

REDITUS AD REM

Observations on Cicero's Use of *Digressio*

Cicero's employment of *digressio* is sufficiently widespread in his speeches for it to rank as a major device in his oratorical repertoire¹). Since, *ex hypothesi*, it marks a departure from the main theme, the manner of its insertion is of interest to the student of Cicero's style, for it is *prima facie* likely that the linkage of the *digressio* to the main argument will reveal either skilful dexterity or roughness of style. An otherwise consummate orator-cum-writer might well exhibit a polished facility in the general flow of his argument, but it is at the obvious breaks in the argument that the fluency may fail and any "heaviness" be apparent. Cicero himself speaks²) not merely of the obvious desirability of *digressio* as an element of rhetoric, but also of the necessity for a smooth return to the main theme at its close: *et ... digressio in qua cum fuerit delectatio, tum reditus ad rem aptus et concinnus esse debebit*. Conversely, one might add that the introduction to the *digressio* should be accomplished with equal fluency. For convenience, I shall in future use the terms 'pre-linkage' and 'post-linkage' to denote respectively the introductory and concluding links of the *digressio* to the main theme. Neither in the passage in question, nor in other passages where he discusses *digressio*³) does Cicero deal explicitly with the pre-linkage to *digressio*. This was probably intentional since the pre-linkage will occasion no difficulty to a competent writer; it necessarily grows out of, or is suggested by, the preceding argument. But the return to the main theme is a very different matter, and Cicero rightly saw that this is where care and skill are required. The present paper accordingly concentrates

1) H. V. Canter (Amer. Jour. Philol. 52, 1931) lists occurrences of *digressio*. The list is a helpful one but it omits many examples of shorter *digressiones*, including such *loci communes* as e. g. Mil. 61 ad. fin.: *Magna vis est conscientiae... etc.*; Sest. 91, et al. The Greek παρέκβασις would presumably include many such shorter *declinationes*, nor indeed is it at all clear that *digressio* and *declinatio* are "water-tight" terms so much as fairly vague appellations which admit a certain degree of overlap.

2) De Orat. III, 203.

3) Cf. inter alia: Inv. I, 27; I, 51; I, 97; Brut. 85; 292; 300; 322; De Orat. II, 77; II, 312; III, 53; III, 203; III, 205; Orat. 137; 138; 228.

mainly⁴) on an examination of the various forms of post-linkage, and attempts to catalogue more precisely the qualities which Cicero's own phrase *aptus et concinnus* (loc. cit.) would suggest are necessary in the *reditus ad rem*.

Briefly, two main principles appear to emerge:

- (A) As part of his general effort to curb prolixity⁵), the post-linkage in examples of *digressio* which occur in speeches later than the *pro Roscio Amerino* tend to be more concise than those in the earlier speeches.
- (B) Certain fairly clear-cut distinctions emerge after the *pro Roscio Amerino* such that the character and purpose of the *digressio* help to determine the kind of post-linkage which is used.

In the *pro Roscio Amerino* there are five obvious examples of *digressio*; in most of them the flow of the speech receives a lengthy and noticeable break at the post-linkage. The contrast Cicero draws in the first *digressio* in this speech⁶) between Fimbria and Roscius ends with the words: *Illud, quia in Scaevola factum est, magis indignum videtur, hoc, quia fit a Chrysogono, num est feren-dum?* But there follows a lengthy conclusion to the *digressio* before the main theme recommences: *Nam per deos immortales! quid est in hac causa quod defensionis indigeat? qui locus ingenium patroni requirit aut oratoris eloquentiam magno opere desiderat? Totam causam, iudices, explicemus atque ante oculos expositam consideremus; ita facillime, quae res totum iudicium contineat, et quibus de rebus nos dicere oporteat, et quid vos sequi conveniat, intellegitis?*⁷).

In the example which follows⁸), on the role of accusers in the state, the protracted analogy with the watchful geese of the Capitol ends with the reference to parricide and a similarly protracted post-linkage: *Sin autem sic agetis ut arguatis aliquem patrem occidisse neque dicere possitis aut qua re aut quo modo, ac tantum modo sine suspicione latrabitis, crura quidem vobis nemo suffrin-get, sed, si ego hos bene novi, litteram illam cui vos usque eo inimici*

4) Pre-linkage is examined where its relevance requires it, cf. below pp. 310ff.

