

Fourth-Century Fakes

CHARLES J. MCNAMARA

ABSTRACT: Although Gaius Julius Victor has attracted scholarly attention due to his inclusion of letter-writing in his fourth-century rhetorical manual, his peculiar notion of *sermocinatio* or “impersonation” has gone largely unnoticed. Set against the backdrop of earlier accounts of *sermocinatio* as a technique of the grand style—including accounts in Quintilian and Cicero—Julius Victor presents impersonation as a method of subtle eloquence most germane to plain-style rubrics. Given Julius Victor’s coupling of *sermocinatio* and letter-writing, too, his manual suggests that the ascending importance of writing tracks this stylistic reorientation, anticipating our own era’s evolving media and techniques for impersonating others.

KEYWORDS: *sermocinatio*, impersonation, Gaius Julius Victor, history of rhetoric, deepfakes

Gaius Julius Victor is known among historians of rhetoric principally for his role in theorizing letter-writing as a domain of oratorical practice.¹ According to Jeffrey Reed’s account of epistolary theorists, up to the time of Julius Victor’s fourth-century *Ars Rhetorica* “letter writing was not treated as part of a systematic rhetorical theory, and

even [in Julius Victor] it is relegated to an appendix alongside the *de sermocinatione*” (Reed 1997: 191).² Outside his brief consideration of epistolography, where Julius Victor explains how “many of the things which are precepts of speech are applicable to letters,” Julius Victor has not attracted much attention, even in specialist volumes on the rhetorical developments in his time.³ In Stanley Porter’s *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 330 B.C.–A.D. 400* (1997), to take one example, Julius Victor is mentioned a half-dozen times but only as an early theorist of epistolary style and once as a follower of Cato’s rhetorical dictum *rem tene, verba sequentur*.

As Reed’s account mentions in passing, however, this late-antique rhetorical handbook also devotes some attention near its end to the topic of *sermocinatio*, but unlike Julius Victor’s nascent theorizing of the letter as a rhetorical genre, his own consideration of *sermocinatio* is predated by many rich treatments. In the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, *sermocinatio* occupies several pages of the fourth book on matters of style, where the technique is defined as relaying speech (*sermo*) that is “typical” of some person or that “conforms with his character” (*cum ratione dignitatis*).⁴ At least in that text, we might render *sermocinatio* as something like “imitation” or “impersonation.” According to Quintilian, too, this imitative stratagem involves displaying “the inner thoughts of our opponents as though they were talking to themselves,” but he cautions that these imagined speeches “are credible only if we imagine [the speakers] saying what it is not absurd for them to have thought.”⁵ As both of these texts highlight, *sermocinatio* is speech that on the one hand is a product of patent artifice but that on the other hand must in some way be so emblematic of the speaker that we could believe the words to be “authentic.”⁶

Since Julius Victor shows himself to be an avid reader of Quintilian, whom he frequently cites in the *Ars Rhetorica*, it is surprising to find in his handbook a treatment of *sermocinatio* that is evidently at odds with this well-documented practice of impersonation.⁷ In the first sentence of its chapter titled *De sermocinatione*, in fact, the *Ars Rhetorica* suggests that this term is one defined by its distance from rhetorical artistry: “the use of *sermo* is much more frequent than the use of *oratio*.”⁸ In the sentences that follow, Julius Victor paints *sermocinatio* as a kind of speaking devoid of rhetorical figures (*sine figuris*), metaphors (*paucae translationes*), and allusiveness (*carens obscuritate*). In other words, Julius Victor advances a notion of *sermocinatio* more strongly rooted in bare *sermo*, or unadorned speech. While the *Institutio Oratoria* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* position *sermocinatio* as a highly wrought display of verbal sophistication, the chapter in Julius Victor hints at something more in line with mere “conversation, dialogue, [or] discussion.”⁹

Despite Julius Victor’s apparent departure from his predecessors in this anti-rhetorical portrayal of *sermocinatio*, however, D. S. Mayfield (2018: 55n104) suggests that the same chapter of the *Ars Rhetorica* “facilitates a nexus with” those earlier considerations of *sermocinatio* as a kind of expert ventriloquism. Taking its cue from Mayfield’s remark, this article explores this possible “nexus.” Read in light of the earlier rhetorical handbooks from which it in some ways radically differs, Julius Victor’s chapter on *sermocinatio* still emerges as an important development of the theory of impersonation rather than as a clean break from earlier writers. More specifically, I show here how this fourth-century treatment of *sermocinatio* is closely tied to preceding accounts in their shared foundation in the concept of rhetorical decorum, the

“appropriateness” of a speech for its audience and aims. His attention to “appropriate” oratory allows for Julius Victor’s account of *sermocinatio* to shift from its Ciceronian understanding as a theatrical performance to one of subtle posturing. Among earlier authors like Cicero and Quintilian, in fact, *sermocinatio* is understood principally as a strategy of the grand style, employing exaggeration and artifice, but in Julius Victor’s manual, impersonation aligns with the rubrics of plain-style speaking, through which one might accomplish persuasion by way of less overt and even covert means. And this generic pivot, I conclude, positions Julius Victor as an important predecessor for more modern theories of artful subtlety, including the notion of *sprezzatura* or studied nonchalance and even our own era’s pioneering methods of so-called “deepfake” videos.

I. Bring Up the Bodies

In Heinrich Lausberg’s *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*, we find several pages of examples of *sermocinatio*, showing the ancient popularity of putting words in other people’s mouths.¹⁰ One of the most famous among these many examples can be found in Cicero’s *Pro Caelio*, where the Roman advocate *par excellence* resurrects the persona of the distinguished statesman Appius Claudius Caecus as a scathing critic of Clodia, Cicero’s client’s former lover:

Let me therefore call up some member of this very family, above all Appius Claudius the Blind, for he will feel the least sorrow since he will not be able to see Clodia. If he appears, this assuredly is how he will plead, this is how he

will speak: “Woman, what hast thou to do with Caelius, with a stripling, with a stranger?”¹¹

Alongside modern commentators who have studied Cicero’s speech as a master class in courtroom strategy, ancient rhetorical writers—including Julius Victor himself, as we shall see—have also taken an interest in Cicero’s rhetorical maneuvers here. In a robust discussion of the strategy of impersonation in book 9 of the *Institutio Oratoria* and likely with this very speech in mind, Quintilian cites Cicero as an authority on the tactic of conjuring up the deceased for posthumous commentary:

Bolder, and needing (as Cicero puts it) stronger lungs, are impersonations, or προσωποποιΐαι as they are called in Greek. These both vary and animate a speech to a remarkable degree. We use them to display the inner thoughts of our opponents as though they were talking to themselves (but they are credible only if we imagine them saying what it is not absurd for them to have thought!), to introduce conversations between ourselves and others, or of others among themselves, in a credible manner, and to provide appropriate characters for words of advice, reproach, complaint, praise, or pity. We are even allowed in this form of speech to bring down the gods from heaven or raise the dead.¹²

In his commentary on *Pro Caelio*, R. G. Austin (1960: 90) calls such impersonation “essentially a feature of the ‘grand style’ in oratory,” a classification that Quintilian

supports in his own account here: he cites Cicero as an authority for understanding impersonation as a theatrical, even arduous strategy, one that requires “stronger lungs” than other kinds of speech do. In a summary treatment of the grand style in book 12 of the *Institutio*, too, Quintilian cites Cicero’s speech where “an orator will even raise the dead, for instance Appius Caecus,” using these dramatic techniques to “inspire anger and pity” and to force the judge to “turn pale and weep” and to “let himself be dragged through the whole range of emotions.”¹³ Quintilian’s grand-style assessment of this rhetorical necromancy is not strictly his own making either; as Quintilian notes, Cicero himself reports in his *Orator* that one needs “strong lungs” for oratorical impersonations, which are not appropriate for the plain style of speech.¹⁴

Despite these several reminders to leverage one’s athleticism in the service of emotionally electrifying caricatures, Quintilian paradoxically emphasizes that these rhetorical elements need to remain truthful and “appropriate” to the real-life qualities of their target. Grand-style impersonation, in other words, cannot be a root-and-branch fabrication. Quintilian’s account of impersonation stresses three times that it must conform to the prevailing understanding of the person imitated: it cannot be “absurd” (*non sit absurdum*), it must be done “credibly” (*credibiliter*), and its targeted personalities must be “appropriate” (*personas idoneas*). In some way, this insistence on “credibility” and “appropriateness” is intuitive—it would not make sense for an impersonation to be unrecognizable.¹⁵ And in the sentences that follow this triple recommendation, Quintilian underscores how this rhetorical “probability” is the fundamental element underlying all the granular subcategories of impersonation found among ancient theorists:¹⁶

