

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS

A FEW OBSERVATIONS ON FORM AND CONTENT IN DEMOSTHENES

CECIL W. WOOTEN

ONE OF THE commonplaces of stylistic criticism in Demosthenes is that style in his speeches is always functional, that it is never merely decoration, that it always clarifies a point which he wants to make or reinforces an idea which he wants to convey to his audience. Like much criticism, however, this statement is made more often than it is illustrated. I would like to point out here a few instances of the very effective way in which style reinforces and reflects content in the *First Philippic* and the *Third Philippic*.

The point which Demosthenes most emphatically makes in these speeches is that Philip has been successful because he has been active and quick while the Athenians have been idle and slow. This basic antithesis is reflected very clearly in the style of these speeches. Philip's actions are usually reported in short, quick clauses with no connectives between them while the Athenians are usually referred to in longer, more involved clauses which often are connected by means of polysyndeton.

In the *First Philippic*, for example, Demosthenes relates Philip's actions (34) in a series of clauses which are short and simple but filled with action since each clause contains at least one circumstantial participle (most of these are verbs of motion) in addition to the main verb. The speed with which Philip acts is conveyed by the lack of connectives between these clauses: . . . ἐμβالῶν . . . ᾤχετ' ἔχων, . . . συλλαβῶν . . . ἐξέλεξε, . . . ἀπέβη . . . ᾤχετ' ἔχων. This fast, quick, energetic section, emphasizing Philip's movement and speed, is followed at the end of the sentence by a very slow section which describes the actions of the Athenians, using polysyndeton to emphasize their slowness and apathy: ὑμεῖς δ' οὐτε . . . δύνασθε κωλύειν οὐτ' εἰς τοὺς χρόνους . . . βοηθεῖν. Likewise, two sections later (36) Demosthenes first describes Athenian preparations for war with a series of adjectives which are dominated by the broad, open *a*-sound which emphasizes the idea of laxity, apathy, and lack of definition: ἄτακτα, ἀδιόρθωτα, ἀόρισθ' ἅπαντα.¹ Then, his description of how the Athenians act when they receive news that Philip is on the move is filled

¹ I would like to thank Professor George Kennedy for pointing out to me that this is one of the most striking examples of hiatus in Demosthenes, which makes each word stand out very emphatically. Although the actions of the Athenians were careless, the style which he uses to describe them is very carefully worked out.

with polysyndeton, to emphasize how long all of this takes, and anaphora, to emphasize that they always make the same mistakes: ἀκηκόαμεν τι καὶ τριηράρχους καθίσταμεν καὶ . . . ποιούμεθα . . . καὶ . . . σκοποῦμεν . . . καὶ . . . ἔδοξε . . . εἴτ' αὐτοὺς πάλιν, εἴτ' ἀντεμβιβάξιν, εἴτ' ἐν . . . Here also in describing the activities of the Athenians Demosthenes uses clauses which follow one another without transition or connection. The lack of organization and lack of an organizing principle within the sentence reflect the situation which it defines.² Then (37) after all this slowness and hesitation there is a dramatic shift back to Philip (ὁ δ'), who has been acting while the Athenians delay. Likewise, in the *Third Philippic* (27) Demosthenes relates the actions of Philip in short, energetic clauses with no connectives between them: οἴχεται, . . . ἦκεν . . . , . . . ἔχει . . . , ἐπεβούλευσεν . . . His ceaseless activity and boundless energy, reflected in the first part of the sentence, are contrasted with the Greeks' inertia and lack of unity in the second: . . . οὐ πέμπομεν . . . κάγανακτοῦμεν, οὕτω δὲ κακῶς διακείμεθα καὶ διορωρύγμεθα . . . ὥστ' . . . οὔτε τῶν συμφερόντων οὔτε τῶν δεόντων πράξει δυνάμεθα, οὐδὲ συστήναι, οὐδὲ . . . ποιήσασθαι . . . Here again the polysyndeton reflects the slowness, indifference, and divisive separation which Demosthenes saw among the Greeks of the fourth century. This same idea is reflected a few sections later (35): μέλλομεν καὶ μαλκίομεν καὶ . . . βλέπομεν. Here the style clearly reflects the thought which he wants to convey.

