

6

Two philosophical texts

I. Cicero (106-43 B.C.):

Earthly glory and true immortality¹

'... *Quocirca si reditum in hunc locum desperaveris, in quo omnia sunt magnis et praestantibus viris, quanti tandem est ista hominum gloria, quae pertinere vix ad unius anni partem exiguam potest? Igitur alte spectare si voles atque hanc sedem et aeternam domum contueri, neque te sermonibus vulgi dedideris nec in praemiis humanis spem posueris rerum tuarum; suis te oportet inlecebris ipsa virtus trahat ad verum decus; quid de te alii loquantur, ipsi videant, sed loquentur tamen. Sermo autem omnis ille et angustiis cingitur his regionum, quas vides, nec umquam de ullo perennis fuit et obruitur hominum interitu et oblivione posteritatis extinguitur.'*

Quae cum dixisset, 'Ego vero', inquam, 'Africane, siquidem bene meritis de patria quasi limes ad caeli aditum patet, quamquam a pueritia vestigiis ingressus patris et tuis decori vestro non defui, nunc tamen tanto praemio exposito enitar multo vigilantius.' Et ille: *'Tu vero enitere et sic habeto, non esse te mortalem, sed corpus hoc; nec enim tu is es, quem forma ista declarat, sed mens cuiusque is est quisque, non ea figura, quae digito demonstrari potest. Deum te igitur scito esse, siquidem est deus, qui viget, qui sentit, qui meminit, qui providet, qui tam regit et moderatur et movet id corpus, cui praepositus est, quam hunc mundum ille princeps deus; et ut mundum ex quadam parte mortalem ipse deus aeternus, sic fragile corpus animus sempiternus movet.'*

'... In case therefore one despairs of returning to this place, where everything belongs to great and outstanding men, – what then is this human glory actually worth, that can barely cover a small portion of a single world-year? So if you want to look upwards and see this dwelling-place, this immortal house, then do not rely on the talk of the common people, and do not set your personal hopes on human rewards. Virtue itself must lead you by its own

¹ Cic. *rep.* 6,23,25 – 24,26. Text of K. Ziegler (Leipzig 1960⁵). Commentary by A. Ronconi *Somnium Scipionis. Introduzione e commento* (Florence 1961).

charms to true honour. What others say about you is their business – they will of course say something. But that talk is completely enclosed by the narrowness of the area you see here; it never lasted long for anyone; and it is covered up by men's deaths and effaced in the oblivion of posterity.'

When he had spoken these words, I said: 'Truly, Africanus, if something like a path to heaven's gate is really open to those who have done service to their fatherland, though from youth up I trod in my father's and your footsteps and tried hard to emulate your distinction, now that such a high reward is set before my eyes, I shall make an even more untiring effort.' He spoke: 'Do but make an effort and believe firmly that it is not you who are mortal, but this body. For you are not the person that this shape represents; rather it is the mind of each man that constitutes his being, and not the external appearance that can be pointed to with a finger. Know then that you are a god, as truly as it is a god who has vital energy, who feels, who remembers, who foresees, who so directs and leads and moves this body he is put in charge of, as the highest God does this world. And just as the eternal God himself moves the world, which to a certain extent is mortal, so the imperishable mind moves the frail body.'

1. Sequence of thought

The opening of our text forms the conclusion of the Elder Scipio's remarks on the futility of glory.² It was immediately preceded by the argument that in view of the greatness of the world-year even the most enduring glory is perishable. Cicero assumes that a person has abandoned hope of returning to heaven. Earthly glory would be all he now had; but this would be worth very little. With *igitur* the conclusion is then drawn from this that Scipio should direct his gaze upwards and disregard the talk of the crowd and human honours. Virtue³ must be pursued for its own sake and it will thereby lead men to the true heavenly reward. On the other hand what people say is