Some confine the term *prosopopoeia* to cases where we invent both the person and the words; they prefer imaginary conversations between historical characters to be called “dialogues,” which some Latin writers have translated *sermocinatio*. I follow the now-established practice in calling them both by the same name, for we cannot of course imagine a speech except as the speech of a person (*non potest ut non personae sermo fingatur*).¹⁷

While Lausberg documents how several rhetorical writers keep a sharp distinction between *sermocinatio* and the Greek loan-word *prosopopoeia*, Quintilian himself conflates all such groups under the latter, relying on “established practice” (*recepto more*) for this combination.¹⁸ Quintilian’s choice to stress the *persona* at the center of impersonation, moreover, hints at the Greek vocabulary from which these Latin terms derive, all centering around the notion of ἦθος. While not cited in the above passage, elsewhere Quintilian uses the word ἡθοποιία, the fashioning of an ἦθος or character.¹⁹ If nothing else, we see that at the time of Quintilian’s writing, the vocabulary surrounding rhetorical imitation is diverse and even unstable, with terminological disputes of what we can only assume was a widely adopted practice of caricature. Indeed, it would only make sense to have so many terms available if there were at least as many notable examples to which one could apply them.

The theoretical sophistication surrounding *sermocinatio* and its closely related terms makes it all the more surprising that Julius Victor eschews all of them—*prosopopoeia*, *moralis confictio*, *fictio personae*, and others—in his own discussions of impersonation. As we shall see now, however, his *sermocinatio* itself will emerge as something rather different from its earlier treatment in Cicero and Quintilian. This

terminological rupture will prompt us to reconsider what kind of relationship we can trace between Julius Victor's *sermocinatio* and the same word that appears throughout these earlier rhetorical manuals from which he proudly takes inspiration.

II. How to Treat People Ethically

As we have just seen in Quintilian's own accounts of rhetorical impersonation, the virtuosic ventriloquizing of Appius Claudius Caecus in Cicero's *Pro Caelio* is understood even in antiquity as an exemplar of the tactic. Julius Victor's *Ars Rhetorica* affirms this canonicity. At the conclusion of chapter 22, titled *De obliquitate*, Julius Victor provides just one brief paragraph on two of the three Aristotelian methods of proof or πίστεις—ἦθος and πάθος—and he summarizes the entire consideration of ἦθος with a citation of this episode from Cicero's well-known speech:²⁰

Ethos, however, is a person's mental character and durable pattern of his character traits, as a blowhard, a greedy man, a wholesome man, a hayseed, or someone gentle or shy or bawdy or stern, or an old man or a young man and so forth, all whose peculiar character a style of speaking (*sermo*) ought to imitate. This is what Cicero does in his speech *Pro Caelio*, speaking in the persona of Appius Caecus and then of Clodia.²¹

As readers of Quintilian (surely including Julius Victor himself) know, there are several names available for the strategy alluded to here. Although he writes that Cicero speaks “in the persona” of Appius Caecus and nods to the Greek concept of ἦθος, however,

Julius Victor avoids the use of the word ἠθοποιία and its various Latin relatives, including not just *sermocinatio* but also *fictio personae* and *prosopopoeia*.²²

While sidestepping the available terminology for Cicero's strategy, Julius Victor here applies the Latin cognate *ethos* to these various types of caricature, but elsewhere he prefers the label *allocutio*, a term which continues to underscore the ethical and emotional dimensions of this tactic.²³ In a chapter entitled *De principis*, Julius Victor again points to resurrecting the dead as an emblematic use of impersonation: "In the last part of a speech it is also permitted to introduce an *adlocutio* and to rouse the dead, to produce proofs, and other things that affect the emotions of the audience."²⁴ The verb *movere* signals Julius Victor's consideration of *allocutio* as a method of emotional appeal, building on the long tradition of aligning *docere*, *movere*, and *delectare* with the Aristotelian πίστεις of logical, emotional, and ethical strategies, respectively.²⁵ While this first use of *allocutio* focuses on emotional methods of persuasion, moreover, an appearance in the following chapter titled *De narratione* points to its "ethical" aspect, as well: "*allocutio* should be used exceedingly rarely, except where you need to and where it does a lot for quickness and credibility (*ad fidem*)."²⁶ Paralleling Julius Victor's treatment of ἤθος and πάθος at the end of chapter 22 on *obliquitas*, these earlier considerations of *allocutio* reinforce his view of Ciceronian impersonation as a method of persuasion more germane to the grand and perhaps even middle style of oratory, the styles associated with the activities of moving (*movere*) and pleasing (*delectare*) one's audience. At least from this preliminary review, then, we might conclude that Julius Victor has simply rejected the term *sermocinatio* and has decided to use *allocutio* to refer to these well-theorized strategies.

While the label *sermocinatio* remains conspicuously absent from his accounts of *allocutio*, however, Julius Victor nevertheless deploys it elsewhere in his text. But unlike the description of impersonation in Cicero and Quintilian as a grand-style technique, *sermocinatio* appears in Julius Victor as a tactic of the plain style, and even as one unrelated to Ciceronian impersonation. In a chapter on the topic of *pronuntiatio* (24), we find one of two appearances of the word *sermocinatio* in the *Ars Rhetorica*.²⁷ Rather than refer to theatrical impersonation, the term merely denotes a simple manner of speaking that one must use with an unsophisticated judge:

But if the case is a small-scale one in front of a middling judge, you will understand—even if you were never admonished—that the delivery needs to be subdued after the manner of *sermocinatio* (*ad sermocinationis vicem*). That is, just as a low-voiced and humble style of speaking is unseemly in the highest court cases, in minor matters a lofty and clamorous style of speaking similarly must seem insane and laughable.²⁸

Aside from the striking absence of any mention of impersonation, Julius Victor's first use of *sermocinatio* also differs from earlier theorists in its positioning of this tactic as something more subdued than Cicero's carnivalesque lampooning. As a style of speaking appropriate for a "middling judge" rather than for elevated court cases, *sermocinatio* here would simply denote a humble manner.²⁹ Despite the obvious rhetorical orientation of Julius Victor's text, in fact, this appearance of *sermocinatio* sets the term at odds with earlier manuals and instead positions it among the non-technical uses found in its first

definition in the *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, simply “a conversation, dialogue, [or] discussion.”³⁰

It is tempting, then, to see *sermocinatio* in Julius Victor’s text not as a rhetorical term at all but instead merely as a synonym for *sermo*: conversational, unadorned speech used outside formal rhetorical contexts. This type of speaking is a topic of consideration among earlier thinkers, too, who simply use the term *sermo* to refer to the “style of ordinary conversation.”³¹ Rather than look to Quintilian or the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* as his model for *sermocinatio*, Julius Victor perhaps has in mind something like the following discussion of *sermo* in Cicero’s *De Officiis*, a text that describes *sermo* as a manner of speaking devoid of rhetorical fireworks:

The power of speech (*oratio*) in the attainment of propriety is great, and its function is twofold: the first is oratory (*contentio*), the second, conversation (*sermo*). Oratory is the kind to be employed in pleadings in court and speeches in popular assemblies and in the senate; conversation should find its natural place in social gatherings, in informal discussions, and in intercourse with friends; it should also seek admission at dinners. There are rules for oratory laid down by rhetoricians; there are none for conversation; and yet I do not know why there should not be.³²

At least according to this treatment, contrasted with the impersonation of *Pro Caelio*, Cicero’s *sermo* and *sermocinatio* are fundamentally different styles of speaking despite their shared etymological foundation. *Sermo* is speech not meant for law courts; instead, this language should be used among friends. While one kind of speech (*contentio*) should

dominate in the assembly and the courtroom—that is, in those public domains of deliberation and argument—one should use Cicero’s *sermo* in the private, intimate setting of a dinner party.

