APPREACHING THE END: QUINTILIAN 12.11∗

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ABSTRACT

The final chapter of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* (12.11) falls into two distinct sections. The first (§§1-7), on the retirement of the orator, which contains much reminiscence of Cicero, completes one theme of the book, which began with the birth of the promising son in 1.1.1. The second (§§8-30, followed by a postscript in §31) is the culmination of another theme, the instilling of enthusiasm for oratory. It is in effect the peroration of the whole work, recapitulating as it does earlier material (especially from Book 12), and arousing various kinds of emotion in the endeavour to show that the suggested programme of studies is practicable and leads to a highly desirable goal. The structure, unity and addresses of the section are discussed, and an attempt is made to deal with difficulties of interpretation and text.

What we mark as the final chapter of Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* was found wanting by a sympathetic editor. R.G. Austin wrote of it: 'We see his orator retiring with powers still unimpaired and holding the position of an elder statesman to whom all the young men will turn with veneration for help and advice. There is a simple grandeur in this aspect of his conception: is it too much to claim that he has Cicero in mind, with a vision of what might have been? It is a pity, I think, that the book does not end on this note. Instead, a number of pages are devoted to a somewhat dull and unconvincing postscript, intended to show that, after all, the path to perfect eloquence is not so difficult as it might seem.' Accordingly, commenting on section 7 of the

∗ I first started to think about Quintilian 12.11 when I chose it as the topic of my last Oxford seminar before my retirement in 2001. This led to lectures, in different forms, at the Catholic University of Milan and the University of Cassino during 2003. I am most grateful to my hosts there, and especially to Elisabetta Matelli and Antonio Stramaglia. I hope that the piece, now much revised, will be of interest to John Atkinson, who, with Val, did so much to make my two visits to the University of Cape Town happy and rewarding. I hope too that he will enjoy his retirement as much as I am enjoying mine.

† In his edition of Book 12 (Oxford 1948) xxiv-xxv.
chapter, Austin wrote: 'At this point, one feels that the book ought to have ended.'

At recessio an eam tum beatissimum credi oporteat fore, cum iam secretus et consecratus liber invidia, praelud contenationibus famam in tuto conlocari, et sentiet uius eam qua post fata praestari magis silet uenerationem, et quid apud posteros futurus sit videbit. This resounding period is indeed markedly closural, with its hints of death and fame after death. In fact, up to conlocari we might suppose that the retired orator is thought of as dead; for only in death would a great man normally be 'far from strife', or his fame quite safe. The securest seclusion from the world (secretus) comes after death ('the grave’s a fine and private place'), and only then would one expect 'consecration'. The author of the Octavia said of Augustus that he was post fata consecratus (529). But Quintilian's orator is, it turns out, still alive to receive nothing less than veneration: he is (as it were) Divus Cicero in his own lifetime, or the Augustus to whom Horace wrote (Ep. 2.1.15): praescenti ubi maturus largimur honores.

But this is not the end of the book, only of one theme in it, the one which takes us from the birth of a promising son (1.1.1) to the suspended animation of the retired orator, and that theme does indeed give the whole book a purposeful forward movement. But a no less important theme is provided by Quintilian's concern to arouse his reader's enthusiasm for the whole project of oratory. Far from being a postscript, the final sections of 12.11 constitute a vital culmination of this aspect of the Institutio.

To return to the opening part of 12.11. Quintilian here talks of the end of a career. He was himself in retirement when he wrote his book, as we are told in 1 pr. 1\(^2\) and again in 2.12.12, a passage of particular interest, in which avoletur oium nostrum\(^3\) is indicative of the author's ambivalent attitude towards retirement, while desinere dumm desiderarem is taken up in 12.11.3, where Quintilian tells us of a mot directed at the orator Domitius Afer, who had gone on speaking in the courts despite the waning of his powers: Afer, someone remarked, preferred deficiere quam desinere. Quintilian, whose mentor Afer had been, had chosen to avoid that.

But the early sections of 12.11 are only allusively concerned with Quintilian. Rather, as Austin suggested, Quintilian has Cicero much in mind. We

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\(^2\) Where the length of Quintilian's career is given as twenty years. George Kennedy, 'Quintilian on retirement', in T. Albaladejo et al. (ed.), Quintiliano: Historia y actualidad de la retórica (Logroño 1998) 1.153, had the pleasant idea that Quintilian consciously connected this period with the twenty years laid down by Augustus for legionary service, but it would seem that by the time of the Flavians that service had been extended to 25 years.