² A.D. Leeman *Gloria* (Diss. Leiden; Rotterdam 1949) is more important in our context than the well-known work of U. Knoche. 'Der röm. Ruhmesgedanke' *Philologus* 89 (1934) pp.102-124 (now in U. Knoche *Vom Selbstverständnis der Römer* [Heidelberg 1962] pp.13-30). On the concepts of glory and immortality of mind in the *Somnium Scipionis* cf. K. Büchner *Somnium Scipionis. Quellen, Gestalt, Sinn* Hermes-Einzelschriften 36 (Wiesbaden 1976); G. Wojacek 'ΟΡΓΙΑ ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΗΣ. Zur philosophischen Initiation im *Somnium Scipionis*' *Würzburger Jahrbücher* 9 (1983) p.124; D. Bayer 'Der Traum des Scipio' *Anregung* 30 (1984) p.423; W. Olbrich 'Ciceros "Somnium Scipionis" – episch und dramatisch' *Anregung* 30 (1984) p.98. On the same topic in Cicero's work as a whole cf. K. Buchheit 'Ciceros Triumph des Geistes' in: B. Kytzler (ed.) *Ciceros literarische Leistung Wege der Forschung* 240 (Darmstadt 1973) pp.489-514, esp. 512ff.

³ On Cicero's concept of *virtus* cf. P. Kuklica 'Ciceros Begriff *virtus* und dessen Interpretation' *Graecolatina et Orientalia* 7-8 (1975-76) pp.3-32, esp. 18. On the reward of immortality for the statesman as a Roman and Ciceronian addition to an otherwise Platonic conception cf. E. Berti *Il De re publica e il pensiero politico classico* (Padua 1963) pp.33f. and Büchner pp.73-81.

ephemeral and therefore a matter of indifference.

This exhortation is followed by the vow of the Younger Africanus to redouble his previous efforts. It is only after this ethical decision that the philosophical doctrine of the divine element in man and of immortality is presented.⁴

2. Sentence connection

The sentences are linked to each other by means of particles: *quocirca; igitur; autem; et; nec enim; sed; igitur; et*. However the principle of careful sentence connection is violated at a significant point: *igitur alte spectare si voles atque hanc sedem et aeternam domum contueri, neque te sermonibus vulgi dedideris nec in praemiis humanis spem posueris rerum tuarum; suis te oportet inlecebris ipsa virtus trahat ad verum decus; quid de te alii loquantur, ipsi videant, sed loquentur tamen*. The asyndeton in *tuarum; suis* is adversative; *suis* receives strong emphasis owing to the initial position. On the other hand the asyndeton in the next sentence has more the character of a supplement. Cicero stresses vigorously the important concept that virtue is to be pursued for its own sake and that the talk of the common people is without substance. There is no opportunity for such a 'change of register' in those authors who invariably write asyndetically.

3. Multiplicity in sentence structure

The sentences in our text are of many different types. The first main clause takes the form of a question; the second contains a prohibition. Later on there are several imperative sentences. Those containing statements are also varied: the future (*loquentur; enitar*) is used as well as the present. The subordinate clauses too are marked by diversity: conditional clauses (two cases of *si*; two examples of the half causal *siquidem*), several relative clauses, including one with anaphora of the pronoun, a dependent statement clause (*trahat*), a dependent interrogative clause (*quid ... loquantur*), a concessive clause (*quamquam*), and a comparative clause (*ut*). For a short text this is quite a collection.

On the other hand the rarity of participial constructions is noteworthy. The only ablative absolute comes in the words of the

⁴ On the train of thought and the interpretation of the text cf. Büchner pp. 41-46 and 88-92 and O. Schönberger 'Ciceros "Somnium Scipionis" als exemplarische Lektüre und Einführung in die Philosophie' *Anregung* 30 (1984) pp. 93-96. The interpretation offered by Wojacek is interesting; he explains the whole *Somnium* as the different stages of a mystery initiation: this is accepted by Bayer.

Younger Africanus: *tanto praemio exposito*. The phrase serves to give the vow an impressive brevity. We shall have to return to this passage when we deal with vocabulary and phraseology.