This separation of plain conversation from the trappings of rhetorical artistry appears in Julius Victor’s text, for his chapter on *sermocinatio* advances a verbal style that similarly avoids figures, enthymemes, and metaphors:

The method of conversing (*sermocinandi ratio*) should not be handled just as a footnote; indeed, the use of *sermo* is more frequent than the use of *oratio*. The excellence of *sermo*, therefore, is elegance without showiness (*elegantia sine ostentatione*). Its words are well chosen, honest rather than melodious, with few metaphors and with no obscure references, little antiquated language, with no extraordinary figures, without a too-slick structure, without periodic syntax, and without enthymemes.³³

The treatment of *sermo* in the opening lines of this chapter also points to this genre of speech at odds with the grand-style *sermocinatio* that we see in Cicero and Quintilian: Julius Victor’s *sermocinatio* lacks “showiness” (*ostentatione*). Shortly thereafter, too, Julius Victor describes this style of speaking as “simple and regular” (*simplex et aequalis*), and he even sets it apart from the *contentiones* mentioned in *De Officiis*: “Silly chatter propels lots of people into crassness, and *contentiones* push them into rage; but just as in every part of life, calm is the best demeanor for *sermones*.”³⁴

We have already observed, however, that Julius Victor sees *sermocinatio* as a type of speech proper to legal occasions, at least to the *privata cognitio* or a minor court

case.³⁵ Immediately prior to Julius Victor's chapter on *sermocinatio*, moreover, he rejects the "vacuous practice" (ματταιοτεχνία) of declamatory show-speeches, and he advises his readers not to drift from proper judicial rhetoric.³⁶ Earlier in that preceding chapter, too, Julius Victor sets this proper style in opposition to declamation, advising his readers to be "unvarnished" (*rudes*) in their courtroom speaking, "since if there's one kind of performance, or one kind of style in declamatory speeches, then the kind that should be found in the law courts should be vastly different."³⁷ In other words, Julius Victor anticipates his discussion of *sermocinatio* by rejecting a showy style of theatrical declamation in favor of another, plainer kind, but one still appropriate to courtroom proceedings. Julius Victor's intertwining of the *sermo* of unadorned conversation with the rhetoric of the courtroom, in fact, is on full display throughout chapter 26 of the *Ars Rhetorica*. Despite beginning his discussion with a separation of *sermo* and *oratio*, he later carves out the proper "occasions" for *sermo* using an assortment of terms rooted in legal procedure:

The occasions for *sermones* include interrogating (*sciscitatio*) what the litigants are doing, as well as recollecting evidence (*commemoratio*)—what happened to you or to someone else or what you have heard about a new circumstance, the retelling of which is not part of one's obligation—as well as pointing something out (*admonitio*) from an incidental event. Then when its starting point needs to be agreed upon (*statuendum*), the case proceeds of its own accord: that is, the defense (*responsio*) follows from the charge.³⁸

While *De Officiis* might locate *sermo* at the dinner table, Julius Victor here emphasizes its role in a range of forensic activities, from the gathering of evidence to the narration of events.³⁹ By setting these various opportunities for *sermo* as a preface to the settling of a case's central controversy (*statuendum*)—itself an important concept in the various Latin renderings of *status* theory—Julius Victor reinforces time and time again that *sermo* is not strictly informal chatter but instead precisely the kind of speaking that permeates each and every task before the courtroom advocate.

In a later section of the chapter, too, Julius Victor combines those public and private categories of speaking from Cicero's text, explaining that the calm, steady demeanor of *sermo* is most appropriate not just to affairs among friends but also to one's public appearances:

A good method of speaking, just as in walking, is to proceed calmly, without racing and without stumbling. Shouting while speaking is uncouth and uncivilized; indeed, it makes an altercation out of speaking. If you yell either in a public setting or in a private one (*in publico aut in convivio*), you may be considered not just unrefined but downright crazy.⁴⁰

Julius Victor's paralleling of the *publicum* and the *convivium* shows his conflation of the two categories of speech that Cicero pries apart in *De Officiis*. While Cicero may have seen the courtroom as a venue for theatrics, Julius Victor asserts here that understated calm is appropriate for both a gathering among friends and a dispute in front of a judge. There is no separation of the public and the private, then, and the style of speaking that

Cicero places in the domestic and familiar sphere has enveloped the formal, judicial settings that previously followed a different set of stylistic guidelines.

At this point, we see how *sermo* and *sermocinatio*—words that Julius Victor perhaps sees as interchangeable—align neither with the theatrical practice of impersonation in the works of Cicero and Quintilian nor with the plain, non-oratorical speaking of *De Officiis*. Keeping with the broader judicial orientation of his text, Julius Victor maintains that *sermocinatio* and *sermo* should be deployed in front of a judge, especially in the fourth-century equivalent of a small-claims court. But we would be mistaken to align Julius Victor’s terms with the bombast of *Pro Caelio*’s *sermocinatio*, which both Cicero and Quintilian place firmly within the domain of grand-style performance. Inasmuch as Julius Victor’s account of *sermo* and *sermocinatio* diverges from these earlier considerations of impersonation, it similarly differs from the tradition—exemplified in Cicero’s *De Officiis*—of seeing these two related terms as matters of private conversation rather than public oratory. Even if Julius Victor wants to define *sermo* against the anti-example of overblown declamatory rhetoric, he nevertheless reminds his readers that the courtroom advocate must use this style of speaking at the bench. While the most prominent rhetorical theorists of the Roman world offer their own durable and influential views of *sermo* and *sermocinatio*, Julius Victor fashions some new chimeric combination of those earlier renderings, fitting cleanly into neither.

If we find any link between the *sermocinatio* of Julius Victor and the same term as used in those earlier rhetorical manuals, we might still find it in their shared concern for speaking “appropriately” or *apte*.⁴¹ Despite the call for an unornamented or plain *sermo* in the first sentences of chapter 26, its latter half demands that one still give full

attention to the circumstances of one's speaking, changing one's affect depending on one's audience, and even inspiring the speaker to stray, somewhat paradoxically, from the plain-style guidelines first recommended in the chapter:

A concern (*ratio*) for the people and the places and times must be attended to: one kind of speech with a superior, another kind of speech with an equal or coeval. And so with those who are older, with those of the same age, and with children and women. Why? Would you think speech should be the same in a party as it is in a public forum or in some meeting of bookworms? Because I know that certain people—whether at the public spectacles or at dinner parties or wherever it is least fitting—trot out their learnedness and high-flown style or rattle the state.⁴²

Here Julius Victor advises that maintaining “concern” (*ratio*) for the circumstances of one's rhetoric injects a certain malleability into *sermocinatio*, for even if earlier he appears to restrict this method of ordinary speaking to the occasion of the low courts, here he recommends that one use one kind of *sermo* with an unsophisticated audience like a child and another kind with a dignified elder.⁴³ Even more strikingly, Julius Victor again emphasizes how *sermo* might be tailored for the small dinner party (*convivium*) and for matters bearing on the *res publica*. Like a chameleon, the orator must always recolor his *sermo* to fit his surroundings.

This protean quality of *sermo* and *sermocinatio* is not entirely Julius Victor's creation, for a similar malleability can be found in Quintilian's discussion of impersonation, where one sees its close ties with the rhetorical principle of *decorum*, itself the broader topic that underlies book 11 of the *Institutio*.⁴⁴ There Quintilian returns

to the element of “appropriateness” in *prosopopoeia*, and launching again from a consideration of *Pro Caelio* as an emblematic example of impersonation, Quintilian urges his students to focus on crafting “proper personalities” (*sui mores*):

We use imaginary persons and speak as it were with other men’s lips, and so have to provide the proper personalities (*sui mores*) for those to whom we lend our voice. Publius Clodius and Appius Caecus are imagined very differently, as are the father in Caecilius and the father in Terence. [...] In short, it is not only that there are just as many varieties of *prosopopoeia* as there are of cases: there are more because in *prosopopoeia* we simulate the emotions of children, women, nations, and even things which cannot speak, and they are all entitled to their appropriate character.⁴⁵

Here Quintilian focuses on the traits of the characters we might impersonate through *prosopopoeia*, acknowledging that the different styles of speaking are perhaps as numerous as the individuals and even inanimate objects that we conjure up.⁴⁶ These flexible *mores* reappear in Julius Victor’s text, too. Just a few sentences into his chapter on *sermocinatio*, he asserts with an aphoristic quality that “as a rule, *sermo* shows the character traits of every person (*cuiusque mores*) to be genuine.”⁴⁷ As I mentioned at the beginning of this article, D. S. Mayfield (2018: 55n104) has suggested that this description of *sermocinatio*—despite its closeness with the non-technical notion of conversational *sermo*—nevertheless “facilitates a nexus with *ethopoia*” as understood in earlier rhetorical texts. Especially after considering Quintilian’s *decorum*-oriented

account of the *mores* of impersonation, we have a hint of the content of this “nexus,” one that centers around a speech’s carefully tailored exterior and its focus on the creation of a convincing personality.