Demosthenes also often uses parallelism to underline the regularity with which Philip acts, especially when he wants to frighten his audience by predicting how he will treat Athens, judging from how he has treated other cities in the past.³ In the *Third Philippic* (65–66) parallelism and anaphora (καλὴν γ' . . . καλὴν γ' . . . καλῶς) are used to underline the idea that Philip has always deceived those who had supported him and would act the same way towards Athens if he got the chance. A few sections later (68) these same devices are used again for the same purpose: πόλλ' ἂν . . . πόλλ' ἂν . . . πολλά.⁴ Elsewhere in this same speech (34) he uses possessive genitives at the head of each clause (. . . Κορινθίων . . . Ἀχαιῶν . . . Θηβαίων . . . ἡμῶν) to underline, in keeping with the pan-Hellenic ideas in this speech, the idea that Philip has wronged all the Greeks.

There is another sort of sentence of which Demosthenes is fond and which clearly reflects the situation as he saw it. In one section of the *First Philippic* (7) the first part of the sentence consists of a long series

²This lack of organization is pointed out by G. Ronnet, *Etude sur le style de Démosthène dans les discours politiques* (Paris 1951) 119.

³This, obviously, is one of the main functions of the deliberative orator, to predict what will happen in the future on the basis of what has happened in the past. Cf. Aristotle *Rhet.* 1.3.4.

⁴Demosthenes, however, as always, avoids strict parallelism which appears unnatural and insincere; cf. G. Rowe, "Demosthenes' Use of Language," in *Demosthenes' On the Crown*, ed. J. Murphy (New York 1967) 184–186.

of relatively complicated conditional clauses, which state what the Athenians must do to rectify the situation in which they find themselves. The results which they will obtain are stated at the end in simple, straightforward clauses using polysyndeton to emphasize each of these consequences: *καὶ . . . κομείσθ' . . . καὶ . . . ἀναλήψεσθε, κάκεινον τιμωρήσεσθε*. Clearly, Demosthenes here wants to convey the idea that the sacrifices that the Athenians must make are involved and complex; he doesn't want to deceive them into thinking that what he proposes will be easy. On the other hand, the simple and straightforward clauses in the conclusion emphasize that, if these sacrifices are made, the results will follow without question and will be clear-cut gains, that all can recognize.⁵ Likewise, in the *Third Philippic* (6) Demosthenes uses a complex style in the first part of the sentence to reflect the complexity of the situation and to contrast it with the simplicity of the measures, stated in the main clause, which must be taken to solve these problems: . . . *ἀνάγκη φυλάττεσθαι καὶ διορθοῦσθαι περὶ τούτου*. The simple conclusion is set off against the ramifications of the situation. Similarly, in another section of this speech (2) he discusses the causes which have produced the predicament in which Athens finds herself. The clauses become more expansive as the reasons stated become more particular, building up to the effect which these causes have produced, which is stated very simply and very emphatically at the end of the sentence: . . . *Φιλίππῳ δ' ἐξέσται καὶ λέγειν καὶ πράττειν ὃ τι βούλεται* (the principle, according to Demosthenes, over which all previous Greek wars had been fought, and an important theme in this speech; cf. 22). It is the complicated situation in Athens, reflected in the structure of the first part of the sentence, which has made it so easy for Philip to act as he wishes.⁶

I give one final very clear and very simple example of the way in which style reflects content. In the *First Philippic* (24) when Demosthenes is trying to convince the Athenians that they will be more successful in warfare if citizen-soldiers fight with mercenary troops he gives an example of how this practice was successful during the Corinthian War. To

⁵Ronnet, 89, comments very briefly on this. Similarly, in another section of this speech (50) when Demosthenes is trying to convince the Athenians that the assumptions on which their foreign policy should be based are few and simple and that they should disregard the rumours which some politicians spread around Athens he reflects this idea in the structure of the clause: . . . *ἐχθρὸς ἄνθρωπος καὶ τὰ ἡμέτερ' ἡμᾶς ἀποστερεῖ καὶ χρόνον πολὺν ὕβρικε* . . . These are the simple, basic truths about the situation which should be obvious to everyone. They are, therefore, stated in a simple, basic, and straightforward way. As usual, style reflects and reinforces thought.

⁶Demosthenes realized that the real problem in Athens was internal rather than external. The apathy of the Athenians and the venality of many Athenian politicians was much more difficult to combat than Philip; cf. *Philippic* 3. 53-56.

emphasize this idea of cooperation and interlocking he uses a chiasmus:

. . . μεθ' ὑμῶν ἐνίκων οὗτοι οἱ ξένοι καὶ ὑμεῖς μετ' ἐκείνων.

I have tried to give above a few examples of how style is never simply ornamentation in Demosthenes. It is always closely related to the thought which he wants to convey. It always reflects and reinforces that thought.

INDIANA UNIVERSITY, BLOOMINGTON, INDIANA