

A Companion to Roman Rhetoric, eds W. Dominik and
J. Hall (Blackwell, 2007).

CHAPTER SEVEN

Virile Tongues: Rhetoric and Masculinity

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In Rome, as in most western cultures, manly men are better known for war-making than wordplay. Near the end of Vergil's *Aeneid*, in a council scene rich with material for the student of Roman rhetoric and gender, the Latin leader Turnus is taunted by his rival Drances, a man *largus opum et lingua melior, sed frigida bello / dextera, consiliis habitus non futilis auctor, / seditione potens* ("rich in resources and very good with his tongue, but with a cold right hand in war; in counsel-taking considered no useless leader, strong in quarrel," *Aen.* 11.338–40). Turnus retorts that Drances should keep silent until he has joined the fight, asking: *an tibi Mavors / ventosa in lingua pedibusque fugacibus istis semper erit?* ("or is your martial spirit to be found always in that wind-fickle tongue and those flying feet of yours?", *Aen.* 11.389–91). Tricked by Juno in book 10, Turnus had abandoned the battlefield; here, with his belligerent equation of Drances' oratorical powers with unmanly cowardice, Turnus redeems himself as a man of action, paving the way for his emergence as a lion-like hero before his final combat with Aeneas (himself, we remember, no great speaker). The eloquent Drances, by contrast, uniting verbal artfulness with riches and soft habits, is the embodiment of cultural corruption in the Roman moralist tradition (e.g., Sen. *Controv.* 1 *praef.* 8). His political skills, described with the litotes *non futilis auctor*, are coupled with disloyalty (*seditione potens*); his flapping tongue and scurrying legs signify a capricious physicality that recalls the rushed, talkative, gesticulating, plotting slaves of Roman comedy (e.g., Plaut. *Mil.* 200–17; Graf 1991). In a subtle touch Vergil describes Drances as a man goaded by *invidia* ("resentful envy," *Aen.* 11.337) of Turnus' glory – *invidia* being one of the emotions Roman orators sought most eagerly to arouse in their efforts to turn juries against their opponents (Quint. *Inst.* 4.2.75, 4.2.128, 4.3.6; Cic. *Inv. Rhet.* 1.22, *De Or.* 2.189, 203).

Practically speaking, rhetoric and oratory in Rome were wholly male endeavors in that the art of persuasive speech was taught, studied, and practiced in public space,

which is to say in male space, by men, for men, to men, according to men's interests: it formed the core of Roman education and was the primary instrument of the law court, Forum, and senate. Quintilian writes in the introduction to his *Institutio Oratoria*: *oratorem autem instituimus illum perfectum, qui esse nisi vir bonus non potest* ("we seek to create the perfect orator, who cannot exist unless he is a good man," 1 *praef.* 9). By defining speech itself as the exclusive domain of men, rhetoric at once sweepingly symbolizes, supports, and enacts men's dominance. More specifically, as the central focus of Roman education, rhetoric reinforces conventional beliefs about gender as it seeks to inculcate in students ideal masculine values and practices. The confidence to give a speech, the properly expressive but dignified posture to adopt when speaking, and the aggressive dominance of adversaries in the law court are all described as masculine properties, and from evidence outside rhetorical texts it is clear that Roman ideas about masculinity (which stress, for instance, propriety and gracefulness) are shaped in part by the defining experience of rhetorical education in youth and performances through adulthood (Keith 1999; Krostenko 2001: 233–90). As Richlin points out, a complete study of rhetoric's identity as a male and masculine social system would have to address the Forum as a gendered space, the socialization of Roman youths, the subject matter of the declamatory exercises they practiced, the links between gender and ethnic prejudice in rhetorical criticism, and the construction of women as a group excluded from the world of rhetoric (Richlin 1997: 91).

At the same time a cluster of interconnecting tensions marks the complex relations of rhetoric and masculinity in Rome, and it is these that underpin the angry exchange of Turnus and Drances: between eloquence and virtue, word and action, style and substance, artifice and integrity, politics and war. Considering these oppositions in their context in Roman culture from the second century BCE to late antiquity, the problem that gender poses is obvious: namely, it is impossible to map "masculinity" cleanly onto one half of the grid. If, as many textual and visual *exempla* of Roman culture suggest, virtue, action, substance, integrity, and war constitute the ideal values of Roman manliness in its most archaic form – the purest expression of Rome's collective cultural fantasy – words, style, eloquence, artifice, and politics are no less essential in the world in which Roman men live. Yet Roman ideology burdens the second list with heavily negative associations of unmanliness and vice – a habit that culminates, in the post-Roman tradition, in tendentious observations like Thomas Howell's remark in 1581 that "Women are Wordes, Men are Deedes," and Michel de Montaigne's meditations on the contrast between feminine *caquet* ("chatter") and manly action (Parker 1989: 452). Rhetoric and its object, eloquence, are constituted in and made possible by things that the Romans (and other cultures, ancient and modern) defined as not-manly: the artful manipulation of words, the willingness to deceive, the equation of power with persuasion rather than action, verbal ornament, theatricality, emotional demonstrativeness. The failure of ideal masculinity to square with the demands of eloquence makes rhetoric's legitimacy a fundamental issue for Roman rhetoricians – its legitimacy as a social practice, a pedagogy, a professional discipline, and a theory of language. Understanding this is a necessary first step to grasping the many-sided role masculinity plays in rhetorical texts.