\(^3\) Compare Martial 12 pr.: in hac provinci solitudine, ubi nisi uiam intemperanter studemus, et sine solacio et sine eussimone secessimus.
are pointed explicitly to a passage of Cicero’s dialogue De Oratore, where
Crasus is made to look forward to a retirement whose solitude is alleviated
by the throng who will come to consult him on matters of law, est ... sine dubio
domus iuris consulti, Crassus says, utius oraculum aitatis (1.200). Quintilian
picks that up (12.11.5) by drawing a picture of the home of his retired orator
thronged by optimi iuuenes seeking from him the ‘path of speaking’ as though
from an oracle (selut ex oraculo). To this we should add a passage apparently
overlooked by the commentators, in Cicero’s De Senectute (28-29), where the
old Cato (who addresses his friends as optimi adolescentes, 39) remarks on the
pleasures of an old age stipata studii iuventutis, ready to teach the young. Still,
Quintilian’s words do remind us vividly of the boni iuuenes of his first preface
(7): Quintilian’s own pupils, whom in another place (7.3.30) he calls adoles-
centibus meis (neos enim semper adolescentes potaha). These studious young men
will, as we shall see, reappear at the very end of the chapter, and of the book.

Two further connections with Cicero suggest themselves. Quintilian’s
stress on the physical failings of the old, the increasing weakness of voice,
lungs, and general health, is taken not just from life but from De Oratore,
where Crassus foresees (1.199) a time when his powers will begin to fail
(defiare), and also from De Senectute, where lungs, strength and voice are
mentioned (28). It is noticeable that both Cicero and Quintilian gloss over
the possibility of mental decline and even collapse; Quintilian just says that
knowledge increases with age (2); and later he will tell us how Cato learnt
Greek for the first time as an old man (23, from De Senectute 3 and 26).
Secondly, Quintilian wants his orator to make for port with vessel unharmed.
The idea of retirement as a port after the storms of one’s career appears in De
Oratore (1.255): what Crassus saw as a solitude to be feared, Antonius thinks
of as a quiet harbour to look forward to. Quintilian sides with Crassus here.
The retired orator must keep busy; his port is like the one hankered after by
Cicero himself in the last years of his life (Brutus 8), a portum ... non inmitiae
necque desidiae, sed oti moderati atque bonesi.

There must, then, be fruits of old age (12.11.4).4 Quintilian loyally men-
tions Cicero’s idea of giving legal advice, but his other suggestions are
designed to leave something tangible behind: books on history (written, as he
says, for posterity), philosophy, and, put in to cover himself, rhetoric. The
climax comes with talk of going on ‘shaping’ the young (formabitis, 5): quid ...
ex bonestis quam docte quod optime scias? (6). And Cicero the preceptor of the

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4 Cf. Plin. Ep. 3.7.14: ‘quidquid est temporis utilis et caducii, si non datur factis ...,
certc studiis proferamus, et quaternus nobis denegatur diu uiuere, relinquamus
aliquid quo nos uixisse testemur.’
young is made an explicit exemplum. The retired orator is motivated *amore quodam opere: nemo enim minui velit id in quo maximum fuerit*. Quintilian’s own voice comes through clearly. The work must go on, and his retirement is not to be a rest. He will teach by writing, and by going on talking to the young.

We have seen the strong closure at the end of 7. Still, when Quintilian does go on, it is to a section (8) that links neatly with what precedes. He is confident, he says, that he has, as well as he could, brought the fruits of his knowledge and research to the notice of all who wished to learn: that puts him, in his way, alongside Cicero the teacher of youth. *Id satio bono satis est*, he now says of himself, *dociisse quod sciérīt*. Being a good man is one attribute of an orator; and the echo of 6 is obvious and intended: Quintilian has himself done what he recommended the ideal orator should do. But now a dark note: ‘I fear however’ (9). The link is: I have taught as well as I could; but is my programme *practicable*? This is the new topic. 18-19, an assertion that it is our own fault if we find we have no time to complete such wide studies, and 21-24, an inspiring list of men who have in fact mastered vast tracts of knowledge, are straightforward enough. But we need to find some clue to the labyrinth of 9-17.