4. Emphatic positions in the sentence

The position of the verb is very flexible. On several occasions it yields its place at the end of the sentence to other elements,⁵ which are thereby given emphasis: *in quo omnia sunt magnis et praestantibus viris; quanti tandem est ista hominum gloria; spem posueris rerum tuarum; suis te oportet inlecebris ipsa virtus trahat ad verum decus; angustiis cingitur his regionum; enitar multo vigilantius; non esse te mortalem; qui tam regit et moderatur et movet id corpus, cui praepositus est, quam hunc mundum ille princeps deus*. Here the forward position of the first group of verbs involves chiasmic structure. This is even clearer at the end of 25: *et obruitur hominum interitu et oblivione posteritatis extinguitur*.

The beginning and end of the sentence are often stressed: *quanti tandem est ista hominum gloria?* However there are also significant passages in which the emphasis is put on the centre: *quae pertinere vix ad unius anni partem exiguam potest; igitur alte spectare si voles atque hanc sedem et aeternam domum contueri; spem posueris rerum tuarum; sed loquentur tamen; limes ad caeli aditum patet; sic fragile corpus animus sempiternus movet*.

With Cicero the main emphasis on content is not always at the end of the sentence. The penultimate position seems if anything more important, whereas the end itself fades away.⁶ Cicero's aim is not therefore an emphatic ending at any cost, but rather harmonic balance.

5. Vocabulary

If we turn from the text's overall impression of grandeur to individual words, it is astonishing to find so little in the vocabulary that is unusual.⁷

⁵ On verb position in the middle of the sentence cf. the present writer's 'M. Tullius Cicero, Sprache und Stil' *RE Supplementband* 13 (1973) 1293.

⁶ In this connection it should also be recalled that in the formation of clausula rhythm the penultimate position appears more important than the last.

⁷ E.g. though *contueri* (cf. [Gudeman] *ThLL* 4,4 [1908] 794,14-795,50) is admittedly more frequent in Cicero's philosophic works than in his speeches, it occurs even in Plautus; it can thus be regarded as perhaps a rather less common word, but on no account as an affectation. However the comparative adverb *vigilantius* is first attested in our passage and is otherwise very rare (*Phil.* 11,10; *Tert. anim.* 34,5; *Aug. civ.* 21,27 p.551,20; references supplied by W. Ehlers, *ThLL*, Munich). Büchner p.43 n.40 also

6. Form and content

Recognition that the vocabulary of our text is unremarkable has further implications. It is all the more important, since the content would lead one initially to anticipate a more select vocabulary. Accordingly we must look for artistry elsewhere: it is to be sought, not in the material, but in its use and arrangement.

a) Sublimity through simplicity

The effect of sublimity can be due to nothing more than Cicero's choice of a particularly ordinary expression or of a simple construction. This is the case on a number of occasions in the very first sentence. *reditum desperaveris* is the commonest and most laconic construction with this verb: Cicero forgoes the accusative and infinitive, which would also be conceivable here (for example *te redire posse*), and thus achieves a more austere dignity. In the following relative clause he again chooses the simplest expression: *esse* ('be at the disposal of, belong').

b) An archaic element: duplication

The monumental simplicity we have described does however combine with an archaic⁸ element, viz. duplication: *magnis et praestantibus viris*. The main point here is the restraint Cicero shows in the use of archaism. For him the principal means of attaining dignity is not old-fashionedness, but linguistic purity. The ensuing question about the value of glory is again formulated in the most concise way possible: *quanti tandem est?*

c) Artistic use of analytic word order

Only towards the end of the sentence does the style become more diffuse: *ista hominum gloria* (both attributes qualify the value of glory

adduces Boethius *cons.* 3,12,16 (*iam enim, ut arbitror, vigilantius ad cernenda vera oculis deducis*). Nor is one particularly struck by the verb *vigere*, applied here to deity; Cicero uses it in his philosophic works far more frequently than elsewhere. (The verb is found in the speeches only in the middle and final periods, while there are also sporadic occurrences in the letters and rhetorical works, but significantly not in *inv.*) The metaphorical use in the philosophic works is rather bold; in our passage we can virtually assume the basic meaning ('to be biologically strong'). The adjective *fragilis* is found only once in the speeches (*Mil.* 42), though more often in the philosophic works; in the letters it is completely absent, and in the rhetorical works it occurs only at *de orat.* 3,7,2. Apart from the philosophic works all the instances are therefore close in time to *rep.* In the philosophic works the word is also found later.