Regarding the issue of legitimacy, Vergil's *Aeneid* prompts one more fruitful line of thought. What is the eloquent Drances' parentage? His mother is noble; his father, unknown (*incertum de patre*, 11.340–1), a fact that places him outside the normative net of family and social legitimacy. Like Drances, rhetoric at Rome has a doubtful genealogy. Cicero simultaneously asserts and denies the foundational role of the Greeks who, like bad styles of oratory, are represented as lacking in moral and political restraint (Cic. *Tusc.* 4.70, *Q. Fr.* 1.1.16, *Flac.* 16), excessively erudite (*De Or.* 2.18), and pedantic (*De Or.* 2.75). Cicero cites the Greeks' founding role in inventing the art of speech and conveying it to Rome, but he also uses Greece as a way symbolically to exile bad oratory from Rome, in his claim that the Romans, rescuing Greek oratory from its decline into vice, have made (virtuous) rhetoric their own rightful property (*De Or.* 3.130; cf. *Tusc.* 2.5). Driving Cicero's resourceful handling of the ethnic origins of rhetoric lies the remark of the elder Cato, outspoken if not transparent critic of Greek influence on Roman culture (Gruen 1992: 52–83), that the orator should simply *rem tene, verba sequentur* ("seize the point, and the words will come," Iulius Victor 17; Halm 1863: 374). Cato's maxim is, and was perhaps designed to be, an uncomfortable reminder of the liminal place that artful speech occupies in Roman culture and its carefully tended "straight-talking," manly image.

In its moralist tradition, historiography, and sculpture, and in other ways, such as the preservation of agriculture as a theme for high art and literature, Roman society carefully memorialized, and in the process made constantly problematic, the consequences of transition from agrarian, small-town culture to grand imperial cosmopolis. Gender is a key player in this ongoing communal self-critique. Might the men who built a Mediterranean empire transform into half-men, emasculated by the loot they carried home from Carthage, Greece, and Asia? Roman writers make up a chorus of anxieties about the cultural decay ushered in by empire (Sall. *Cat.* 10; Vell. Pat. 1.16; Petron. *Sat.* 88; Plin. *HN* 14.1). The elder Seneca complains in the introduction to his collection of rhetorical exercises called *controversia* that Rome has sunk into a daily worsening state of decline where *cantandi saltandique obscena studia effeminatos tenent* ("shameful enthusiasms for singing and dancing seize hold of the effeminate youth," *Controv.* 1 *praef.* 8). The Roman love of competition, once properly exercised on the battlefield and law court, has moved into women's bedrooms, as young men compete with women (*certare cum feminis*) in the arts of femininity: hair-braiding, cosmetics, training the voice in the rhythmic, sing-song effects suitable only for women (*ad muliebres blanditias*), and making the body soft and pliable (*mollitia corporis*).

Cicero identifies rhetoric as the art that engineered the transformation of humans from a savage to a civil state: it is literally what makes culture (*cultus*) possible (*Inv. Rhet.* 1.4). In the ancient societies of Greece and Italy, however, cultural achievement is the object as much of anxiety as it is of desire, from the endless labor endured by Hesiod's farmer to the tragedy that results from the Argo's shattering of the natural boundaries of the seas in Horace's *Epode* 16 and Seneca's *Medea*. In Rome, rhetoric is a target for those fears: it crystallizes worry that imperial expansion would lead to the replacement of the *mos maiorum* ("ancestral custom") of a smaller, agrarian, military-oriented age with the refined and potentially unmanly arts of high urban civilization. Aulus Gellius captures this anxiety in his description of Hortensius, the most famous orator of the generation just preceding Cicero's:

quod multa munditia et circumspicte compositeque indutus et amictus esset manusque eius inter agendum forent argutae admodum et gestuosae, maledictis compellationibusque probris iactatus est, multaque in eum, quasi in histrionem, in ipsis causis atque iudiciis dicta sunt. sed cum L. Torquatus, subagresti homo ingenio et infestivo . . . non iam histrionem eum esse diceret, sed gesticulariam Dionysiamque eum notissimae saltatriculae nomine appellaret, tum voce molli atque demissa Hortensius "Dionysia," inquit "Dionysia malo equidem esse quam quod tu, Torquate, amouosos, anaphroditos, aprosdionysos." (Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 1.5.2-3)

Because he dressed very elegantly, draped his toga with care and precision, and when pleading cases used quite distinctive gesticulations, he was harassed by many rude remarks and rebukes, and in the court itself, before the jury, many things were said against him, as though he were an actor. But when Lucius Torquatus, an ill-mannered and aggressive person . . . said Hortensius was not just an actor, but a pantomime and a Dionysia, the name of a notorious dancer, then in a soft and mild voice Hortensius responded, "Dionysia, yes, I would much prefer to be a Dionysia than like you, Torquatus, with no Muses, no Aphrodite, no Dionysus."

Rhetorical education was designed to instill in Roman boys habits that would make their masculinity literally visible to the world: along with constructing logical arguments, handling narration and interrogation, and creative ways to use words, they learned to stand up straight, look others straight in the eye, gesticulate with grace and authority, and speak with easy confidence. As Gellius' anecdote shows, the challenge for them lay in tracking the slender, shifting line separating masculine urbanity from feminine softness, old-fashioned bluntness from crude vulgarity.

