

# ANALYZING CICERO'S STYLE FROM THE TEXT OF CICERO: A REPLY\*

*Cicero's Elegant Style* was intended to suggest a method of analysis by which readers could discover and appreciate certain essential features of Cicero's periodic composition. The need for such an approach is patent to anyone who has read the standard discussions and assessments of Cicero's style in the literary histories and tried to derive from them a clear notion of Cicero's artistry. Most of what is said is inadequate; much is inaccurate; almost nothing is demonstrated in detail. In my introduction, I reiterate and expand upon a point made by Erasmus, but never noticed, and argued independently by Eric Laughton, namely, that Cicero did not compose his periods in the Isocratean mold, as is almost universally claimed. In the commentary I discuss a couple of places where he uses Isocratean symmetries to stress the absurdity of an opponent's logic. Elsewhere he uses formal balance and echoing symmetries in the structure of periods for special effect, but generally he plays off the expectation of balance to produce a less predictable result. A reviewer should be aware of the novelty of this assessment and either refute it or praise it.

I make the further point that Cicero avoids symmetry of phrases and clauses; that is to say, beyond the avoidance of the larger balances, he eschews concinnity in the component elements of his periods. This observation has never been made, much less proved. It goes well beyond anything Erasmus may have been suggesting in his general distinction between Isocratean and Ciceronian structure. I have set out and discussed the relevant passages of the *Ciceronianus* in volume 5 of *Illinois Classical Studies* (1980). When my reviewer says, "The contrasting of Isocrates and Cicero as paradigms respectively of balance and asymmetry is at least as old as Erasmus," he is extrapolating from comments in my book; and he produces a statement both false in content and misleading in the implication that anything about Erasmus' criticism had been previously incorporated into Ciceronian criticism. "At least" is merely a reviewer's ploy.

Having disposed of the long and virtually unchallenged *communis opinio*, I talk about the means by which Cicero guides his listeners through the intricacies of his periods. I discuss various techniques of anticipation and resolution. When I say that a demonstrative pronoun or adjective modifying the antecedent often anticipates a relative clause, thus maintaining periodicity beyond the clause containing the antecedent and interweaving the clauses, my reviewer takes me to task for not distinguishing restrictive and nonrestrictive relative clauses—as if the listener could know by the demonstrative for which kind of relative he was being prepared. Indeed, as I point out, the demonstrative pronoun may also anticipate a result clause or an accusative and infinitive. Cicero guides his audience; he does not handcuff them to him.

Anticipation and resolution keep the audience in touch with the movement of the period in a way less predictable than the symmetrical balances of his putative model Isocrates. I show that an accusative pronoun can look forward to a transitive verb and therefore function as a mark of anticipation. My reviewer would

\* See *CP* 76 (1981): 301–13.

dismiss this if the pronoun is in the postpositive position where, as Wackernagel once demonstrated, unemphatic pronouns are often found in inflected Indo-European languages. A word placed in that slot, however, is not hidden from view. That same pronoun may equally anticipate an infinitive of which it is the subject; this only means that as an anticipatory device it is less limiting than, say, *non modo*; structural expectations are, nonetheless, aroused. If the pronoun is in one colon and the construction that resolves it is in the next, that is a kind of hyperbaton—one that achieves interweaving of the cola involved. I repeat the example of this technique I cited in my book: “in qua me non infitior mediocriter esse versatum.” Wackernagel’s law is irrelevant to my point. At the least, Cicero is taking advantage of a natural tendency to achieve a structural effect. To ignore this is as unresponsive to the nature of style as rejecting the artistic use of the tricolon because it is also an intrinsic feature of Indo-European.

Hyperbaton is a figure of speech I deal with frequently and in some detail because it is another technique by which Cicero may direct his listener forward. It also allows him to achieve periodicity by bracketing some other element of the sentence between the two words that are wrested from their natural collocation. I suggest that a variety of rhetorical effects may also result from the use of the figure, but here, as usual, I concentrate on structural rather than rhetorical effects. If I were going to talk about rhetorical effects, I would continue the practice that otherwise informs my book and generalize from the text rather than imposing an extrinsic principle. My reviewer uses the opposite method. “It is not the element that is inserted into the natural pair that is emphasized, but the element that, displaced from its natural collocation, precedes the inserted element.” To demonstrate how misleading such a principle is, I merely cite three phrases where both the inserted element and what follows it are emphatic: 2 *In Verrem* 1. 95 “hac sua, quam tum primum excogitavit, Siciliensi aestimatione,” 4 *In Catilinam* 11. 23 “hac quam perspicitis ad conservandam rem publicam diligentia,” 4 *In Catilinam* 7. 11 “multo etiam maiore populi Romani ad summum imperium retinendum et ad communis fortunas conservandas voluntate.” The extrinsic approach to stylistic analysis is likely always to be detrimental. When I thought up *magno cum gaudio* as an example of hyperbaton for the sake of elegance, I was guilty of just that. The postponement of *cum* in modal phrases pervades the language and amounts almost to a law. It is not an exquisite articulation. When my reviewer says, “So in *magno cum gaudio* . . . the usual effect of hyperbaton is to emphasize *magno*, not *cum*,” I must take the blame for misleading him. What he would need to explain is why the frequency of postposition of no other preposition approaches that of *cum* specifically in modal phrases.