⁸ See in general E. Bréguet 'Les archaïsmes dans le *De re publica* de Cicéron' in: *Hommages à J. Bayet* Coll. Latomus 70 (Brussels 1964) pp. 122-131. On the frequency of archaisms in Cicero's philosophic works cf. the present writer loc. cit. 1253. On the archaisms in the stylistically 'elevated' sections of Cicero, to which our passage also belongs, cf. ib. 1255-1257 and 1260.

in different ways), *quae pertinere vix ad unius anni partem exiguam potest*. It should be noted how the scope of glory progressively shrinks in the final section from one word to the next. After the neutral *pertinere*, the adverb *vix* registers a first basic reservation. Then follows the exaggerated formulation *unius anni* ('one year', instead of 'one world-year'). However even this was still saying too much: the next word makes a further qualification (*partem*). Thus it is only part of a year. But this is still not the end of the limitations. *exiguam* rounds off the descending sequence: only a small part of a single year. Here English word order is the opposite of Cicero's and so it does not allow us to imitate the sequence of thought with the same naturalness. Thus in the sentence under consideration it is only towards the end that we find a rather more exuberant style; but here too the artistry is much less conspicuous than it would be in English, with its different rules of word order.

d) Plainness and emphasis

Here we see two opposite stylistic principles at work. A markedly plain form of expression produces an effect of dignity. On the other hand adjectives and adverbs carry a certain emphasis, which can be further accentuated by position (*quanti* stands at the beginning, *exiguam* in penultimate position). Emphasis combines with dignity in the archaic duplication (*magnis et praestantibus viris*).

e) Combination of words

The following sentence also has no surprises in vocabulary, though it does have in the way words are combined. *alte spectare* is concise and at the same time not quite at home in prose; it is true that it recurs in *Tusc.* 1,34,82, but otherwise Cicero says *magna spectare*.⁹ Even so, the more elevated expression in the philosophical works is based on everyday life: in *fam.* 10,26,3 we read *alte ascendere*. There is likewise nothing remarkable about the individual words *aeternus* and *domus*, though there is about their combination, which cannot be found anywhere in the speeches.¹⁰ Apparently colourless words are made to stand out through combination. The collocation *praemia humana* is also alien to the speeches. *hominum gloria* in the sense of 'earthly glory' occurs in Cicero only in our passage.

f) Spiritualization of basic Roman elements

Our linguistic findings show that here Cicero is giving unusual combinations to words that derive from ordinary Roman life and is thus making it possible to spiritualize the basic concepts behind

⁹ *Phil.* 1,12,29.

¹⁰ But cf. *Tusc.* 1,49,118; *nat. deor.* 3,16,41.

them.¹¹ The combination *verum decus* is another indication of how traditional values are being transformed. In the speeches there is no reason to distinguish 'true honour' or 'true glory' from what these words denote in ordinary usage. The subject of the sentence under consideration is *ipsa virtus*. Normally the Romans are reluctant to turn an abstract concept into an agent (*te trahat*). Here Cicero feels less constraint than e.g. Caesar: the orator¹² had a sense of the enlivening effect that comes from personification, and philosophy confirmed him in this tendency.

g) *Verbal repetition and variation of expression*

In the sentence we are examining there is a case of verbal repetition (*quid de te alii loquantur, ipsi videant, sed loquentur tamen*): the repeated word is stressed; in the last clause there is a conceit.¹³ Later on a word is repeated for the sake of clarification: *deum te igitur scito esse, siquidem est deus, qui ... tam regit ... corpus ... quam hunc mundum ille princeps deus*. In the same way *corpus* recurs several times and also, though a little further apart, *mortalis, sermo, praemium, decus*. All the words mentioned are thematically important. However Cicero avoids excessive rigidity: he varies between *gloria, decus* and *praemium* (these are not of course synonyms but related concepts), between *corpus, forma* and *figura*, between *mens* and *animus*, between *mortalis* and *fragilis*, between *aeternus* and *sempiternus*, between *hominum, vulgi, humanis, alii, posteritas*, and between nouns (*sermones, sermo*) and verbs (*loquantur, loquentur*).