The canonical goals of persuasion are three: *docere movere delectare* ("to teach, to move, and to please," Cic. *Brut.* 185; cf. *De Or.* 2.128). Too much pedantry, pathos, or pleasure, however, and the orator risked crossing over to unmanly territory, the social space inhabited by actors, teachers, dancers, prostitutes, and others who used their arts for gain. As Quintilian notes, vice and virtue enjoy remarkably close relations (*Inst.* 8.3.7). The cosmetics necessary to the skillful orator – the graceful movements of his body and the ornamentation of his words – easily cake into the heavy makeup of the eunuch slave (5.12.17-20).

Rhetoric is at heart a discourse of codification and evaluation. With its burden of longstanding associations and prejudices, the binary opposition of gender makes ideal shorthand for virtue and vice. Just as men's bodies are represented as being "naturally" better disciplined than women's bodies, just as men are better equipped to reason and to dispense justice, so their speech tends to obey laws of moderation – and if it fails to do so, the rhetorical treatise is available to redress that failing (Parker 1989: 113-19). Social and economic order rests on the maintenance of law, and rhetorical manuals and treatises, with their emphasis on proper speech, posture, and gesture, literally make those laws physical, by advising their readers how the good man – whether noble, king, monk, or merchant – behaves. Consider this influential passage of Cicero on the ideal orator's physical appearance:

idemque motu sic utetur, nihil ut supersit. in gestu status erectus et celsus; rarus incessus nec ita longus; excursio moderata eaque rara; nulla mollitia cervicum, nullae argutiae digitorum, non ad numerum articulus cadens; trunco magis toto se ipse moderans et

virili laterum flexione, brachii projectione in contentionibus, contractione in remissis.
(Cicero, *Orator* 59)

By the same token he will use motions that are not excessive. In his movements he will stand straight and tall; he will rarely stride around, and then in small compass; he will dash forward only a little, and rarely; there will be no soft curving of the neck, no flicking of the fingers, no counting the rhythm on the knuckles; he will govern himself in his whole frame, and in the manly stance of his torso, stretching out the arm in aggressive argumentation, and pulling it in at lighter moments.

This advice escaped the bounds of the rhetorical manual, and it persists in remarkably unchanged form through late antiquity into the early modern period. In a letter to a friend and fellow seeker of the well-lived life, the younger Seneca advises his addressee that in order to understand why vicious styles of oratory become popular at certain periods of time, he must look to men's character, since "men speak as they live" (*talis hominibus fuit oratio qualis vita*, *Ep.* 114.1). Seneca selects Maecenas, close friend and supporter of the emperor Augustus, as his *exemplar* of vice, citing Maecenas' swaying walk, loose clothing, and unconventional household – a notorious image still remembered fifty years after his death. By intentionally parading his vices in public, Maecenas parodically inverts one of rhetoric's primary educational goals, the techniques of concealing moral and physical flaws: *quam cupierit videri, quam vitia sua latere noluerit* ("how he desired to be seen, how he was unwilling to hide his vices," 114.4). Some of these points are echoed, ironically, in Quintilian's assessment of Seneca, demonstrating the speedy evolution of style and criticism in imperial Roman rhetoric, and the flexibility of gendered language as a weapon of invective, which could easily be turned against its wielder: *corruptum et omnibus vitiis fractum dicendi genus* ("a style corrupt and weakened by every vice," *Inst.* 10.1.125; cf. 10.1.129).

Seneca's critical terms *infracta* ("broken, faltering"), *inverecunde* ("immodest"), *soluta* ("loose"), and *discinctus* ("loosely belted"), catchwords in the rhetorical writings of Cicero and Quintilian, are embedded in the gendered language of Roman moralism, which itself rests on a tangle of folkloristic, medical, and philosophical beliefs. The female body was assumed to be weaker, damper, and more permeable than the male; just as they are more vulnerable to illness, the heaviness of their bodies makes women succumb more easily to mental disturbance (Hanson 1990: 317, 323). Most important for rhetoric and the emphasis that rhetorical education laid on training the body was the presumption that properly self-governed character manifested itself in physical characteristics normally belonging to men: in particular, a robust body and a deep voice (Gleason 1995: 91). Even virtuous women are barred from rhetorical virtue.

We are dealing here, it is important to remember, with symptoms of cultural fantasy, not reflections of reality. There is a near-total absence of women from the Roman rhetorical record. Quintilian stresses the necessity of ensuring that those caring for very young boys, including mothers and nurses, speak pure and grammatical Latin (*Inst.* 1.1.6–8). In his biographical history of Roman oratory, Cicero mentions the letters of Cornelia, whose pure speech exerted a profound influence over her sons, the politicians Gaius and Tiberius; he adds that Scipio Aemilianus' close

friend Laelius produced several generations of female descendants who shared his well-known "elegance" of expression (*Brut.* 211; repeated by Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.6). Valerius Maximus counts three Roman women who pleaded cases before magistrates (8.3; again, cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.1.6) but elsewhere asks the rhetorical question *quid feminae cum contione?* ("what do women have to do with public meetings?", Val. Max. 3.8.6). Justinian explains the prohibition on women's pleading cases by appealing to natural divisions of labor that confine women to domestic life (*Digest* 3.1.1.5; Richlin 1997: 93).