It seems not to have been noticed that a key element of the passage is recapitulation of the topics of the *Institutio* as a whole, and especially of those of the advanced programme of studies prescribed in the early chapters of Book 12. Nor is recapitulation inappropriate to this final chapter. In a speech, so went the precept, the peroration should link recapitulation with emotional appeal. I shall come back to the emotions later.

A preliminary statement of the main lines of Quintilian’s programme is given in 9, in the shape of a distinction between the weight (*magnus*) and the number (*multa*) of the items on his syllabus. The former covers the requirement *exandum utrum bonum esse et dicendi pertinum*, this summarises the essence of 12.1 (which began with a statement of Cato’s famous definition of the orator). The latter takes in earlier features of the *Institutio*, the ‘arts’ learned by boys (referring to 1.10, where see 1: *munc de ceteris artibus quibus instituendo ... pueros eximium*) and *ea quae de eloquentia tradebantur* (covering Books 2 to 11), but subordinates them (note *praefer* and *adieuem*) to the advanced programme of Book 12, from which Quintilian for the moment picks out *praecepta monum* (12.2, where in 1 notice *mores ... oratori studiis erunt exculti*) and *scientia iteris civilis* (12.3; see its opening words). After bracing general remarks in 10, Quintilian goes through the programme again, in more detail. The virtue of the orator is so important⁵ that Quintilian expands on it in 11-13, before coming in 16-17 to the other items in the syllabus (*cetera*, 13).

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⁵ *Quod prius quodque maius est* (11) echoes 12.1.1: *id quod et ille [sc. Cato] posuit prius et ipsa materia potius ac maius est.*
These recapitulations are subordinate to arguments designed to allay the fears of those who find Quintilian’s programme too demanding. Quintilian is concerned first (11-13) to show the practicability of the attainment of virtue. At the start of 12.2 we were told that virtus, etiam si quodam impetus ex natura sumit, tamen perfectionis doctrina est (we may be reminded here of Seneca’s remark in De Otto 4.2 that one thing the retired could inquire into is natura an ars bonus seors faciat). Nature and art accordingly intertwine in an unschematic way in our passage. Thus in 12: *Natura enim nos ad mentem optimum genuit, adeoque discere meliora volentibus promptum est ut nec intuenti minum sit illud magis, malos esse tam multos*. Nature and precept, therefore, work together in the same direction. But nature is ultimately the more important, and it is given the climax of the section (13): *Nam ut aqua piscibus, ut sicc a terrenis, circumfusa nobis spiritus volucritus convenit, ita arte facult es operebat secundum naturam quam contra eam sustine*. Again we may note the clausal effects: the examples of fish, animals and birds leading up to humankind, the mild word play of *secundum naturam* and *contra eam*. The purport of 9-13 is quite clear: nature has prepared us in advance, and it is not difficult to learn what needs to be learned. To become good is natural, and moral precepts work with the grain of our natures.

The closure at the start of 12 paves the way for defence of the practicability of the rest of the programme, cetera. In 16, Quintilian, rather oddly, again mentions learning moral precepts, together with getting experience of the forum: this alludes to 12.6, on the age for starting to plead in court. In the lacuna before *cognovere* (16) we surely need a mention of law, as in 9 above, to recall 12.3. Kidderlin was therefore right to add *ius civile*. The next item, *rerum cognitio* (17) duly recalls the short chapter 12.4, on *historia*, to be understood in the grammarians’ sense, of the background knowledge of texts from which the orator can accumulate *exempla*.

We may observe how in 12.4 Quintilian stresses that one does not need to wait till old age to win authority here: study (that is, the reading of books) will give you an old man’s experience before you grow old. So here in 12.11, 17: *rerum cognitio cotidie crecit*, but experience is to be supplemented by book-reading. The argument is puzzlingly set out. But Quintilian seems to exclaim:

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6 *Perhorreseat*, 9; at 12 we should perhaps read *praemetturn* for the corrupt *praemuntrum* (I offer a defence in a forthcoming number of Classical Quarterly).