Repetition of the same word with a different function was avoided less in antiquity than it is nowadays. We can cite the following example, which is no problem even for modern sensibility: *ipsi videant; ... quas vides*. A third type of verbal repetition is specifically rhetorical. Fivefold anaphora occurs in the almost hymnic sentence that establishes the divinity of the human mind by reference to that of the universe.

We noted a repetition with a similar psychological power in the

¹¹ Internalization through the context is also to be observed in a colourless word like *res*. In Cato's speech for the Rhodians it had denoted the material interest of the individual; here *rerum tuarum* refers to man's higher interests in life. *inlecebra* is used elsewhere in Cicero's speeches and philosophic works only in connection with vice; here Cicero applies it to virtue. The metaphor is made possible by the antithesis 'vice – virtue'; in this way the semblance of familiarity that Cicero always strives to achieve is preserved here as well.

¹² Cf. the numerous cases in which *virtus* is in the nominative; they are noted by Merguet in his lexicon to the speeches s.v.

¹³ Cf. *rep.* 6,20,22 *ipsi autem qui de nobis loquantur, quam loquentur diu?*

conversation between the Scipios. The solemn promise of the Younger (*enitar multo vigilantius*) is taken up by the Elder in confirmation and admonition (*tu vero enitere*): here we have the objective echo of a subjective affirmation, and in it the same word appears in a different light. This device too combines naturalness with poetic effect (it is no surprise to find the same technique in Roman and modern European poetry¹⁴), and here it is also ennobled by the atmosphere of ritual dialogue. The same tone appropriate to the *pater familias* is also heard in the formula *sic habeto*.¹⁵ The second imperative itself has a solemn ring. However the combination of *habere* with *sic* is also linked to the idea of ancient Roman tradition: *maiores nostri sic habuerunt* was what we found back in Cato. The expression is used in a similar way by Sallust.¹⁶

What is astonishing of course is that, while from the stylistic angle this conversation between father and son is marked by old-fashioned Roman dignity, Cicero gives it a 'Greek' content: deity is active in the individual, as in the universe. Thus in the setting typically Roman respect for ancestors and for the *pater familias* and his teachings is given a spiritual dimension.

h) *Antithesis, parallelism, chiasmus*

Platonic doctrine appears in antithetic form: *non esse te mortalem, sed corpus hoc. nec enim tu is es, quem forma ista declarat, sed mens cuiusque, is est quisque, non ea figura, quae digito demonstrari potest*. Antithesis is characteristic of the rational style of philosophic exposition; however in the fifties, when *De rep.* was written, Cicero uses the formula *non – sed* often in the speeches as well.¹⁷ Working with contrasts is of course particularly important in speeches, where it contributes substantially to the emotional effect. Accordingly in the antithetic formulation there is a fusion of rational and emotional elements.

The enumeration of the ways God operates in the world is arranged anaphorically, as befits the style of hymnic predication. Here however the writing is less elevated owing to the use of the third person. An impression of rationality is also produced by the 'logically' rising sequence: biology – sensation – intellectual activity.¹⁸

¹⁴ Cf. the present writer's *Die Parenthese ...* pp.94f.

¹⁵ Cf. Büchner p.43 n.41.

¹⁶ See above p.1 n.3.

¹⁷ Cf. P. Parzinger *Beiträge zur Kenntnis der Entwicklung des Ciceronischen Stils, I. Teil*. Programm des K. Humanistischen Gymnasiums Landshut für das Schuljahr 1910/11 (Landshut 1911) p.12.

¹⁸ Büchner p.43 also notes the climax.

The analogy between man and the world is presented in mirror form: *deus ... qui tam regit et moderatur et movet id corpus, cui praepositus est, quam hunc mundum ille princeps deus*. In the final sentence, with its emphasis on motion, chiasmus is replaced by parallelism: *et ut mundum ex quadam parte mortalem ipse deus aeternus, sic fragile corpus animus sempiternus movet*.