Passages like these demonstrate that in Roman rhetoric the crux is not the avoidance of empirically observable habits of women *per se*: on the contrary, the tradition of aristocratic women's speech features models of pure Latinity. Moreover, the critical category of femininity is a flexible one, perfectly capable of embracing groups whose members are biologically male. In Cicero, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the elder Seneca, and Quintilian, references to femininity or effeminacy connote the non-Roman (especially the "Asiatic" Greek), the enslaved, and the poor. By the same logic, references to the poor, the enslaved, and the non-Roman carry gendered overtones (Walters 1997: 30, 32). All these groups, legally, economically, and politically dominated by elite Roman men, are used as signs of the vices that the manly Roman orator must avoid. What is at stake is the inculcation and perpetuation of a particular set of attitudes and behaviors associated with masculinity and men. Like other aspects of identity, masculinity is established via differences that have become socially meaningful. Masculinity requires difference in order to exist, and it easily converts surface difference into essential otherness in order to secure its own "self-certainty" (W. Connolly 2002: 64). Whether in Roman culture the difference with which rhetorical texts are ultimately concerned is *gender* identity is the question I address at the end of this chapter. In the next section I survey three areas of special significance in the conflict between rhetoric and masculinity in the canonical writings of Cicero and Quintilian: rhetoric's identity as an art, its role in training verbal and bodily propriety, and the resources it offers for verbal ornament.

Art and the Man

Rhetoric is the *ars dicendi*, the "art of speech," and Roman writers tend either to define *ars* as the technical province of hired (Greek) teachers and craftsmen or to associate it with a type of cleverness that bleeds into the realm of manipulation and cunning. The orator Antonius, one of the two senior interlocutors in Cicero's dialogue *De Oratore*, protests against accusations that he drew on art and technique in one of his most famous performances, the defense of Manius Aquilius (2.195-6). Eloquence is an art of pleasure (one of its three canonical aims), and the pleasures it furnishes arouse the senses, from the aural delights of a well-trained voice embellishing dry argument with images and figures, to the sight of graceful gestures and elegant attire, and the sensation of being pulled, as into a drama, by emotion artfully introduced and subtly brought to a climax. Like poetry, eloquence moves and penetrates the listener. As Cicero writes: *huius eloquentiae est tractare animos, huius omni modo permovere: haec modo perfringit, modo inrepat in sensus; inserit novas opiniones, evellit insitas* ("it is the property of this [grand style of]

eloquence, to pull minds, to push them in every possible way: sometimes it shatters the senses, at other times it creeps into them; it grafts on new opinions, it tears out innate ones," *Orat.* 97). Yet the gender ideology of elite Roman masculinity valorized bodily inviolability and impenetrability (Walters 1997). Compare the first-century CE satirist Persius' description of the shattering effect of a contemporary poet's recitation:

tunc neque more probo videas nec voce serena
ingentis trepidare Titos, cum carmina lumbum
intran et tremulo scalpuntur ubi intima versu.

(Persius, *Saturae* 1.19–21)

Then, not according to approved good custom, nor in moderate tones,
you may see the huge sons of Titus shake, when the poems
penetrate their groins and itch their innermost parts with a trembling verse.

Describing the detailed techniques involved in training the memory and developing good delivery was a challenge for Roman rhetoricians because professional, paid performance itself was understood as an improper area for elite male participation (Edwards 1997a). Orators in the law court could not receive financial remuneration, according to the *lex Cincia* of 204 BCE: forensic speaking functioned instead as part of the exchange of favors that constituted the network of political *amicitia*, best translated in this context as "alliance" rather than "friendship." Though certain actors (notably Cicero's favorite, Roscius) were hailed as models for the aspiring orator, the rhetoricians are careful to emphasize the essential difference between actors, *imitatores veritatis* ("mimes of truth"), and orators, *actores veritatis* ("agents of truth") who literally enact legal and political order (*De Or.* 3.102, 214; cf. Quint. *Inst.* 1.8.3, 1.11.3). Actors, musicians, and dancers held a low social status that could be equated with that of women, and prejudicially associated with femininity or effeminacy. In his discussion of delivery, the anonymous author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* observes that *acuta exclamatio vocem vulnerat: eadem laedit auditorem, habet enim quiddam inliberale et ad muliebrem potius vociferationem quam ad civilem dignitatem in dicendo adcommodatum* ("a high-pitched outburst damages the voice: and further, it irritates the hearer, for it has something of the vulgar about it, and in oratory, is more fit for womanish screeching than the dignity of a citizen," 3.22). Cicero's *De Oratore* seeks to defuse the challenge by staging scenes where the interlocutors acknowledge rhetoric's emotional power and theatrical aspects, only to insist that the good orator's sincerity and natural sense of propriety can transform latent vice into virtuous persuasion. So, with regard to his melodramatic defense of Aquilius, Antonius claims that his act was entirely authentic: *non arte... sed motu magno animi ac dolore* ("not by way of technique... but by way of a great passion of the mind and a feeling of indignation," 2.195). The other major figure in the dialogue, Crassus, emphasizes Roman men's natural moderation (especially as contrasted with Greeks) and compares stylized rhythms and verbal decorations to the beauties of natural phenomena like trees and stars (3.178–80). At every point the

artifice of the performance is concealed, and authenticity and naturalness are made synonymous with the manly performance. The rhetorical treatise reminds readers that those who transgress the rule become *exempla* of vice and the object of notoriety in popular culture. Sextus Titius, for example, a tribune of the early first century BCE, was supposed to have adopted such languid gestures that a dance was named after him – proof, as Cicero says, that *cavendum est ne quid in agendo dicendove facias, cuius imitatio rideatur* (“you must guard against acting or speaking in ways that may be ridiculed,” *Brut.* 225).

