an oasis in the desert of Ash Meadows. On one side of the lodge is a meandering, green hot-water stream; cattail cluster is thick and brown on that side of the grounds. On the other side is the grassy meadow leading to the vagrant stream's fartherest curve; the stream provides the lodge's water and the swimming pool is also warm and green. In twilight's hazy glow, creaky, old cowboys and fat ranchers sit around a fireplace of native stone lit by the dry cottonwood logs. Conversation sifts through the smoky lounge, scuffed boots, propped up on the nearest chair, laughter bursts and curses spark, and stories and lies take on an air of reality as the atmosphere thickens."

— Shirley Shown

She walked slowly, picking her way as though she were afraid she would fall.

— John Steinbeck

Eyes watching, horns straight forward, the bull looked at him, watching.

— Ernest Hemingway

The road was littered with squashed grasshoppers; and, their wings crackling, a number of live grasshoppers sailed through the air back and forth across the road as if the summer sun, having thawed out their nearly frosted bodies, had set them abruptly sizzling.

— John Nichols
The Milagro Beanfield War

"Now she reached the Ocean Avenue loop at the foot of the hill, sprinting across the parking area and onto the beach. Above the thin fog, the sky held only scattered clouds, and the full moon's silver-yellow radiance penetrated the mist, providing sufficient illumination for her to see where she was going. Some nights the fog was too thick and the sky too overcast permit running on the shore. But now the white foam of the incoming breakers surged out of the black sea in ghostly phosphorescent ranks and the wide crescent of sand gleamed palely between the lapping tide and the coastal hills, and the mist itself was softly aglow with the reflections of the autumn moonlight."

— Dean Koontz
Midnight
"The house itself looked toward town. It was huge and rambling and sagging, its windows haphazardly boarded shut giving it that sinister look of all old houses that have been empty for a long time. The paint had been weathered away, giving the house a uniform gray look. Windstorms had ripped many of the shingles off, and a heavy snowfall had punched in the west corner of the main roof, giving it a slumped hunched look. A tattered no-trespassing sign was nailed to the right-hand newel post."

--Stephen King
Salem's Lot
BIBLIOGRAPHY