In other words, for earlier thinkers like Quintilian and Cicero, *sermocinatio* is a technique for transforming temporarily into some other figure, taking on that person or object’s putative *mores* and speaking in a way that is patently imitative. And if we keep an assiduous focus on this expert shape-shifting, Julius Victor’s account of *sermocinatio* sits more comfortably alongside his rhetorical predecessors, even if he introduces some important innovations. For Julius Victor, *sermocinatio* still requires that one carefully adopt a new style of speaking in conformity with a given set of *mores*, but those *mores* are never openly identified with an external figure. Instead, the speaker seamlessly transforms his own character into whatever persona the circumstances demand, always with an eye toward preserving a compelling veneer. In both cases, *sermocinatio* stands as a feat of rhetorical virtuosity; however, for those earlier theorists the trick is one of conjuring whereas for Julius Victor it is one of metamorphosis.

This reorientation of *sermocinatio* might shed light on an important issue of textual criticism in Julius Victor’s chapter. Near its end, the chapter includes one corrupt word, here presented as in Halm’s *Rhetores Latini Minores*:

One should not spill wine from one’s cup onto the table, and one should not use one’s little finger to draw it out into lines. The bad kind of *satio* (?) (*mala ista † satio*) is talkative in a dinner party and loose-lipped from drinking too much, like

when you see those drunkards—those people without a lick of sobriety in them—
babbling on.⁴⁸

In a 1980 edition of *Julius Victor* by Remo Giomini and Maria Silvana Celentano (1980: 104), *sermocinatio* stands in the place of *satio* (“the bad kind of *sermocinatio*”), and perhaps their decision to include this important word—otherwise absent from the chapter—might find some support in the foregoing analysis of *sermocinatio*. If we see this technique as an expertly appropriate style of speaking, stripped of its obvious showmanship and instead suffused with unobservable finesse, this recommendation here for sobriety might be fitting advice to the orator. With Giomini and Celentano’s emendation, this sentence would not amount to a call for one kind of chatter over another; rather, it would caution against tipping one’s hand.

Indeed, this view of *sermocinatio* as a studied, virtuosic performance also finds support in the last sentences of the chapter, where Julius Victor hints again at this fashioning of one’s own *dramatis persona*. There Julius Victor advises his readers to mine the models of the theater: “Old Comedy brings a lot of style to one’s *sermo*, as do the *togatae*, low comedies, Atellan farces, and mime shows; old letters are very helpful, too, especially those of Cicero.”⁴⁹ When Julius Victor further recommends nearby that, regarding the norms of *sermo*, one should speak “appropriately, honestly, with good Latin, clearly, calmly, with a serene face, with a subdued expression, without a ruckus, without jokes, and without those other elements” of ornament, we should not take Julius Victor to mean that one should avoid any kind of deliberate style or strategy.⁵⁰ While distancing *sermo* from the theatrics of tragedy, his ideal of *sermo* and *sermocinatio* can be found in mime shows and Atellan farce, those genres that most closely approximate

the lives and manners of ordinary people.⁵¹ The orator, in sum, should strive to conceal his rhetorical ornamentation to yield a natural, plain-spoken impression.

While these genres of acting dominate Julius Victor's models for the proper study of *sermo*, he concludes the chapter by positioning letters as another example worthy of imitation, teeing up his final and well-studied chapter on the rhetorical considerations of the epistle. Launching from this segue in the *Ars Rhetorica*, we now look at how letter-writing might hint at reasons for Julius Victor's peculiar refashioning of *sermo* and *sermocinatio* in his penultimate chapter. We find that Julius Victor's notion of epistolography, like his understanding of *sermocinatio*, stems from his focus on adaptability and careful presentation: the ability of a masterful orator to "pass off" character traits as authentic at just the right moment. As we shall now see, Julius Victor's changing attitudes regarding impersonation and their close relationship to the ascendant role of the written word in the fourth century show how impersonation relies on the technologies and venues available to the rhetorician, a truth that we are learning yet again in the twenty-first century.

III. Technology, Character, and Authenticity

Since Julius Victor's writings generally (and even proudly) follow the models of Cicero and Quintilian, his reimagining of impersonation in the *Ars Rhetorica* as a strategy of shape-shifting demands that we consider not just how but also why this fourth-century manual might stray from its predecessors in this respect. Discovering this motivation will involve some degree of speculation, for Julius Victor himself never gives an explicit

rationale for his many changes on this topic—his preference for *allocutio* over *prosopopoeia*, for example. As one possible explanation for these developments, we might look to his treatment of letter-writing, which has long been considered an important feature of his rhetorical manual. Following the suggestion of George Kennedy (1999: 124), who sees that fourth-century handbooks “probably reflect, at least in part, changed conditions in society [where] training in written argumentation was becoming more important than in speech,” I here consider how the ascendant role of writing and a novel view of impersonation might have gone hand in hand, both emerging from changes in the dominant medium of forensic communication.⁵² In other words, the final two chapters of the *Ars Rhetorica*—on *sermocinatio* and *epistolae*—should be read as inseparable studies of the rhetorical and technological landscape of Julius Victor’s time rather than as two unrelated appendices.

Other modern readers of Julius Victor have noted the changes in legal procedure in his era, drawing a distinction between the bureaucratic paper-shuffling of the fourth century and the performative culture of Cicero’s time. Continuing his assessment above, George Kennedy (1999: 124) writes that legal work became more technical and less theatrical, for “stasis theory continued to be useful in planning a defense or accusation, but procedures in court now debarred the kind of full-scale opening or concluding address with which Cicero had won his fame.”⁵³ Of course, earlier rhetorical theorists show their own interest in *status* and its various renderings—the third book of Quintilian has an ample and even overwhelming summary of these technical systems—but this strategy of invention plainly dominates the writings of Julius Victor.⁵⁴ Indeed, we have

already seen that his consideration of emotional and ethical appeals constitutes just one brief paragraph. Rational proof is Julius Victor's primary interest.

Despite this emphasis on invention, however, these final chapters on *sermocinatio* and letter-writing concern themselves primarily with stylistics. Julius Victor sees that the generic parameters for one apply to the other: "Many of those guidelines for *sermo* are also fitting for letters."⁵⁵ And just as spoken rhetoric admits of various stylistic categories, so do epistles. On the one hand, "official letters" (*epistolae negotiales*) are those that most resemble grand-style speaking, for they feature a "weighty" style and the rhetorical figures that define formal oratory.⁵⁶ On the other hand (and more relevant to his discussion of *sermo*), Julius Victor's letters to friends (*epistolae familiares*) stand apart from the "oratorical" trappings of formal letters by an excision of every overblown ostentation.⁵⁷

In familiar letters, the primary guideline to observe is "brevity." Also, as Cato says, the ostentation (*ambitio*) of those famous aphorisms should no longer be trotted out, but they should be cut back to an extent that nothing ever seems to be missing in your language.⁵⁸

Aside from the *brevitas* underlying the style of familiar letters, Julius Victor here also advises his readers to avoid showy *ambitio*, itself a stylistic hallmark of declamatory rhetoric.⁵⁹ In the sentences that follow, too, the *Ars Rhetorica* underscores the importance of clarity: one should avoid *obscuritas*, and outside the demands of conspiratorial *clandestinae litterae*, one should send only letters that are *clarae* and *perspicuae*.⁶⁰ To be sure, his treatise connects this epistolary clarity to the plainspokenness of *sermocinatio*

when he cautions that “if you do not need to hide anything, avoid obscurity more than in oratory or in speaking plainly (*in sermocinandi*).”⁶¹ And just as in *sermocinatio*, familiar letter-writing demands “appropriate” stylistic adjustments as circumstances change:

A letter should not be jovial if you are writing to a superior; if you are writing to an equal, do not be impolite; if you are writing to an underling, do not be arrogant. So in your letters, with your friends you should play, as though you think it possible that, down the road, they might read those letters during a bluer time.⁶²

In his preceding chapter, as we have just seen, Julius Victor similarly writes that we should use “one kind of speech with a superior, [and] another kind of speech with an equal or coeval,” and here the *Ars Rhetorica* also recommends that we attend to the station and familiarity of our readers, particularly with admonitions against the excesses of impudent clowning. Alongside clarity and brevity, then, the stylistic virtue of *decorum* reigns in both *sermocinatio* and *epistolae*.⁶³ According to the sum of these several recommendations, the letter-writing of the *Ars Rhetorica* aims at a kind of calm forthrightness: “nothing ever seems to be missing,” showiness should be assiduously avoided, and a generally understated style should be tailored to one’s audience. The stylistic program of this treatise’s final chapter reinforces Julius Victor’s model of restrained ventriloquism detailed immediately beforehand.