Beyond the purely physical resemblance between the dramatic gestures of the orator and the actor or dancer, however, lies a more profoundly destabilizing question about the nature of masculinity itself. The human capacity to mime the attributes and appearance of another has been a target of moral anxiety throughout the western tradition (Barish 1966). The cultural tendency to construct a moral hierarchy that privileges authenticity over acting is an important aspect of the western association between femininity and theatricality, pretense, and dissembling. Femininity has been identified, in an influential psychoanalytic essay by Riviere (1927), with “masquerade,” and mimesis itself has been characterized as the sign of the feminine in Plato and Greek drama (Zeitlin 2002: 129–31). Within this tradition, rhetorical discourse may be seen to undermine its own quest: in its effort to inculcate the essence of manliness, rhetoric ends up constantly at war with itself. The self-knowledge and self-mastery promised by a rhetorical education emerges as an internally contradictory, highly unstable fantasy (Gunderson 2000). When Cicero advises that the good, manly orator should “be what he wishes to seem” (*vero assequetur, ut talis videatur, qualem se videri velit, De Or.* 2.176), his acknowledgement of the proximity between the rhetorical and the dramatic arts implies that masculinity, along with its assimilated values, such as sincerity, authenticity, and knowledge of the truth, are *learned* techniques, unnatural and artificial – the very inversion of the values masculinity is imagined to represent (Connolly 1998: 136–7).

This is the reason feminists have come to view rhetoric as a fruitful area for analysis: because it lays bare the contingent constructedness of gender difference, revealing the gap between the masculine ideal (in this case, its virtue, authenticity, and naturalness) and the social practices by which the power of men is actually realized. The rhetoricians’ careful codification of what De Lauretis (1987) calls the “technologies of gender” (related to Foucault’s framing, in non-gender-specific terms, of the “practices of self-care”) show that it is precisely what cultures define as *natural* that tends to do the heaviest ideological work in sustaining *cultural* norms.

The Politics of Propriety

The link between masculinity and propriety runs deep in rhetorical writings. *Decere*, to be proper, is the *caput artis*, the essence of the art (*De Or.* 2.132). Gendering the proper performance as masculine in the manner of Cicero in *Orator* 59 (quoted above) is a standard move in Quintilian and post-Roman writings on rhetoric. Following both Roman writers, Thomas Wilson’s 1553 *Arte of Rhetorique* and Baldesar Castiglione’s 1528 *Il Libro del Cortegiano* (*Book of the Courtier*) teach men to mold their bodies into embodiments of civilized and civilizing power: strong

and supple, full of grace and force, back straight, head held high, hands and feet moving in serene rhythm (Rebhorn 1993).

But the proper management of the male body in the delivery of the speech is only half the story. The author of the *Ad Herennium*, Cicero, and Quintilian devote a much larger proportion of their writings to verbal propriety. They seek to enforce the order and orderliness of ideas and words with terms such as *dispositio*, the proper "arrangement" of arguments (the second element in the canonical parts of rhetoric, along with invention, style, memory, and delivery) or tropes like *hyperbaton/verbi transgressio*, change in customary word order. They are equally concerned with the orderliness of language in an extended sense, namely the restraint of excessive speech, embodied in the careful distinctions drawn between the proper and improper use of tropes and figures. As Quintilian comments, *in hac autem proprietatis specie, quae nominibus ipsis cuiusque rei utitur, nulla virtus est, at quod ei contrarium est, vitium. id apud nos improprium... quale est... de cruce verba ceciderunt* ("there is no virtue in the appearance of propriety, by which we call things by their own names, but there is vice in the opposite, and this we call impropriety... as in the phrase... 'the words fell from the cross,'" *Inst.* 8.2.3). No less than those men who adopt a rhythmic delivery, fluting voice, and languid gestures, Quintilian characterizes the speeches of orators who experiment with the resources of verbal style as vicious and unmanly: *impropria, obscura, tumida, humilia, sordida, lasciva, effeminata* ("inappropriate, obscure, inflated, lowly, mean, without restraint, effeminate," 2.5.10). Men seduced by ornament are like those who are attracted to shaved and hairless bodies, with artificially curled hair and heavy makeup (2.5.12).

Two points are worth considering here. First, in these prescriptions, the personal is the political. The elder Seneca's censure of the effeminate young men of his age and the younger Seneca's letter to Lucilius declaring that "as a man speaks, so he lives" (*Ep.* 114.1) express their belief that oratorical decline is linked to moral decline on a broad social scale. If the effeminate orator "communicates" moral disease that corrupts the whole state, the good orator is the speaking embodiment of the *res publica*, protected like an elected magistrate by his skill, a crucial element in its good government: *conquirimus... eum virum* ("we seek that man," *Cic. De Or.* 1.202). The heavy emphasis in rhetorical treatises (and speeches) on the orator's masculine nature and his obedience to the rules of masculine propriety is born from Roman political ideology, which equates masculinity and its virtues with the order of society itself. To perform according to expectation and custom is thus a matter not only of obeying the ethical and aesthetic code of masculine convention as an individual Roman, but of making visible the unity and health of the body politic.

