The Characterization Stage of Aphthonius' Progymnasmata in Light of Hermogenes' *On Style*:

Exploring the Border between Contemporary and Ancient Classrooms

By

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This paper will explore the border between contemporary and ancient classrooms through first suggesting correlations between the model provided by Aphthonius in his stage of Characterization or Ethopoeia, and with Hermogenes Style of Clarity in his treatise *On Style*. This treatment will then suggest the use Hermogenes' style rubric would assist mastery of the progymnasmata stage in the 9th grade would prepare contemporary students to master the Canon of Style as presented by Hermogenes in the 12th grade. Hermogenes uses a rubric of eight components to teach Style. The first six of these eight components--Thought, Method, Diction, Figures, Clauses, and Word order--will be used to analyze the model provided in Aphthonius as well as the 22 student exercises--11 tenth and 11 twelfth graders--for areas of convergence and/or divergence. The student exercises were a characterization of Antigone burying Polynices. A lack of time and an absence of expertise precluded the use the last two components of cadence and rhythm in this paper. The examples of the current student exercises will be used to evaluate the efficacy these ancient methods of instruction in contemporary secondary writing instruction. My approach will be to compare and contrast the two sets of exercises in relation to each of the six components one at a time or piecemeal as it were. The exercises were written in April of this year: the tenth grade students simply to help

me out with this paper while the twelfth graders received a grade for a style exercise for their effort.

The use of Hermogenes *On Style*, in particular his treatment of Clarity with its sub styles of Purity and Distinctness, in the senior year of High School can build upon the instruction of the Characterization stage of Aphthonius' *Progymnasmata* in the ninth grade year. Up to this point the instruction at Whitefield in the 9th grade year (reviewed again in the 10th) has used Aphthonius' brief even cryptic instructions and an analysis of his model. The analysis of the model presupposes that Aphthonius' curriculum is vertically integrated and incorporates a number of previously taught rhetorical tools. By vertically integrated I mean that the exercises teach foundational discrete or definable composition skills in the early stages that are then utilized to build more advanced skills culminating in a set of skills necessary to be begin the Art of Rhetoric. Specifically, those tools include the eight Heads of Development mastered in Chreia and Maxim stages and the six Heads of Purpose mastered in the Refutation and Confirmation stages. This analysis essentially becomes a rubric to aid the student in creative composition. An additional caveat must be given. An encoding skill or tool is inherently difficult to identify from the decoding side of its invented particular. The reason being that a particular invention may be encoded from several tools and so to determine with certainty its originating source is often tenuous. The process would be akin to looking at finished work of pottery and deciding whether a figure on its surfae had been stamped or engraved. However, turning to Hermogenes, the additional skills imparted by the rubric and text of the treatise *On Style* provides students with greater precision and flexibility in their choices to create the styles called for in the progymnasmata. Finally, this paper is, of course, not a study of Style in relation

the original Greek texts but of teaching style to English writers in a contemporary classroom. I am confident that the components of particular style types can be adequately taught using the excellent translations available to those of us who are teaching in the venacular.[1]

Introducing the Characterization stage, Aphthonius writes

Characterisation is developed in a style that is clear, concise, colourful, unconstrained, not intricate or figurative. Instead of heads, you will divide into the three times - present, past and future. [2]

Dealing with the easiest first, the manner in which Aphthonius instructs students to arrange the material, what Hermogenes refers to as "Method," aligns well with the second sub-style of Clarity called Distinction. Distinction as a sub style shares the same parameters as Purity in relation to Thought and is concerned primarily with method which must provide clear order to a composition which will allow a reader or hearer to easily follow the train of thought. The method Aphthonius uses of present, past, and future provide such clarity to the reader as the narrative unfolds from the immediate circumstances of the present, then moving to the past to understand how these circumstances came about and to provide a contrast to the present, and finally concluding with a future consideration of their possible effects.