This dominant plain-style orientation, seen in the treatment of *sermocinatio* and in letter-writing alike, therefore positions the *Ars Rhetorica* not so much as a conduit for Ciceronian bombast but instead as a predecessor of more subtle models of rhetorical

impersonation.⁶⁴ In this subtler mode, “what may well have been a *sermocinatio* might not be discerned as such,” and such impersonation might even “consummate the rhetorical *desideratum par excellence*—to be deploying a particular device (and the overall *ars*) so effectually that its use goes unnoticed” (Mayfield 2018: 198–99).⁶⁵ Seen in this light, the *Ars Rhetorica*’s version of impersonation approaches something like Baldassar Castiglione’s notion of *sprezzatura*, the early modern aesthetic principle of a “studied carelessness” or a deliberate nonchalance.⁶⁶ Just as Julius Victor cautions his readers to avoid declamatory ostentation, Castiglione maintains that keeping up an appearance of graceful effortless is key to preserving one’s credibility: “we may call that art true art which does not seem to be art; nor must one be more careful of anything than of concealing it, because if it is discovered, this robs a man of all credit” (1.26).⁶⁷

By way of conclusion, I entertain the possibility that Julius Victor’s break with the Ciceronian practice of grand-style *sermocinatio* and his reorientation of rhetorical impersonation around the rubrics of subtlety in no small part arise from the prominence of the written word in fourth-century legal culture. Without frequent opportunity for the visual carnival of Ciceronian courtroom performance, the possibility for a certain brand of impersonation would have similarly evaporated. Indeed, if we can conclude anything from the account of *sermocinatio* in the *Ars Rhetorica*, it is that the aesthetic norms of impersonation are persistently flexible, adapting to variables like one’s audience and intended emotional effects. When the foundation of communicative technology changes, the rhetorical components of impersonation would very well shift, too: its occasions, its aims, its overall style.

We might even revisit Cicero, Quintilian, and Julius Victor as an opportunity to reflect upon changes in our own era's novel methods of impersonation. The fourth-century reorientation of *sermocinatio* around the rubrics of nonchalance—a departure from the Ciceronian model of overt theatrics—and its ties to the impossibility of electrifying performance in bureaucratic documents are particularly relevant as we begin to grapple with the ascendant phenomenon of so-called “deepfake” videos, entirely lifelike but fabricated videos which present well-known politicians and celebrities doing deeds they have never done and saying words they have never said.⁶⁸ In some cases, deepfakes follow the Ciceronian model of outlandish caricature, where any audience would have to recognize their artificiality: unsettling examples include videos of Ivanka Trump “starring” in doctored pornographic scenes. In other deepfakes, however, our new technological medium weaponizes the subtle, plain-style artistry of Julius Victor's *sermocinatio*. One notable clip depicts Barack Obama offering believable if uncharacteristically profane criticism of his successor's administration.⁶⁹ In this genre of disinformation, concealing one's fiction behind an expert veneer of *sprezzatura* is key to the impersonation's persuasive potency. As soon as such a deepfake reveals its artificiality—as soon as it spills the wine—it instantly appears as fantasy rather than as documentary.

If we accept the hypothesis that changes in the technology of communication from speech to writing catalyzed changes in the methods of *sermocinatio* in the fourth century, then we should not be surprised to find that our current century and its digital media might yet again reorient the ways in which caricature operates. As artificial intelligence and advanced video processing methods propel us into a “world suffused

with deepfakes [...] in which ‘fake’ images are routinely believed to be real, [and] one in which ‘real’ images are routinely believed to be fake,” we would be wise to consult a technological shift in the fourth century that similarly reconfigured the evolving parameters of impersonation (Read 2018).⁷⁰

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA—TWIN CITIES

mcnamarc@umn.edu

Works Cited

- Blitz, M. J. 2018. “Lies, Line Drawing, and (Deep) Fake News” *Oklahoma Law Review* 71: 59–116.
- Caplan, H. 1954. *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Cambridge, MA.
- Celentano, M. S. 1990. “Un galateo della conversazione nell'*Ars rhetorica* di Giulio Vittore.” *Vichiana* 1: 245–53.
- _____. 1994. “La codificazione retorica della comunicazione epistolare nell'*Ars rhetorica* di Giulio Vittore.” *Rivista di Filologia e di Istruzione Classica* 122: 422–35.
- _____. 2000. “Le regole della comunicazione.” In P. Radici Colace and A. Zumbo, eds., *Letteratura scientifica e tecnica greca e latina*. Messina. 263–74.
- Chesney, B. and D. Citron. 2018. “Deep Fakes: A Looming Challenge for Privacy, Democracy, and National Security.” *California Law Review* 107: 1753–820.
- Cueva, E. P. and J. Martínez. 2016. *Splendide Mendax: Rethinking Fakes and Forgeries in Classical, Late Antique, and Early Christian Literature*. Groningen.

- D'Angelo, P. 2018. *Sprezzatura: Concealing the Effort of Art from Aristotle to Duchamp*. New York.
- Diakopoulos, N. and D. Johnson. 2019. "How Could Deepfakes Impact the 2020 U.S. Elections?" *The Nieman Journalism Lab*.
<https://www.niemanlab.org/2019/06/how-could-deepfakes-impact-the-2020-u-s-elections/>.
- Dyck, A. 1996. *A Commentary on Cicero, De Officiis*. Ann Arbor.
- Eden, K. 2012. *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy*. Chicago.
- Freese, J. H. 1926. *The Art of Rhetoric*. Cambridge, MA.
- Gallagher, M. P. 1968. "The Plain Style." *Essays in Criticism* XVIII: 444–48.
- Gardner, R. 1958. *Pro Caelio, De Provinciis Consularibus, Pro Balbo*. Cambridge, MA.
- Giomini, R. and M. S. Celentano. 1980. *C. Iulii Victoris Ars Rhetorica*. Leipzig.
- Halm, C. 1863. *Rhetores Latini Minores*. Leipzig.
- Hendrickson, G. L. and H. M. Hubbell. 2014. *Brutus, Orator*. Cambridge, MA.
- Holtmark, E. B. 1968. "Quintilian on Status: A Progymnasmata." *Hermes* 96: 356–68.
- Hornblower, S. and A. Spawforth. 2003. *Oxford Classical Dictionary*. Oxford.
- Javitch, D. 2002. *The Book of the Courtier*. New York.
- Kennedy, G. 1999. *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times*. Chapel Hill.
- Lausberg, H. 2008. *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*. Stuttgart.
- Leff, M. 1982. "The Material of the Art in the Latin Handbooks of the Fourth Century A.D." In B. Vickers, ed., *Rhetoric Revalued*. Binghamton, NY. 71–78.
- Martínez, J. 2014. *Fakes and Forgers of Classical Literature*. Leiden.