We can compare the policing of women's bodies and speech, which offers "proof" that social structures are secure and stable. In his early books on Rome's archaic past, Livy consistently identifies the violation of Roman women (or its imminent threat) as the reason for regime change and social upheaval, from the birth of Romulus and Remus to Rhea Silvia after her rape by Mars, to the rape of the Sabines, to Lucretia, raped by the tyrannical prince Tarquin, to Verginia and Cloelia. By the same logic inverted, violence and chaos is again the outcome in Livy when abnormally powerful women like Tanaquil and Tullia, transgressing

conventional restraints, seize a role in early Roman politics. The elder Cato condemns women speaking in public, and indeed speaking about public affairs at home (Livy 34.2–3). Similarly, with the policing of men's bodies, the carriage and style of individual men (their *habitus*, to use the sociologist Bourdieu's term) and their proper use of words proclaim the health and vitality of the state. Like the boy whose youthful fire and luxuriant style must be tempered by moderation and experience, the Roman state too learns self-government through a painful adolescence (Cic. *Rep.* 2.30, *De Or.* 1.134–5).

The *ars rhetorica*, the property and tool of the dominant order, is devoted to sustaining it in all its guises: the aristocracy, the propertied classes, and men in general. Habits of language usage are centrally important in sustaining the belief system that underpins material structures of power – naming the rich and politically powerful *optimates*, or “the best men,” for example, or retaining two words for “man,” the elite *vir* and the common *homo*. This is the second consequence of the Roman rhetorical treatise's prescriptions on the body and everyday language usage: the discipline of rhetoric *naturalizes* those beliefs and structures. The reality of masculinity, its purchase as a concept, is created through repeated social enactments whose “stylized repetition,” to use Butler's phrase, places them beyond question, beyond criticism, beyond reason (Butler 1990: 140–1). The rhetorician's particular contribution is to construct a system that simultaneously divides and evaluates language, inventing or copying categories that distinguish “good” and “bad” types of verbal and bodily expression. Most important are the value-laden distinctions of propriety, between what is supposed to work and what does not, according to the audience's expectation and taste – itself a dynamic construct of custom, memory, and current fashion.

Cicero links propriety with protecting the social order from the taint of disruption. In the third book of *De Oratore*, which is devoted to proper style and delivery, the censor Crassus recalls his decision to shut down schools of Latin oratory because they taught students *nisi ut auderent* (“nothing but how to be rash,” 3.94). Whether or not Crassus is speaking the truth here (scholars have speculated on political reasons for the shutdown), his description of it as a policing action is an example of the identification Cicero makes between ordered style and political order: *sic enim statuo, perfecti oratoris moderatione et sapientia non solum ipsius dignitatem, sed et privatorum plurimorum, et universae rei publicae salutem maxime contineri* (“for this is what I believe: by the moderation and the wisdom of the perfect orator not only his *dignitas*, but the safety of the mass of private citizens, and indeed the entire republic, is embraced,” 1.34).

The presence of gendered terms in the style-disciplining language of rhetoric helps create a seamless identification between masculinity and civic virtue. When elites exploit the “natural” language of gender to describe and evaluate themselves, the visible and verbal signs of masculinity become both evidence and source of political stability and power. Because the unmanly orator threatens to disrupt that order by fracturing the identification of dominance and masculinity, he is censured, both in the text of the rhetorical treatise (e.g., *Brut.* 225; *Quint. Inst.* 8 *praef.* 19–20) and, these texts expect, the world outside the text (but see Quintilian, who acknowledges the appeal of unmanly speech, 5.12.17–20). At the same time, the notion of threatening the male status quo becomes itself (in rhetorical treatises) an

effeminized, and hence unnatural, idea. The manly orator signifies virtue, and virtuous men constitute a virtuous political community. Women – and the many men who do not meet the class-based standard of the *vir* – are entirely excluded from the system, in thought and practice.

Ornament

The political context of the disciplinary language in Roman rhetoric also illuminates the remarkable gendering of *elocutio*, style, specifically verbal ornament. Quintilian condemns ornament's emasculation of speech in no uncertain terms at the opening of his book on style: *illa translucida et versicolor quorundam elocutio res ipsas effeminat* ("a translucent and variegated style emasculates the subject matter," *Inst.* 8. *praef.* 20). Students contemplating this topic are advised to treat *eloquentia* like a vigorous male body (*toto corpore valet*) rather than simply polishing her nails and arranging her hair (*ungues polire et capillum reponere*, 8. *praef.* 22). The properly adorned oration must be, Quintilian self-consciously repeats (*repetam enim*), *virilis et fortis et sanctus sit nec effeminatam levitatem et fuco ementitatum colorem amet, sanguine et viribus niteat* ("manly, brave, and pure, a lover not of effeminate smoothness and color tinted with makeup, but glowing with blood and strength," 8.3.6–7; cf. *sine ullo fuco*, Cic. *Brut.* 162). The best kinds of Attic-style speeches, pared down and plain, resemble the woman who is most beautiful when unadorned (*mulieres pulchriorae . . . inornatae*, *Orat.* 78).

Ornament presents a special problem in part because it recalls the artful speech of the actor or poet: its obviously superfluous presence draws attention to itself in a way uncomfortably close to those unmanly professions. Quintilian flatly admits that he is aware there are those who assert that "rough speech" (*horridum sermonem*) is more natural, and even more manly, than ornament (*modo magis naturalem, modo etiam magis virilem esse*, *Inst.* 9.4.3). Richlin cites his concern over "loosening the holiness of the Forum" by importing the rhythmic, heavily ornamental flourishes of the Lycians and Carians instead of the *pressi* ("succinct") and *integri* Attic style (11.3.58; Richlin 1997: 107). I have already discussed a few general associations between artfulness and unmanliness: now I would like to explore precisely what kind of threat ornament is imagined as posing to ideals of masculinity.