7 Cf. 11 (becoming good) *voluntate maxime constat.*

8 *In foro nos expetiri* implies not just ‘attending real cases’ (Austin), but ‘trying oneself out’ in the making of speeches; cf. Plin. *Ep.* 7.4.3: *Latinos elegos ... feci expetus sum me aliquando et hero.*

9 Perhaps more has dropped out.
"How many books we need to read, even if we set ourselves to read only useful material!" But we are not to despair, for, as is stressed in 18-19, we waste an enormous amount of time that might be devoted to study. It does now begin to look as though Quintilian is starting to move away from the position that the programme can really be completed in adolescence. This is suggested especially by the mention of 'anxious calculation of accounts', not something adolescents normally much worry about. I shall return to this point.

Before Quintilian started this recapitulation of the programme of Book 12, he had already, in 10-11, laid the foundations of the emotional appeal of this peroration. The human mind is capable of so much. Even minor arts can aspire to discover the courses and numbers of the stars, and almost measure the universe itself. The hyperbole is emotive, and contains an argument a fortiori: if a mere geometer can do so much, then, we the students of the grandest of all arts, can do anything! The goal is great, no labour to reach it is to be grudged. And there is emotion too in 18-20, combined with further scorn for the professors of other arts. In a very characteristic passage, Quintilian gives us an impassioned statement of the human tendency to waste time. Most other things a man, especially a young man, might wish to do are ruled out with distaste. Some of them are familiar targets of a satirist's criticism, and are given adjectives to point the moral: morning visits to one's patron (*uanus salutandi labor*), undue concern for one's body (*insana corporis caerius*). But Quintilian could be thought to be banning almost everything on which a Roman (or anyone else) might spend his leisure: conversation (*fabulae*), shows, dinner parties, travel, concern for one's estates, sex (and wine too, unless we delete *et uinum*). This sort of complaint is not to be dismissed, in the way Austin dismisses it, as just a *loca de saeculo*. It is that, but it is used to a purpose: we waste time we can ill afford to waste. Quintilian is surely inspired by, even corrects, a passage of Seneca's *De Brevitate Vitae* (1.4): *non acipimus [varia lectio acipimae] breuem uiam sed faciun [MSS faciun*], echoed

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10 But 17 remains obscure: *et tamen ... omnia* sounds like an imagined objection, that the reading list is too long. Perhaps, then, emend *et tamen* to *at enim* (answered by *sed*, as in *Dec. Min.* 371.5).

11 Note earlier (13): *etiam si aetatem nostram non spatius senectutis sed tempore adolescentiae metiamur* (with the implication: how much more can we do if we employ old age to the full!).

12 Other passages of the *Institutio* (1.11.15, 1.12.18, 6.2.30, 12.1.6) cite yet more distractions of which Quintilian disapproves: exercise in the Campus Martius; dicing (approved for old men by Cato in the *De Senectute* 58); the hunt; the palaestra; sleep, and, while awake, daydreaming.
in our chapter (18) by *breue nobis tempus nos fecimus*. Seneca's treatise gives parallel examples of how time is wasted (e.g., 2.1, 7.1, 13.1). His purpose, though, is to encourage us to find time for *philosophy*, especially, it may be noted, in old age (note especially 7.4, 19.1): whereas Quintilian is thinking of the need to make time for study in youth, and (it begins to appear) throughout one's life. But the general argument is remarkably parallel. The similarity illuminates Quintilian's praise for Seneca as an *egregius ... utilitum insector* in 10.1.129. Conversely, we should look upon this passage of Quintilian, and others like it, as being signs of his desire to ensure that the student of rhetoric is trained in morals also. We may notice how, back in 12.1.4, he said that the retired orator will write a rhetorical handbook *or* give expression to the precepts of philosophy. Quintilian's book does both. So here: when he talks about time-wasting, he is not ranting: he is teaching.

We saw that, before Quintilian turned to recalling the details of his advanced programme, he gave some general encouragement (10). And he gave it, we now discover, in terms that look forward to later parts of the chapter. The prize is great - and in 29 we find that the reward is not, or not primarily, a matter of money and praise. The human mind is capable of extraordinary feats - and in 21-24 Quintilian unobtrusively uses his own wide reading to give examples of great men who have mastered many skills. These are *exempla* to prove his point (again youth is forgotten, as we shall see); and a list that started with Homer ends with calculated bathos (24): if the mediocre Cornelius Celsus can master so vast a field, anyone can!