- May, J. 1988. *Trials of Character: The Eloquence of Ciceronian Ethos*. Chapel Hill.
- Mayfield, D. S. 2018. *Variants of Rhetorical Ventriloquism*. Online Supplement to J. Küpper, J. Mosch, and E. Penskaya, eds., *History and Drama*. Berlin.
- Miller, W. 1913. *De Officiis*. Cambridge, MA.
- Osgood, J. 2005. "Cicero's *Pro Caelio* 33–34 and Appius Claudius' *Oratio de Pyrrho*." *CP* 100: 355–58.
- Porter, S. 1997. *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.–A.D. 400*. Leiden.
- Rackham, H. 1942. *On the Orator: Book 3. On Fate. Stoic Paradoxes. Divisions of Oratory*. Cambridge, MA.
- Read, M. 2018. "How Much of the Internet Is Fake? Turns Out, a Lot of It, Actually." *New York Magazine*. <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/12/how-much-of-the-internet-is-fake.html/>.
- Reed, J. 1997. "The Epistle." In S. Porter, ed., *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period, 330 B.C.–A.D. 400*. Leiden. 171–93.
- Russell, D. A. 2001. *The Orator's Education*. Cambridge, MA.
- Scafuro, A. 2004. *The Forensic Stage*. Cambridge, UK.
- Sutton, E. W. and H. Rackham. 1942. *On the Orator: Books 1–2*. Cambridge, MA.
- Trimpi, W. 1983. *Muses of One Mind: The Literary Analysis of Experience and Its Continuity*. Princeton.
- _____. 1962. *Ben Jonson's Poems: A Study of the Plain Style*. Stanford.
- Trimpi, W. and F. L. Blumberg. 2012. "Decorum." In R. Greene, et al., *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry & Poetics*. 341–42.

1 For a discussion of Julius Victor's role in using "rhetorical conventions in letters (specifically, 'official letters')," see Reed 1997: 181. For Julius Victor's epistolary recommendations, see *Ars Rhetorica* 27. Citations of Julius Victor refer to the chapter number in Halm's *Rhetores Latini Minores*.

2 Reed 1997: 183 also points to Demetrius' *On Style*, perhaps written in the second century BCE, as "one of the more thorough discussions of epistolary style." For an account of Demetrius' interest in "detail and character" as hallmarks of letter-writing, see Eden 2012: 34–36. See also G. Kennedy's (1999: 131) report that aside from Demetrius' *On Style* and "a short passage on letters in the late Latin rhetorical handbook of Julius Victor," the systematic treatment of letter-writing apparently "was neglected in ancient texts on grammar or rhetoric, surprisingly so, considering the great importance of correspondence in antiquity."

3 *Epistolis conveniunt multa eorum, quae de sermone praecepta sunt*, 27. Translations of Julius Victor are mine unless otherwise noted.

4 *sermocinatio est cum alicui personae sermo adtribuitur et is exponitur cum ratione dignitatis*, 4.52.65. Translations and text of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* are adapted from Caplan 1954.

5 *his et adversariorum cogitationes velut secum loquentium protrahimus (qui tamen ita demum a fide non abhorrent si ea locutos finxerimus quae cogitasse eos non sit absurdum)*, 9.2.30. Translations and text of Quintilian are adapted from Russell 2001. The artificial nature of these *sermocinationes* appears in the *OLD*, too, which defines this rhetorical notion of *sermocinatio* as "imaginary dialogue inserted into a speech" (1b).

6 The complex notion of "authenticity," here paradoxically applied to fabricated speech, merits exploration outside the limitations of this article. For a recent treatment of authenticity, forgery, and imitation in the ancient world, see Martínez 2014.

7 G. Kennedy 1999: 118 reports that in late antiquity Quintilian's *Institutio* "was quarried by rhetoricians writing abstracts, of whom Julius Victor is probably the best example."

8 *sermonis usus multo frequentior quam orationis est*, 26.

9 *OLD sermocinatio* 1a. The *OLD*'s examples point to this use of *sermocinatio* even among imperial authors including Aulus Gellius and Apuleius. D. S. Mayfield 2018: 55n104 adopts this reading in his survey of ancient treatments of ventriloquism, where he remarks that Julius Victor's chapter takes "the term in its root meaning (from 'sermo,' resp. 'sermocinari'), and consequently speaks about (informal) conversation *sensu lato* [...] as opposed to (formal) orations." M. S. Celentano 1990: 246n6 sees that "Julius Victor uses the word *sermocinatio* to indicate the language of common usage, namely of conversation." I argue here that Julius Victor's text preserves a modified understanding of *sermocinatio* as a strategy of impersonation, not just as a style of conversation.

10 For a catalog of examples of *sermocinatio* and related terms like *prosopopoeia* and *fictio personae*, see Lausberg §820–829.

11 *Exsistat igitur ex hac ipsa familia aliquis ac potissimum Caecus ille; minimum enim dolorem capiet, qui istam non videbit. Qui profecto, si exstiterit, sic aget ac sic loquetur: Mulier, quid tibi cum Caelio, quid cum homine adolescentulo, quid cum alieno?*, 33–34. Translations and text from *Pro Caelio* are adapted from Gardner 1958.

12 *Illa adhuc audaciora et maiorum, ut Cicero existimat, laterum, fictiones personarum, quae προσωποποιία dicuntur: mire namque cum variant orationem tum excitant. His et adversariorum cogitationes velut secum loquentium protrahimus (qui tamen ita demum a fide non abhorrent si ea locutos finxerimus quae cogitasse eos non sit absurdum), et nostros cum aliis sermones et aliorum inter se credibiliter introducimus, et suadendo, obiurgando, querendo, laudando, miserando personas idoneas damus. Quin deducere deos in hoc genere dicendi et inferos excitare concessum est*, 9.2.29–31.

13 *Hic orator et defunctos excitabit ut Appius Caecum. [...] Hic iram, hic misericordiam inspirabit: hoc dicente iudex pallebit et flebit et per omnis adfectus tractus huc atque illuc sequetur nec doceri desiderabit*, 12.10.61–62. For the grand style as a rhetorical framework that in Quintilian's eyes relies primarily on emotional appeal, see *Institutio* 12.10.59. For an exploration of this particular impersonation's humorous dimensions, too, see Osgood 2005.

14 In his guidelines for speaking in the so-called Attic style, Cicero writes that the orator “will not represent the state as a speaking thing, or call the dead from the lower world, nor will he crowd a long series of iterations into a single period. This requires stronger lungs and is not to be expected of him whom we are describing or demanded from him, for he will be rather subdued in voice as in style” (*non faciet rem publicam loquentem nec ab inferis mortuos excitabit nec acervatim multa frequentans una complexione devinciet. Valentiorum haec laterum sunt nec ab hoc quem informamus aut exspectanda aut postulanda; erit enim ut voce sic etiam oratione suppressior*, 85). Translations and text of *Orator* are adapted from Hendrickson and Hubbell 2014.

15 As “Quintilian’s *idoneus* signals, considerations pertaining to the *aptum* are (dependably) involved in all of the above—chiefly with a view to (ethopoetic) probability” (Mayfield 2018: 54). For a broader consideration of how the notion of character or “*ethos* necessarily overlaps with *decorum*,” see Mayfield 2018: 113n189.

16 Lausberg §821 similarly emphasizes the central importance of maintaining credibility in these rhetorical impersonations. As his account of *sermocinatio* cautions, impersonation does not need to be “factually truthful” (*nicht historisch wahr*) but “merely probable” (*nur »wahrscheinlich«*).

17 *ac sunt quidam qui has demum προσωποποιίας dicant in quibus et corpora et verba fingimus: sermones hominum adsimulatos dicere διαλόγους malunt, quod Latinorum quidam dixerant sermocinationem. Ego iam recepto more utrumque eodem modo appellavi: nam certe sermo fingi non potest ut non personae sermo fingatur*, 9.2.31–32.

18 See Lausberg’s catalog at §826. D. S. Mayfield 2018: 51 hypothesizes that “Quintilian is likely to have chosen the term *prosopopoeia* for etymological reasons, seeing that he reliably employs and emphasizes the term ‘persona’” throughout his discussions of rhetorical ventriloquism.

19 As Lausberg §822 reports, later authors continue to use this term, even as late as Isidore of Seville (2.14.1).

20 According to the *TLL*, Julius Victor’s text is the first known instance of the noun *obliquitas* used in the sense of verbal misdirection or irony, or as he writes here, *aliud dicere et aliud velle obliquitas appellatur*. For a catalog of *obliquitas* in this sense of “*ambiguitas, ratio loquendi ambigua et obiecta*,” see *TLL* vol. IX 2, 98, 72–79. The deemphasizing of “ethical” and emotional appeal in the *Ars Rhetorica* is perhaps a consequence of technological and bureaucratic changes of the fourth century. G. Kennedy 1999: 124 concludes that fourth-century handbooks like that of Julius Victor “probably reflect, at least in part, changed conditions in society: training in written argumentation was becoming more important than in speech.” We return to the growing importance of written communication in the last section of this article.