How is it defined? Ornament is, first of all, superfluous: it is what fills the space between what is necessary for bare communication and what is not. To Quintilian, ornament is literally expansive: similes open up the field of signification in words by shedding light on familiar things (8.3.72); he lists many methods of amplification (8.3.90, and briefly, its opposite, 8.3.82; cf. Parker 1987: 8–35). Ornament is also a force of embodiment: it lends "blood" to the dry bones of words (Cic. *De Or.* 1.56). Of the two major forms of ornament, tropes and figures, the trope is a mutation (*mutatio*) of a word or phrase from its nearest or proper meaning (*a propria significatione*) to another (Quint. *Inst.* 8.6.1) and figures have to do with the particular conformation of language the orator chooses for his speech (9.1.5). Hyperbaton, a change in word order, is a trope, but repetition, ellipse, and impersonation are figures. Despite their differences, both trope and figure rest on the capacity of the meanings and contexts of words to shift and change, whether they actually connote different

significations, as in the trope of metaphor, or allow the orator to speak in the voice of another (as in the figure of *prosopopeia*).

In an influential early feminist study of medieval rhetoric, Ferrante (1975) suggested that women's biological capacity to bear children was the factor that enabled the ideological and intellectual connection between ornament and femininity. Just as women's bodies swell, dilate, and give birth, so ornament allows the expansion and dilation of language, literally and semiotically: ornament is an essentially feminine capacity and is properly described as such (Ferrante 1975: 37–64). We have already seen, however, just how distant is the rhetoric of gender from the lived material realities of Roman women and men. Rather than appeal to biology, it is possible to explain the gendering of ornament by recalling rhetoric's civic context.

Ornament enables language to float free from its original meaning or set of meanings. It performs what one scholar calls the "radical suspension of fixed ontic categories," where every word is transformed into a carrier of multiple significations (Paxson 1998: 164). Ornament thus spotlights the paradox that the formal public speech that codifies, legislates, passes judgment, and makes policy is far from being as clear as the rhetorical codes that seek to describe it: like all speech, political speech is (necessarily) mutable, unreliable, expansive, and open to many different interpretations. If, as suggested above, rhetoric plays an important role in symbolizing the security and stability of the masculine social order, then the rhetoricians' ambivalence toward ornament becomes comprehensible. Ornament is defined by opposition to naked logic; it thus lives, in a sense, outside the law; it must also, then, exist outside the realm of virtue that Roman masculinity claims for itself.

Conclusion: The Rhetoric of Gender

We have seen that common terms of rhetorical criticism that connote the absence of masculinity like *non virilis* ("not manly") and *effeminatus* ("effeminate") are used in tandem with the language of sense perception (*mollis*, "soft"), ethnic prejudice (the florid theatricality of "Asiatic" orators), and social prejudice against actors and other groups in the construction of a code for inferiority that casts its ideological nets very broadly. In a certain sense, trying to tease a consistent discursive thread illuminating the relations of rhetoric and masculinity in isolation from questions of ethnicity and class is impossible. Before concluding, it is worth considering the consequences of taking Roman rhetoricians talking gender at their word, and asking whether privileging gender as the object of analysis in Roman culture orients us in a direction that goes against the grain of the elite class for which rhetorical texts were written.

The contrast with modern versions of the ancient rhetorical handbook, such as the etiquette manual and the composition textbook, is instructive. Beginning in the eighteenth century, when revolutionary movements sought radically to change the conditions of women, people of color, and colonized peoples, these publications took on two new functions. Some sought self-consciously to make the values and traditional forms of education of propertied white male culture available to other, hitherto excluded groups (Ruttenburg 1998; Gustafson 2000). Others sought to obstruct social change by underscoring the naturalness and inflexibility of traditional gender and class identities, under the guise of promoting "manners" and civility. But

no social revolution forms the backdrop of Roman rhetorical discourse: the motivations behind its marked use of gender cannot be explained as liberal or conservative reactions to change.

In her book *Bodies That Matter*, Butler (1993: x–xi) stresses the dangers of misinterpreting her earlier work on performativity: she fears that her use of the word is encouraging the simplistic view that gender is a surface performance, like a dress or a suit, covering up an essence beneath. There is no prediscursive “sex,” she insists, and her argument is relevant here. It is easy, when referring to the challenge of performing Roman masculinity, to adopt language implying that there is an essential masculinity available to “get right”: this is, after all, the assumption of the prescriptions I have surveyed in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, in Cicero, and in Quintilian. It is true that appearing virile is paramount. But the links between rhetoric and femininity are themselves constructions, not essences or universals: so we cannot fully explain the language of gender by appealing to them. We should ask, rather, why the Roman elite retained gender as an important category in critical discourse. Did rhetoric’s nature and associations make this retention “necessary” or “inevitable”? Was masculinity the ultimate object of concern? What, if anything, might lie beyond the rhetoric of gender in Roman rhetoric?