The parallelism is not however schematic, and is broken up by a slight counter-movement: *mundum ... mortalem – fragile corpus*. In the same way rigid symmetry was avoided in the antitheses, where it was a case of distinguishing between the body and the real man. In this the main factor was the change of subject: *nec enim tu is es, quem forma ista declarat, sed mens cuiusque, is est quisque, non ea figura, quae digito demonstrari potest*. In his mature period Cicero knew how to avoid the monotony of mathematical precision.¹⁹

i) Verbs and nouns

In the section we are considering, the impression of simplicity comes largely from the use of verbs (which was originally a characteristic of Latin) and from the aversion to abstractions: *sed mens cuiusque, is est quisque*. In a translation the English-speaker can hardly avoid talking about 'person', 'individual', or even 'ego'. However in Latin the plainness of the language underlines the character of the speech as a supernatural revelation: it is not so much 'scientific' as 'religious' in tone.

On the other hand we also notice 'noun style', above all in the final sentence of 25: *sermo autem omnis ille et angustiis cingitur his regionum, quas vides, nec umquam de ullo perennis fuit et obruitur hominum interitu et oblivione posteritatis extinguitur*. Here the use of nouns to fix the meaning goes partly beyond what would be expected in English: *angustiae* and *oblivio* stress the central idea and Cicero therefore expresses them as nouns.²⁰

7. Conclusion

Because on the whole Cicero connects his sentences very carefully, he has asyndeton at his disposal as an intensificatory device for emphasizing important ideas. With writers who make asyndeton the rule, this opportunity is lost.

¹⁹ His early speeches are still partly characterized by excessive concern for symmetry.

²⁰ In English the occurrence of the main idea in the form of an adjective is less noticeable: 'the talk is always restricted to the narrow area that you see'; 'it disappears with forgetful posterity'.

It accords with the character of a philosophic work²¹ that the sentences generally merge into each other smoothly. The fact that in our text the penultimate position in the sentence is often weightier than the last also helps to avoid an aggressively strident tone. Similarly the large number of subordinate clauses and their variety of form points to a calm periodic style. The infrequency of participial constructions fits this generally relaxed mood: its violation by an ablative absolute at an important point is all the more effective.

The elegant unobtrusiveness of the vocabulary and the refined simplicity of the constructions make every combination of words that is in some degree unusual stand out all the more. Accordingly, since plainness alone contributes very substantially to the dignity of the passage, only a few extra stylistic devices are needed to heighten the tone. Thus we have a single case of archaic duplication, or the expression *sic habeto* evoking the atmosphere of instruction in the *mos maiorum* by the *pater familias*, or anaphora bringing us into the area of religious language.

Philosophic teaching readily assumes antithetic form; at the same time however there is no anxious overemphasis on symmetry. Terminological rigidity is broken up as far as possible by natural variation in expression, though without allowing avoidance of repetition to become obsessive.

Perhaps the most important aspect is that a Roman has entered the realm of philosophy, as we see from the language and style of our text. It is something new in Rome to express the traditional concept of glory by the collocation *gloria hominum*, to reduce it in this way to a special case, and on the other hand to internalize the related word *decus* by the addition *verum decus*. In the formula *sic habeto* the *auctoritas* of a *pater familias* and respect for the *mos maiorum* prepare the way for the exposition of Platonic teaching. The first major philosophic work in Latin prose still reveals by its linguistic form the spontaneous assumptions and emotions – political, moral and religious – to which philosophical thought in Rome could relate. Through spiritualization of traditional Roman concepts Cicero has made a significant contribution towards developing the Latin language into a tool of philosophy.²²

²¹ Note the different stylistic approach in the passages from the speeches discussed in ch. 2. On the many-sidedness of Cicero's style see L. Laurand *Etudes sur la langue et le style des discours de Cicéron I-III* (Paris 1907; 4th ed. 1936-40) and the present writer loc. cit. (p.105 n.5) 1237-1347.

²² No discerning critic will blame him for leaving to later writers the introduction of many abstract concepts. Nor can Cicero's artistic restraint in this area be taken to

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