21 *Ethos autem est habitus quidam mentis et morum perpetuus tenor, ut iracundus, avarus, pius, rusticus, vel lenis vel timidus vel libidinosus vel severus, vel senex vel adulescens et cetera, quorum proprietatem sermo debet imitari: ut Marcus Tullius fecit pro Caelio in persona Appii Caeci, item Clodiae*. For an account of the Roman view that “character remains essentially constant in man and therefore demands or determines his actions” and that “character does not evolve or develop, but rather is bestowed or inherited by nature,” see May 1988: 6.

22 While Julius Victor breaks from his predecessors regarding terminology, he nevertheless follows Quintilian in his collection of various types of impersonation under the single heading of one term. Here he refers to Cicero’s caricature of the deceased Appius Caecus and the living Clodia under the same label of *ethos*, and although some ancient theorists—as Quintilian reports—might use *prosopopoeia* for the former and *sermocinatio* for the latter, Julius Victor follows his first-century predecessor in disregarding these distinctions.

23 According to D. S. Mayfield 2018: 59n109, “the term *allocutio* [...] in other theorists is (turned into) a (quasi) technical term (typically in place of, and signifying what would else be called, ‘*sermocinatio*’ or ‘*ethopoeia*’).”

24 *in epilogo et adlocutionem permittitur inducere et defunctos excitare et pignora producere et cetera, quae animos audientium moveant*, 15. Julius Victor's may be the first use of *allocutio* in this sense of ventriloquism or impersonations. Lausberg §822 catalogs two similar uses by Priscian and Emporius Orator. For a collection of examples of this term used among rhetorical writers, see *TLL* vol. I 1691, 36–51. Here Julius Victor writes *adlocutio*, whose spelling I preserve.

25 For a summary of these rhetorical activities, see Lausberg §257.

26 *allocutio quoque aequam raro admittenda est, nisi ubi opus tibi et ubi ad celeritatem et ad fidem plurimum confert*, 16. Compare Quintilian's explanation of how impersonation can build credibility with an audience at *Institutio* 9.2.30.

27 The second of these appearances, however, is only conjectural due to textual corruption. I discuss this conjecture at the end of this section.

28 *Ceterum si apud pedaneum iudicem sit privata cognitio, ad sermocinationis vicem deprimendam actionem etiam non admonitus intelleges. Sicut enim in sublimibus quaestionibus deiecta et iacens pronuntiatio deformis est, ita in parvis elata et clamosa videatur necesse est furiosa atque deridicula*, 24. For *ad vicem* as “after the manner of,” see *OLD* *vicis* 9b.

29 The recommendation that one use an unadorned style of speaking in the courtroom is not an innovation of Julius Victor. In his *Rhetoric* (3.12.5), Aristotle observes that “the forensic style is more precise, and more so before a single judge, because there is least opportunity for deploying rhetorical devices” (ἡ δὲ δικανικὴ ἀκριβεστέρα. ἔτι δὲ μᾶλλον ἢ ἐνὶ κριτῆϊ. ἐλάχιστον γὰρ ἔστιν ῥητορικῆς). Text and translation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* are adapted from Freese 1926.

30 M. Leff 1982: 73–74 appears to take *sermocinatio* in Julius Victor as a synonym for *sermo*, for he remarks that the *Ars Rhetorica* “ends in an unusual manner with discussion of rhetorical exercises, conversation, and letter-writing.” Compare the similar view taken by M. S. Celentano, cited in note 9.

31 *OLD sermo* 6b. Such *sermo* can be found even in technical rhetorical handbooks, including the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* (3.13.23) and Quintilian's *Institutio* (11.3.168).

32 *Et quoniam magna vis orationis est eaque duplex, altera contentionis, altera sermonis, contentio disceptationibus tribuatur iudiciorum contionum senatus, sermo in circulis, disputationibus, congressionibus familiarium versetur, sequatur etiam convivia. Contentionis praecepta rhetorum sunt, nulla sermonis, quamquam haud scio an possint haec quoque esse, 1.132.* Translation and text of *De Officiis* are adapted from Miller 1913. Cicero here underscores the importance of setting, for “the emphasis in this passage is on the smooth functioning of relaxed *sermo* in small circles of friends; one should make a winning impression and avoid disclosing flaws of character” (Dyck 1996: 310).

33 *Sermocinandi ratio non in postremis habenda est; et quidem sermonis usus multo frequentior quam orationis est. Igitur sermonis est virtus elegantia sine ostentatione. Verba sint lecta, honesta magis quam sonantia, paucae translationes neque eae alte petitae, modica antiquitas, sine figuris insignibus, sine structura leniore, sine periodo, sine enthymemate, 26.*

34 *Nam multos nugae rapiunt ad foeditatem, nec non contentiones ad furorem, cum tamen in omni parte vitae, tum in sermonibus quies optima est, 26.*

35 For *privatus* as a term related to minor legal proceeding, see *TLL* vol. X 2, 1397, 29–50.

36 *Tenendum tamen, quidquid aget orator, non multum a forensi actione discrepare debere et rebus et verbis et pronuntiatione: ceterum longe ab effectu operis aberraverit, 25.*

37 *Rudes autem simus necesse est, si alia pronuntiatio, aliud genus elocutionis in declamationibus fuerit, cum longe alia in foro reperienda sint, 25.* M. S. Celentano (1990: 249) also observes how Julius Victor equates speaking well with “shunning the methods of those who practice oratorical declamation.”

38 *Sermonum autem occasiones sunt sciscitatio, quid agant, rogantis, et commemoratio, quid tibi aut alteri evenerit, aut quid novae rei audieris, quam tamen narrare non sit religionis, et admonitio ex re nata fortuita. Iam ubi statuendum sit initium, res ipsa perducit; nascitur enim ex responsione responsio, 26.*

39 For *commemoratio* as a “recalling” relevant to judicial matters, see *OLD* 3a. For *admonitio* as “directing a person’s attention (to a fact),” see *OLD* 3a. For *sciscitatio* as the “making of inquiries,” see *OLD* 1. For *responsio* as a “replying to an argument or charge,” see *OLD* 2.

40 *Bonus modus est in loquendo tamquam <in> ambulando clementer ire, sine curriculo, sine cunctatione. Clamare in loquendo rusticum ac barbarum est; fit enim de sermone convicium. Iam si in publico aut in convivio clames, non agrestis modo, sed insanus habearis, 26.*

41 For *aptum* as a principle central to rhetorical considerations of *decorum* or “appropriateness,” see Lausberg §258.

42 *Et hominum et locorum et temporum ratio servanda est: alius cum superiore, alius cum pari aut proximo sermo est; item cum senioribus, cum aequalibus, cum pueris aut mulierculis. Quid? In convivio putas eundem debere esse, quem in foro aut aliquo coetu litteratorum? <Quid> quod ego scio quosdam <in> spectaculis aut conviviis aut ubi minime convenit doctrinam atque facundiam venditare aut rem publicam strepere, 26.* The verb *strepo*, normally intransitive, has some transitive attestations (*OLD* 4). The later edition by Giomini and Celentano (1980) uses a question mark after *strepere*, but I have preserved the period from Halm.

43 This recommendation, too, parallels sentiments in Cicero’s *De Oratore*: “Of course the man whom we call ‘tactless’ (*ineptum*) seems to me to bear a title derived from his want of tact, and this is most amply illustrated in our ordinary conversation, inasmuch as whosoever fails to realize the demands of the occasion” (*Quem enim nos ‘ineptum’ vocamus, is mihi videtur ab hoc nomen habere ductum, quod non sit aptus; idque in sermonis nostri consuetudine perlate patet; nam qui aut, tempus quid postulet, non videt, 2.17*). Text and translation of Cicero’s *De Oratore* are adapted from Sutton and Rackham 1942.

44 The principle of *decorum* permeates literary and rhetorical criticism in antiquity, well beyond the writings of Quintilian. For a summary account of *decorum* and its role in classical and post-classical criticism, see Trimpi and Blumberg 2012: 341–342 and Trimpi 1983: 83–240. M. S. Celentano 1990:

247, who chiefly understands Julius Victor's notion of *sermocinatio* as plain conversation rather than rhetorical impersonation, nevertheless sees the aesthetic principles of *aptum* and *πρέπον* as central considerations.