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[1] Wooten, Cecil W., Hermogenes' 'On Types of Style" UNC, 1987; and   Malcolm Heath, and was last updated on 9 December 1997. http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/resources/rhetoric/prog-aph.htm; Kennedy, George, Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric, SBL 2003

[2]   Malcolm Heath, and was last updated on 9 December 1997.
http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/resources/rhetoric/prog-aph.htm

The more difficult task of aligning Hermogenes sub style of Purity with Aphthonius' "clear, concise, colorful, unconstrained, not intricate or figurative" text will require first turning one's attention to his model "What Niobe Would Say on the Death of Her Children." As mentioned above we will analyze the exercise using the rhetorical skills taught in the preceding stages. Again, these will include the Heads of Purpose—a set of six topics taught in the 5th and 6th stages, Refutation and Confirmation—and the Heads of Development—a set of eight skills used to develop, demonstrate, or support arguments in the 3rd and 4th stages, Chreia and Maxim. The 8 Heads of Development consist of a brief encomium or credit, a paraphrase by the student, four types of narrative—general affirmative, general converse, particular affirmative, and general comparison—a paraphrase by an authority (called Testimony), and a brief epilogue. Keeping in mind we are analyzing with encoding or synthesizing tools which tend to be less precise as analytical tools, the model can be divided in several valid ways. We have found that any of these divisions will work well for a student's exercise and mastering the style skill. However, we have settled on the following. The Present paragraph might be divided:

1. as an initial thesis sentence from the Head of Purpose Possibility; then three heads of development: either paraphrases or causes, then two converses for a total of six discrete rhetorical units. or

2. an initial thesis sentence from the Head of Purpose Possibility; then two heads of development: either paraphrases or causes, then an argument of inexpedience and a converse for a total of five discrete rhetorical units..

The remaining sections seem to me to contain less ambiguity. The Past paragraph:

Head of Purpose (Consequent or Possibility); Paraphrase; Example; Example; Paraphrase; and Paraphrase for a total of six discrete rhetorical units.

The Future paragraph:

Head of Purpose (Expedience or Possibility); Paraphrase; Cause or possibly a second Paraphrase; Paraphrase; Converse; Paraphrase; Epilogue for a total of seven discrete rhetorical units.

Additionally, students were given various analytic parameters around syntax and word count. I will digress here for a moment to say that these analytic parameters have always seemed to me artificial and un-classical but I found them necessary. I was happy with the rhetorical tools of paraphrase and concise narratives which provided both clarity and color but unhappy with the use of word count and syntax parameters to ensure conciseness, an apparent lack of constraint, and an absence of intricate, figurative language. As I will suggest a little further on, Hermogenes' pedagogy is far more satisfying to me and I believe ultimately equips the students more effectively and efficiently with the compositional skills they need for creativity and transference.

Hermogenes' rubric does nothing to contradict the above but rather deepens the instruction by adding to the division of a style type. For Hermogenes, the most significant aspect to any style type is the Thought which aligns with Invention or Discovery. When instructing for Purity (the first sub style of Clarity) Hermogenes calls for "common, everyday

thoughts that would occur to anyone."[3] Aphthonius' model aligns well with this component as did the 10th grade exercises though as I suggested above they achieved this alignment indirectly through the artificial parameters. The eleven Sophomore exercises on the whole used thought which was "common and familiar, not needing explanation."   The senior exercises likewise used common, familiar thought not needing explanation with a couple of notable exceptions.

In regards to the second component of Approach Hermogenes writes, "…when someone narrates a simple fact and begins with the fact itself and does not add anything that is extraneous to the topic."[4] Some time ago we adopted Erasmus' *De Copia* into our instruction to teach figures of speech and figures of thought but only after using Hermogenes did the coherence of Erasmus figures of thought and this second component of the style rubric become clear to me. We now use Erasmus' eleven fold division of Method (or Arrangement) to provide a framework for mastery of style. For Purity seven of the Methods are useful. Method 1 which divides ideas into their parts; Methods 3 and 4—simple direct narrates set in the past and the present; Method 5--ways to arrange the description of persons, places, things, and times; Method 7—an accumulation of epithets; Method 8—using circumstances; and Method 9— which includes several subdivisions such as incrementum, comparatio, ratiocinatio, and correctio.   The sophomores primarily used Method 1 (dividing a thought into its parts) to arrange the present paragraph; Method 2 (direct cause and effect narrative) for the past paragraph, although several students used a less direct antecedent/consequence relation

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[3] Hermogenes' On Types of Style, trans. Cecil W. Wooten, University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1987, p. 8.
[4] Ibid. p.15

(Erasmus identifies this as a closely related but distinct Method 3). The future paragraph was developed with Method 4--primarily cause and effect.