So far I have concentrated on the fracturing pressure that the artful, theatrical *ars rhetorica* places on ideals of masculinity. From the perspective of Roman rhetoricians, rhetoric is an art, but it is also a weapon of war. In Cicero’s *Brutus*, eloquence furnishes *arma* (“weapons”) that are the property of leading men and of the ethical and well-constituted republic (7). Elsewhere Cicero remarks that teaching evil men the arts of speaking is the same as handing them *arma* (*De Or.* 3.55; cf. 3.206); in a letter to Brutus, he compares his *Philippics* against Mark Antony to glorious deeds (1.3, 2.1). Just as wealthy youth attached themselves to male networks of their fathers’ friends and relatives in the informal *tirocinium militiae* (“military apprenticeship”) so they sought mentors in the *tirocinium eloquentiae* (“apprenticeship of eloquence”) or *fori* (“of the Forum”). Quintilian refers to ineffective speech as *gladio intro vaginam* (“a sword still in the sheath,” *Inst.* 8 *praef.* 16). Cicero compares giving speeches to competing in wrestling and fighting on the battlefield (*De Or.* 1.81, 3.220, *Orat.* 229: note that the *palaestra* is sometimes dismissed as the site of mere play). References to oratory as *vis* (“force”) and to good orators as “muscular” and “tanned” are common (*Opt. Gen. Orat.* 8, *Orat.* 228, *Brut.* 93, *De Or.* 3.74–6; Quint. *Inst.* 1.11.18, 2.15.10–22). We are reminded, as one historian has put it, that perhaps to a greater extent than any other ancient culture, Rome was a “community of warriors” (Nicolet 1980: 89; cf. Campbell 2002). As these links between language and military power suggest, rhetoric transforms talk into expressions of power. The orator in practice (and as represented in rhetorical texts), like the statues adorning Rome, offered commanding *exempla* for youths to emulate. Men spoke to audiences of men with the aim of winning cases and dominating audiences, exercising power and gaining *auctoritas* at the expense of others.

What distinguishes the Roman speaker from his audience was not gender, which orator and audience shared, but class status. There was no official place in Roman politics for the poor non-elite. Magistrates and ex-magistrates, screened by high property requirements, and those they invited to speak, were the only men permitted to address the senate and the public assembly (*contio*). In the careful construction of

gendered language ongoing in rhetorical discourse, what is being shaped is not a “man” in the biological sense but a person of class with the proper authority, the legal capacity, and the social capital that combine to give him a public voice: the elite citizen-man. *Neminem esse in oratorum numero habendum, qui non sit omnibus eis artibus, quae sunt libero dignae, perpolitus* (“no one should be counted among the number of orators, who is not thoroughly polished in all those arts that are worthy of the free man,” Cic. *De Or.* 1.72). In his earliest surviving oration, Cicero addresses Naevius with brutal irony as *homo timidus virginali verecundia* (“you poor timid man of maidenly modesty,” *Quinct.* 39). His last speeches attack Antony in the same terms: *sumpsisti virilem, quam statim muliebrem togam reddidisti* (“you assumed the manly toga, which you quickly exchanged for a whore’s womanly gown,” *Phil.* 2.44).

Roman orators “talk gender” in public in speeches like these in order to dominate in the intra-elite rivalries that played out in the public eye, making Roman political culture into a “choice between champions” (Morstein-Marx 2004: 284). Bringing gender to the forefront of these contests confirms all elite men in their identity as virile men, a particularly important operation when their refined lifestyles set them decisively apart from the laboring masses. We have already seen that gender is a force for naturalization in rhetorical discourse; claiming masculinity endows claims to authority with the power of nature. Now I suggest that the rhetoric of gender helps recast the competitive nature of intra-elite relations as a contest for virtue, a perfect fit with senatorial aristocratic ideology and its claim to preserve the archaic *mos maiorum*. Framing contests between men as “manly men” masks the profoundly destabilizing political effects of elite power struggles, by replacing them with the more familiar, and globally speaking, less volatile, division between the sexes.

This overview of rhetoric and masculinity has sought to address three areas in this rich and recently much-studied field: rhetoric’s embedment in and enabling of the social and political interactions of men; the anxieties emerging from the inconsistencies between ideals of masculinity and the practices of eloquence; and finally, by way of speculation on possible avenues to be explored in future research, the social context of class domination in which the rhetoric of gender may ultimately have more to say about class than it does about masculinity and femininity or men and women.

FURTHER READING

On gender and rhetoric in Roman culture, Gleason (1995) is invaluable. In a pathbreaking study Richlin (1992²) surveys the gendered aspects of abuse and invective, including Cicero’s speeches; the concise study of “political immorality” by Edwards (1993) is especially helpful on Roman prejudices against Greek culture and the theater. Gunderson (2000) is a thoughtful, theoretically sophisticated study (psychoanalytic theory plays the most important role) of gender construction in Cicero, Quintilian, and Lucian; Gunderson (2003) on declamation concentrates on social logics of male interactions, especially same-sex erotic relations and paternity. Gruen (1992) on cultural identity illuminates the difficult question of the elder Cato’s views on rhetoric and other “importations” from Greece. The studies of rhetoric in English and Italian early modernity and the early American republic cited here make excellent starting points for comparing and contrasting Roman values and practices: Parker (1987, 1989,

1996) in particular is firmly grounded in knowledge of the Roman tradition and deserves careful study. Some of the arguments advanced in this chapter are drawn from Connolly (2007).

The bibliography on Roman gender is too extensive to treat justly here. Hallett and Skinner (1997) offers useful essays and further references. On feminist and queer theory, especially as relating to style and selfhood, Dollimore (1991), Foucault (1991), and De Lauretis (1987) are outstanding for their quality of analysis and readability. Butler (1990, 1993) is less accessible but still important for readers interested in social construction theory. Bourdieu (1990) and his other influential writings on sociology shed light on the intersection between ideology and social practice.