45 *Utimum enim fictione personarum et velut ore alieno loquimur, dandique sunt iis quibus vocem accommodamus sui mores. Aliter enim P. Clodius, aliter Appius Caecus, aliter Caecilianus ille, aliter Terentianus pater fingitur. [...] Denique non modo quot in causa totidem in prosopopoeia sunt varietates, sed hoc etiam plures, quod in his puerorum, feminarum, populorum, mutarum etiam rerum adsimulamur adfectus, quibus omnibus debetur suus decor*, 11.1.39–41. As D. S. Mayfield 2018: 42 sees it, “a consideration of circumstances will always be critical and decisive: it matters in whose mouth words are being put.”

46 For a related discussion of the innumerable styles of speaking, each appropriate to an individual, see *De Oratore* 3.34. There Cicero asks, “Do you not expect that we shall find almost as many styles of oratory as orators?” (*Nonne fore ut quot oratores, totidem paene reperiantur genera dicendi?*). Text and translation of the third book of *De Oratore* are adapted from Rackham 1942.

47 *Fere sermo cuiusque mores probat*, 26. See *OLD* *probo* 7a (“to show to be real or true, demonstrate prove”), 7b (“to prove one’s case”), and 7c (“to get accepted as”). Compare Plautus *Persa* 212, cited in *TLL* vol. X 2, 1467, 8–9.

48 *Minime oportet vinum de poculo in mensam instillare idque digitulo diducere in lineas. Mala ista ꝑ satio in convivio garrula ac per vinum diserta, et fere videas, qui sicci ac sobrii nihil sunt, eos madidos friggere*, 26. The verb *friggere* stems from the bird *fringuilla* and later is applied to people who speak poorly (*TLL* vol. VI 1339, 72–1340, 16).

49 *Multum ad sermonis elegantiam conferent comoediae veteres et togatae et tabernariae et Atellanae fabulae et mimofabulae, multum etiam epistolae veteres, in primis Tullianae*, 26. For an investigation of the relationship between comedy and forensic rhetorical style and strategy, see Scafuro 2004. While mime and farce might seem to be incongruous with the guiding principle of *decorum*, these dramatic

genres of course have their own rubrics of style and “aptness.”

50 *Loquere opportune, honeste, Latine, dilucide, placide, plano ore, vulvu quieto, clamore nullo, sine cachinno, sine aliis notatis supra*, 26. When Julius Victor contrasts his recommended style of speaking to the kind described “above,” he perhaps has in mind the description of declamation found in the final sentences of chapter 25.

51 According to the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Hornblower and Spawforth: 2003), the Atellan farces were “primarily low-life comedies, often in coarse language, set in a small Italian town and giving a humorous portrait of rustic and provincial life.”

52 Celentano 1994: 429 sees that the chapter on letter-writing corresponds to the chapter on *sermocinatio* “in the sense that, if the *de sermocinatio* represents the rhetorical codification of the language of common usage, namely of a kind of very common oral communication, then the *de epistolis* is the rhetorical codification of a kind of written communication that is just as widespread, that of the letter.” For another discussion of *sermocinatio* in Julius Victor as an oral counterpart to written letters, see Celentano 2000: 270–272. For the ancient coupling of the letter and *sermo* as occasions for a “familiar” style, see Eden 2012: 11–48.

53 Leff 1982: 75 agrees with this assessment, observing how the “atrophy of delivery and memory may well be a response to the diminished use of oral argument in court. This same factor, coupled with the increased technicality of court procedure, may account for the preoccupation with the minutiae of the *stasis* system.”

54 For an overview of the various theories of *stasis* found in Quintilian, see Holtsmark 1968.

55 *Epistolis conveniunt multa eorum, quae de sermone praecepta sunt*, 27. Compare the separation of *sermo* from *oratio* in *De Officiis*, cited in note 32. For a treatment of the history of the “epistolary style” and Julius Victor’s place in it, see Celentano 1994: 427, especially for its account of the importance of imitation (*ethopoeia* or *prosopopoeia*) in letter-writing.

56 *In hoc genere et sententiarum pondera et verborum lumina et figurarum insignia compendii opera requiruntur atque omnia denique oratoria praecepta, 27.*

57 For a discussion of differences separating “rhetorical,” “familiar,” and “official” letters, see Reed 1997: 186–190.

58 *In familiaribus litteris primo brevitatis observanda: ipsarum quoque sententiarum ne diu circumferatur, quod Cato ait, ambitio, sed ita recidantur, ut numquam verbi aliquid deesse videatur, 27.*

59 For *ambitio* as a stylistic feature of declamatory rhetoric, see *Institutio* 10.7.21 and Lausberg §1145. Julius Victor here perhaps has in mind Cato’s one extant use of *ambitio* at *orat.* 174, in the sense of “a standing for public office” (*OLD* 3a). A more suitable definition given the context here, however, would seem to be *OLD* 6: “vain display, ostentation, show,” which is attested in Manilius, Seneca, Quintilian, and others.

60 *Lucem vero epistolis praefulgere oportet, nisi cum consulto [consilio] clandestinae litterae fiant, quae tamen ita ceteris occultae esse debent, ut his, ad quos mittuntur, clarae perspicuaeque sint, 27.*

For the importance of plainness and clarity in epistolary style, see Reed 1997: 182–186.

61 *Cum abscondito nihil opus est, cavenda obscuritas magis quam in oratione aut in sermocinando, 27.*

More generally, Julius Victor sees a parallel between the guidelines of writing and the guidelines of speaking, best summarized in the final sentence of the *Ars Rhetorica: in summa id memento et ad epistolas et ad omnem scriptionem bene loqui, 27.*

62 *Epistola, si superiori scribas, ne iocularis sit; si pari, ne inhumana; si inferiori, ne superba; [...] Ita in litteris cum familiaribus ludes, ut tamen cogites posse evenire, ut eas litteras legant tempore tristiore, 27.*

63 As Reed 1997: 185 notes, “two features of epistolary style most parallel rhetorical discussions: clarity and appropriateness for the situation.” Reed’s analysis draws from other epistolary writers and theorists including Cicero, Seneca, Demetrius in making this assessment. Celentano 1994: 433

similarly points to the “indispensable and absolute” importance of appropriateness in both letter-writing and *sermocinatio*.

64 The broader rhetorical principle of concealing one’s artistry (*ars celare artem*) of course predates Julius Victor, even as he departs from his predecessors by emphasizing its importance for *sermocinatio*. For a study of this principle’s Greco-Roman roots and its influence across several eras and domains of literary and artistic practice, see D’Angelo 2018.

65 Mayfield 2018: 197n335 also provides a rich collection of relevant discussions of this stylistic principle, ranging from ancient to early modern sources, including Erasmus, Montaigne, and Shakespeare, among others.

66 Others have noted, too, how the ancient plain style—one that consciously maintains the appearance of being unadorned—is “not unlike Castiglione’s concept of *sprezzatura*” (Gallagher 1968: 447). See notes 37, 50, and 59 above for Julius Victor’s rejection of declamatory style. For a study of the plain style as an “antirhetorical reaction against florid stylistic models,” see Trimpi 1962: viii.

67 Translation of *The Book of the Courtier* is adapted from Javitch 2002.

68 While most scholarship on deepfakes has centered on the technical or computational aspects of their creation and detection, they have begun to attract broader attention among legal theorists. See, for example, Blitz 2018 as well as Chesney and Citron 2018.

69 Humorous, tongue-in-cheek deepfakes are prominent on the Internet, but most attention has been devoted—with good reason—to their most dystopian applications. See, for example, one report by the Nieman Foundation for Journalism, which sketches several doomsday scenarios that are “plausible [...] rather than merely possible” and that might undermine the integrity of a U.S. Presidential Election (Diakopoulos and Johnson 2019).

70 The relationship between forgery and imitation persists as a rich topic of classical scholarship, one whose treatment is well beyond the scope of this article. For recent studies, see Martínez 2014 as well as Cueva and Martínez 2016.

Copyright © 2022 Classical Association of the Atlantic States. This article first appeared in CLASSICAL WORLD,
Volume 115, Issue 2, Winter, 2022, pages 179–204. Published by Johns Hopkins University Press.