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CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I have analysed the classicising ideas on imitation in Dionysius and Quintilian by focusing on the use of mimetic terminology throughout their works, as well as on the form and content of their reading lists. A selection of works written by contemporary Greek and Roman authors, who also embarked on themes related to imitation, formed the variegated background of my investigation. By closely examining the mimetic ideas of Dionysius, Quintilian and some of their contemporaries, this study casts new light on the interferences between Greek and Roman intellectuals, who turn out to have tapped into a common reservoir of language and ideas to describe the process of imitation, whilst selecting and adapting from this reservoir those elements that adequately suit their rhetorical agendas. I will summarise the most important outcomes of this dissertation.

In chapter 2, I explored the ways in which the notions of μίμησις and ζῆλος and imitatio and aemulatio are interpreted, applied and interconnected in the works of Dionysius and Quintilian. For both critics, there is an evident, complementary connection between imitation and emulation, but they conceive of this connection in different ways. Whereas Dionysius suggests that μίμησις and ζῆλος are of equal value, imply each other when appearing separately, form part of the same process of imitation, and ideally always form a homogeneous pair in this process, Quintilian thinks that imitatio is subordinate to aemulatio and should gradually fade away in the orator’s career, leaving the field open for aemulatio. I argued that the underlying reason for this discrepancy between Dionysius and Quintilian is a different notion of what exactly μίμησις-ζῆλος and imitatio-aemulatio mean. Although both critics draw from a similar conceptual framework in their interpretation of μίμησις-imitatio as a technical-creative device in order to create uniformity with a higher-placed model, they also adapt elements from this framework to their own ideas and purposes. Dionysius interprets μίμησις as an original re-expression of literary models, whereas Quintilian expresses the idea that imitatio involves the basic repetition and copying of literary models. Their interpretations of ζῆλος and aemulatio differ even more significantly. In Dionysius’ thinking, ζῆλος is an aspiring movement of the soul generated by the contemplation of paragons of astonishing literary beauty, which either inspires the imitator to parallel and surpass these models in his own work, or fills him with degenerated and misguided zeal. Quintilian’s notion of aemulatio
dominates his mimetic ideas, and is almost always positively charged. It encapsulates the idea of changing, completing and surpassing literary examples in a trial of strength. The differences between Dionysius’ and Quintilian’s understanding and use of mimetic terminology have been explained by pointing to their different cultural backgrounds. The Greek Dionysius propagates an original revival of the magnificent masterpieces of classical Greece through μίμησις and ζηλος. By contrast, Quintilian’s rhetorical programme of imitation mainly serves his aspiration to make Latin literature as great as Greek, and it is aemulatio which pre-eminently allows him to achieve his goal.

Chapter 3 and 4, which form a diptych, were concerned with the ways in which Dionysius’ and Quintilian’s theoretical ideas on imitation are related to the practical reading advice in their canons. Chapter 3 threw new light on Dionysius’ ideas on imitation by presenting a thorough analysis of often unexplored textual material. I distilled and reconstructed important themes and criteria for imitation from the various remnants of Dionysius’ On Imitation, and analysed the purposes, audience, content and form of the epitome of this treatise. I showed that on the basis of thematic and stylistic correspondences with the works of Dionysius, some fragments which lack an explicit reference to ‘our’ Dionysius may well be considered genuine descendants from the treatise On Imitation, such as a remarkable, but often neglected scholion to Aristotle’s Rhetoric. From the analysis of the extensive quote from On Imitation in Dionysius’ Letter to Pompeius, I deduced that the epitome rather faithfully summarises the original text, and that Dionysius in his treatise On Imitation has been concerned not only with style (on which the epitome focuses), but also with subject matter. Moreover, the quote from the Letter to Pompeius taught us that the various literary virtues distinguished by Dionysius can often be applied both to the level of subject matter and style. The qualities which his Letter to Pompeius labels as ‘additional’ turned out to play a more important role in his epitome (and in the rest of his works) than the ‘essential’ virtues. Regarding the epitome, this chapter also established that the wide variety of adhortative formulas – directives, adhortative subjunctives and verbal adjectives, which are often clustered in particular sections of the epitome – not only reflects Dionysius’ pedagogical purpose to offer a reading list for young orators in spe, but also seems to bear traces of the stylistically different sources employed by Dionysius to give shape to his reading advice concerning the specific genres of poetry and prose. In the last sections of this chapter, I examined the literary virtues used in the epitome to designate the styles of the selected authors. I concluded that Dionysius’ recommendations of practical virtues such as clarity
compensate for his predominant insistence on poetical virtues related to magnificence and beauty, and contribute to achieving his ideal of stylistic mixture.