Although I devote much time to the means by which Cicero sustains periodicity, I observe on several occasions that, when the syntax of a sentence is satisfied, the sentence may and, in Cicero, often does go on. The inflection of the speaker might have indicated that there was more to come; this we cannot know. Nonetheless, distinctions can be made; there is a difference between, say, a causal clause before the main predicate or one that follows the predicate but is anticipated by *eo consilio*, or the like, and *praesertim cum* or *propterea quod* attached to the unit after the syntax has been satisfied. Here the critic may ponder the stylistic preference for such an arrangement over a new sentence beginning with *nam*.

This is a subject related to one I raise in my book: the use of the semi-independent relative and how it differs in texture from a new sentence beginning with *et is*. It is simply false to claim as my reviewer does that I ignore the relationship between sentences; I also mention rhetorical “paragraphing” as an alternative to extensive periodicity (see “paragraphing” in my glossary). My reviewer may be believed by people who do not read my book. No careful reader of Cicero will fail to raise a brow when the reviewer of a book on Cicero exemplifies his discussion of the effect of anticipation of a causal clause with *propterea . . . quod*. Unless he bases his expertise solely on the *Pro Plancio*, he is unaware that the tmesis of *propterea quod* found in that speech is unique in Cicero; in the more than fifty other uses of the phrase, the two words appear together.

Familiarity with Cicero’s preferences and practice would seem to be a requisite for a critic of Ciceronian style or the reviewer of a book on Cicero. No one has fully investigated Cicero’s use of homoeoteleuton, a figure Cicero neither eschews nor uses indiscriminately. In my glossary under “homoeoteleuton” I cite examples of the use and avoidance of the figure from which the reader can draw his own, tentative, conclusions. He is unlikely to share the understanding of my reviewer, who at one point asserts that Cicero avoided ending a colon with *colebantur* partly because it “would have made too much of a jingle with *neglegebantur*.” It is precisely to suggest balance of cola that Cicero does use homoeoteleuton. He avoids it in successive words and would not have used the phrase my reviewer produces, *homini summi ingeni*, presumably in imitation of Cicero.

Cicero’s genius in his periodic style lies largely in his ability to dispose a substantial amount of material smoothly and flowingly within the structural limits of a complex syntactic unit, leading his audience through the intricacies of construction by techniques of suspension and resolution. This masterfully controlled composition, resulting in locutions that are both handsome and functional, I frequently describe as elegant. Indeed, I use the word in my title. My reviewer notes critically that the ancient meaning of *elegans* is different. Granted; it had the connotation of restraint, precision, wit, and use of the *mot juste*. Meanings change—to say nothing of languages; the “grand style” connotes something different from the *genus grande*. But attacking the book’s title is the reviewer’s ploy; he did not scruple to use the word “elegant” in his review, as his own and without apology, in precisely the way I do. On the other hand, I wonder whether Cicero would have refused the epithet in describing his oratorical style. I am quite sure that, if someone used “luxurious,” the word employed by W. Ralph Johnson in his book on Cicero and approved by my reviewer, he would have said, “If you want ‘luxurious,’ go listen to Hortensius.” Cicero would claim, as he suggests in the *Orator*, that he exercised great restraint of ornamentation in his speeches in part, perhaps, precisely by avoiding the symmetrical balances associated with Isocrates.

I was forced to the somewhat awkward format of my book by the conviction that, whatever the cost in smoothness of exposition, the observations on style should arise from the text and not become abstracted. One drawback is that it is distracting to the reader to have to wade through every possible observation on any given sentence; another is that it is impractical to make the same observation each and every time it is relevant. A final drawback, one that I failed to

erat Italia tum plena Graecarum artium ac disciplinarum  
studiaque haec et in Latio vehementius tum colebantur  
quam nunc isdem in oppidis  
et hic Romae propter tranquillitatem rei publicae non neglegebantur

I have attempted, perhaps without total success, to cast this piece in the form of an *apologia*, not a polemic. I would not have responded at all but for the fear that, if my reviewer's approach is countenanced, stylistic studies will revert to the imposition of extrinsic principles that may sound fine in histories of literature but are unresponsive to the realities of Cicero's style and fail to describe his techniques and aims. Cicero's audience was not aware of Wackernagel's law or normative Indo-European sentences. They had, if even on a subconscious level, expectations of sentence movement. How Cicero manipulated those expectations is the subject of my book; and the exposition requires detailed analysis of the text, not generalities. Similarly, it is extremely detrimental to the understanding and appreciation of Cicero's artistry, especially in view of what we know of the importance of formal rhetorical training to Republican orators, to impose upon him the distinction between "the trappings of artistry" and "effective communication" with which my reviewer closes his piece. Applied to later declaimers, my reviewer's pronouncements on the relationship between artistry and meaning are blameless, oft-spoken pieties. In Cicero, the trappings are the communication. I doubt whether my reviewer realizes how often in Cicero "effective communication" is precisely the obfuscation and deception achieved by the more elaborate stylistic arabesques.

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