We come to the last paragraph, 25-30. Quintilian uses the phrase *exhortatio studiorum*, but exhortation to study has been an important element of the *Institution*, not least earlier in our chapter. The pupil is now urged to work hard in the confidence that what he is aiming for is not, as it might seem, unattainable; being an orator is (the argument proceeds) something that is possible as well as eminently desirable. The chapter, and indeed the whole of Book 12, is being tied together. The assertion (25) that nature allows the attainment of such heights looks back to similar words in 12.1.31. Oratory is the *opus pulcherrimum* (29): that phrase had been used in the first section of our chapter, and early in 12.1 too (4). And the very fact that Cicero had achieved so much, implied earlier and now stated more openly, should be an incentive to try at least to come near to him. It follows that 21-30 is an

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14 Thus the (Ciceronian) ideal of the perfect orator, first broached at 1 pr. 9, is designed to set a goal towards which the student may strive.
integral part of the argument that started at 9. The programme is attainable, and the goal is very well worth striving for.

Who is being encouraged in this chapter? In the proem to Book 12 (3) we are told that the student has been a dicendi magistris dimissus; he is now either going along under his own steam, aut maion sibi auxilia ex ipsis sapientiae penetrabilis petit, a grand way of alluding to a philosopher’s school.\(^5\) Either way he is out of Quintilian’s hands, and that is why exhortation is so necessary. These are, as it were, the words the Master might have used at the end of the last semester, when addressing pupils who must now bring their own motivation to private studies. But now, writing a book that not only students would read, Quintilian addresses others too. We find him criticising other rhetors (15). And one might guess that he also had fathers in mind, fathers glad enough not to be paying any more fees to a rhetor, but in need of some encouragement themselves to support sons lounging round the house, and occasionally picking up a book on moral philosophy.

But Quintilian is mainly talking to the young in this part of the chapter, even if he sometimes (e.g. 12 and 14) uses the first person plural to soften his exhortations to them. But is there perhaps some element of self-exhortation here too? We have seen how in 2.12.12 Quintilian talked of writing the Institutio as a ‘consolation’ of his leisure. Now the long book is nearly finished, and the dread question ‘What next?’ looms. Though retirement is not mentioned after 7, there is continued allusion to old age. It is striking how the examples amassed in 21-24 (Gorgias, Aristotle, Cato) dwell on long periods of time and on activity in advanced age. And the mention of Cato takes us back, as we have seen, to the De Senectute, and to the idea elaborated there that one should never stop studying. Cicero (26) alludes to famous words of Solon, whom (he says) ‘we see boasting in his poetry that he grows old learning something new every day’: γνώσις δ’ ἀδέλπ θελλά ἀδιάσκήμενος (Fr. 18 West). Finally, in 19-20, Quintilian, after listing ways we find to waste time (a list which, as we have seen, sometimes sounds more appropriate to an older man than to youths), goes on to say that if all that misspent time were spent on study, we should find we had a long enough life and plenty of scope for learning. Nec vero si geometrae et musicæ et grammatici omne suum utam ... in singulis artibus conspersionem, sequatur ut pluris quam siitas ad plura disienda desideram. All this is not much to the point if Quintilian is merely encouraging the young to master moral philosophy and law; rather, he has himself, and his retirement, much in mind. He distances himself from those who stop learning their own subject, and yet are content to know only

\(^{5}\) Cf. 12.2.6: Cicero ... testatur dicendi facultatem ex intimis sapientiae fontibus fluere.
that; he, it is implied, will go on studying rhetoric, but not rhetoric alone. In Book 1 (1.4.5) he had said of grammar that it is *necessaria pueris, incunda senibus, dulcis secretorum comes*. He is telling himself that work must go on: that there is life after the *Institutio*, even if it is only devoted to reading yet more, in rhetoric and in other arts.

Austin thought of much of the chapter as a postscript. But the real, and very short, postscript comes in the last section of all (31). The reader most obviously envisaged here is the dedicatee of the book, Marcus Vitrius. But Quintilian’s thoughts are with the young, the *studiosi iuvenes* whom he hopes will carry out his programme even after they have left his school. No less are his thoughts with his book, which he hopes will prove useful to the young. But if it does not, he knows it will give them ‘good intentions’ (* bona voluntas*). For Quintilian, being good is what matters. And he may have the last word on a teacher’s retirement (12.11.8): *id uirro bona sat is est, docuisset quod scierit.*
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