In chapter 4, we turned to an inquiry of the structure, aims, choices and evaluations of authors, selection criteria and use of literary virtues in Quintilian’s canons of Greek and Latin literature. A comparison with Dionysius’ canon of Greek literature yielded many correspondences and differences which, I argued, resulted from their adaptive use of a shared repertoire of language and notions. I observed that Dionysius and Quintilian make use of similar building blocks to construct their theory of imitation: the concepts of rhetorical facility, wide knowledge, sound judgement, scrupulous selection and eclecticism form the backbones of their methodologies of imitation. The structure of their canons, their evaluations of writers and their preferences for literary virtues displayed many similarities, but also remarkable deviations, the most important of which turned out to be the following. Unlike Dionysius, who is inclined to rely on the guideline of chronology in structuring his canon, Quintilian arranges the authors in his Greek list by tapping into an amalgam of criteria, of which the desired parallelism with the often more cogent order of affiliated authors in his Latin reading list is a rare, but striking example. I established that in his insertion of different Hellenistic authors (who are absent in Dionysius’ list), Quintilian gives voice to the popularity of these writers in his own days, tries to satisfy more advanced students who are formally beyond his scope, and attempts to compensate for the lacunae in Latin literary genres which are not yet fully developed. Moreover, we have seen that the names of Hellenistic authors serve to suggest a chronological continuum between classical Greek and Latin literature. In the more detailed analysis of the judgements Quintilian passes on various authors, I argued that he travels together with Dionysius in many cases, but is also guided by his own rhetorical agenda, which is determined by factors such as the criterion of rhetorical usefulness, the audience of novice learners, and the literary tastes of the Flavian Age. Quintilian’s stringent aim of rhetorical usefulness may also pre-eminently explain why he is much less concerned with the poetical virtues of literary beauty and magnificence than Dionysius, and instead focuses on practical qualities displayed by more modern authors. After having turned to the last sections of this chapter, I elaborated on the metaphors and motives used by Quintilian in his two canons, arguing that his peculiar language clearly frames Greek and Roman identity in different ways. Whereas he evokes the image of an authoritative and autarkic Greek culture, he outlines Roman society as maturing, promising and embroiled with Greece in a battle for literary rule. His mission, clearly, is to make the Romans surpass Greek literature by translating, adapting and improving on its achievements. We have seen that such competitive
purposes are far removed from Dionysius. Focusing on the literary magnificence and beauty of Greek texts, this Greek in Rome rather tries not only to strengthen the identity of Greeks in Rome by accomplishing a revival of their ‘own’ literature, but also to help the Attic Muse gain even more ground than Rome on its own could provide.

Chapter 5 placed Dionysius’ and Quintilian’s mimetic terminology and ideas as discussed in chapter 2-4 in a broader perspective by selecting and comparing various Greek and Roman sources on imitation and emulation: Aelius Theon’s Progymnasmata, Seneca’s Letter to Lucilius 84, Longinus’ On the Sublime, various letters of Pliny, Tacitus’ Dialogue on Oratory, and Dio Chrysostom’s Oration 18. An examination of their use and conceptualisations of the notions of μίμησις-ζῆλος and imitatio-aemulatio yielded various similarities and differences. In their construction of a framework of imitation, we have discerned various constants, the most important of which is that they distinguish between μίμησις-ζῆλος and imitatio-aemulatio only sporadically. When either μίμησις/imitatio or ζῆλος/aemulatio appears without its partner, this partner is likely to be implied. This general tendency to refer to the complex of imitation and emulation together by using only one term results in an amalgam of metaphors which often remind us of the imagery used to describe the more clearly distinguished notions of μίμησις and ζῆλος in Dionysius and imitatio and aemulatio in Quintilian. We have seen that some Greek and Latin authors, like Dionysius, adopt the image of the movement of the soul; others frame imitation in terms of the digestion of food, or by reference to competition and eager aspiration, like Quintilian. Whereas I argued that the recurring ideas and metaphors of imitation in these sources suggest a common discourse of imitation from which their Greek and Roman composers evidently draw and to which they contribute, I explained the differences in accents and nuances by assuming that these authors eclectically gather from this shared discourse the material to realise their aims (which are often bound to specific requirements of genre and addressee) and to express their literary tastes. Influenced by all these factors of text genre, audience, text goal, and personal preferences, the authors at stake address the tension between two quintessential mimetic criteria: literary beauty on the one hand and rhetorical-practical usefulness on the other. This chapter established that also in addressing this crucial issue, the crosslinks between Greeks and Romans are obvious. Aelius Theon, Longinus and Pliny (like Dionysius) adopt a remarkably aesthetic and sometimes archaizing approach of literature, whereas Dio and Tacitus (like Quintilian) propagate the mimetic use of (more modern) literature which is practically oriented more than aesthetically inspired. These latter authors possibly reflect a newer, later stage in Roman classicism.
This study has shown that Greek and Roman critics do not operate separately from each other, but draw from a shared discourse in order to profile their rhetorical agendas. Whereas some Greek and Roman authors espouse the idea that literary beauty – often displayed by more archaic poets and prose authors – should be a leading mimetic principle serving rhetorical-practical purposes, others are inclined to emphasise that rhetoricians in spe should concentrate rather on the practical usefulness of former literature by studying more recent writers. Dionysius can be seen as an important representative of the former, Quintilian of the latter branch, both of which are sprung from the very same, dialogical tradition of classicising theorisation on imitation in Rome.