The seniors on the other hand showed greater variation in the method (arrangement) with only 1 of the 11 following Aphthonius' pattern. All of the exercises stayed within the acceptable methods using 1,2,3,4 and 8. Additionally, two of the 12th graders stayed in a single time, and several used method 8 for the entire exercise.

For Diction, Hermogenes calls for common words. This component presents us with a dilemma in that "common" words can be construed as a relative term. I did not want my students writing these exercises at a 6th grade level (I after all have to read them) which is considered a common or accessible level in today's culture. I have no doubt my students could write to such an extreme degree of commonality but I have asked them to write to their level of literacy and I will only mark them off if I have to look a word up in the dictionary to discover its meaning.

For Figures Hermogenes calls for relatively simple, straightforward figures and uses such in his examples. Note that although Aphthonius directs that the style not be intricate or figurative he does not mean a complete absence of figures.[5] His model includes a number of figures including synonymia—in particular low and harsh words; enallage-- particularly direct constructions with simple verb forms; Antonomasia and periphrasis—having to do with change of names; simple or assessable metaphors; metalepsis—a figure of inference by steps; as well as direct question, antithesis, and simile. The greatest difference between the two sets of student exercises ay lay in the use of figures. The 10th graders figures included direct question,

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[5] Compare with Aphthonius' model for Description, a stage that calls for elaborate, figurative language.

antithesis, and simile. The 12th graders, however, used figures such as direct question, antithesis, simile, but also quite a few more. The seniors created a wide variety of figures including antonomasia, periphrasis, metaphors and metalepsis, averaging over ten figures in their compositions while the sophomores tended to have considerably less figures average five in a exercise. This difference is significant in the "color" and vibrancy brought by effective figures.

Clauses: Hermogenes calls for short clauses that should express complete thoughts in themselves. I was not able to obtain the type of research I would have liked but have identified two sources that suggest my students have crafted shorter clauses than one would typically find in English writing. One source identifies an average number of words in an English clause varying from 6.83 to 7.39[6]; while another studying adverbial clauses puts the numbers at 9.76 to 11.39.[7] (These figures give a rough average of 8.8 words per clause). Clauses for the sophomores averaged from 6.3 words or 71% of the rough average and for the Seniors 6.1 or 69% of average. Though the number of words in a clause is similar the range was greater in the senior exercises. They used a wider variety of clause sizes with more two and three word clauses as well as more twelve and thirteen word clauses. In my opinion this variety made their characterization more interesting but I would hasten to add not in a glaring manner. This aspect of style was enlightening to me in that I assumed compound and complex sentences would create less clarity while the issue is in fact number of words in a clause not the complexity of the syntax.

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[6] https://naccl.osu.edu/sites/naccl.osu.edu/files/NACCL-23_1_13.pdf; 5.16.2014
[7] http://theory.esm.rochester.edu/temperley/papers/temperley-cog07.pdf; 5.16.2014

Word order in the two sets of exercises aligned with Hermogenes requirement that it be simple and direct, using subject/verb constructions.

Hermogenes' second sub style of Clarity is Distinctness and without going through his entire discussion Aphthonius' model includes from this division aspects such as several instances of antithesis and a speaker asking himself a direct question, which likewise were followed by both sets of student exercises.

I would conclude by saying that the style of clarity is imparted to students in the 10th grade as they master the stage of Characterization. Mastery is achieved through the use of previous skills in Aphtonius' progymnasmata being used in the framework of a new exercise which is then practiced in multiple contexts. I do believe that the ancient teacher of Aphthonius would have been well versed in concepts of style such as taught by Hermogenes' *On Style* if not that treatise itself. With such knowledge the cryptic instructions given by Aphthonius are not cryptic at all but rather point to a large body of common knowledge the instructor would have accessed to equip the students with explicit skills. My current pedagogy for the progymnasmata is effective but I believe is ultimately lacking and needs to be supplemented by Hermogenes' rubric of discrete skills particularly around clauses and figures. This additional specificity would not be difficult to include and would better prepare these younger students for the highly sophisticated system they will discover in the Canon of Style in their 12th grade year at Whitefield Academy.