5) For a full discussion of Cicero's immaturity of style in the *pro Roscio Amerino* see my article, Molon's Influence on Cicero, Class. Quart. 18, 1968, 303-314.

6) Sections 33-4.

7) Section 35.

8) Sections 55-7.

estis ut etiam Kal. omnis oderitis ita vehementer ad caput adfigent ut postea neminem alium nisi fortunas vestras accusare possitis.

Later⁹), the *digressio* concerning the frivolity of the accuser Erucius ends with the weighty and repetitive parallelism: *Quae quoniam te fefellerunt, Eruci, quoniamque vides versa esse omnia, causam pro Sex. Roscio, si non commode, at libere dici, quem dedi putabas, defendi intellegis, quos tradituros sperabas, vides iudicare, restitue nobis aliquando veterem tuam illam calliditatem atque prudentiam, confitere huic ea spe venisse, quod putares hic latrocinium, non iudicium futurum.*

Again, a lengthy recapitulation ends the *digressio*¹⁰) on the nature of parricides: *Tanti malefici crimen, cui maleficio tam insigne supplicium est constitutum, probare te, Eruci, censes posse talibus viris, si ne causam quidem malefici protuleris? Si hunc apud bonorum emptores ipsos accusares eique iudicio Chrysogonus praeesseset, tamen diligentius paratusque venisses. Utrum quid agatur non vides, an apud quos agatur? Agitur de parricidio quod sine multis causis suscipi non potest; apud homines autem prudenter agit qui intellegunt neminem ne minimum quidem maleficium sine causa admittere.*

Finally, the *digressio*¹¹) on the political creed and the supremacy of the Optimates closes with the passage: *Quod si quis est qui et se et causam laedi putet, cum Chrysogonus vituperetur, is causam ignorat, se ipsum probe novit; causa enim splendidior fiet, si nequissimo cuique resistetur, ille improbissimus Chrysogoni fautor qui sibi cum illo rationem communicatam putat laeditur, cum ab hoc splendorе causae separatur.*

Such protracted post-linkages tend not to appear in later speeches. Yet although one becomes increasingly aware, in successive speeches, of a general tendency towards conciseness in the *reditus*, a distinction may be made between those cases where Cicero appears to regard such brevity as especially desirable, and those where he does not.

In the former case, where the function of *digressio* is the expansion of a detail in the main theme, and where the *digressio* is, as it were, organically related to the main theme, the post-linkage which is used tends to be both unobtrusive and closely knit¹²). When, occasionally, the presence of *digressio* is recognized, it is

9) Sections 59–61.

10) Sections 61 (med.)–73.

11) Sections 136–142.

12) Post-linkages of this type are henceforth referred to as A-type.

done so with the utmost brevity; in this way the attention is not allowed to stray from what amounts to an unbroken theme, and the unity of the whole is more closely preserved, e. g. *Verum ut Lilybaeum, unde digressa est oratio, revertatur*¹³). In this case the *digressio* itself needs no explanation, for its theme – Verres as a judge of silver plate – is closely integrated with the rest of Cicero's account, and the skilfully contrived word order with its initial *Lilybaeum* reminds the reader of the events recorded prior to the *digressio*, with a hint of more to come.

Again, in his digressive plea¹⁴) for the appointment of Gabinius as Pompey's lieutenant, Cicero represents the opposition to Gabinius as but a further example of the spiteful attitude of his opponents: *Quo mihi etiam indignius videtur obtrectatum esse adhuc, Gabinio dicam anne Pompeio an utrius, id quod est verius, ne legaretur A. Gabinius Cn. Pompeio expetenti ac postulanti.*

In Cicero's submission, the fortunes of the commander and his proposed lieutenant were closely linked both in the present issue and in the war against the pirates previously discussed¹⁵). The content of the present *digressio*, therefore, is a part of the wider theme of the successful partnership of Pompey and Gabinius, and it accordingly concludes with a post-linkage which not merely summarizes the *digressio* itself but also links it with the general argument already adduced: *Mea quidem sententia, Quirites, unus A. Gabinius belli maritimi rerumque gestarum Cn. Pompeio socius ascribitur, propterea quod alter uni illud bellum suscipiendum vestris suffragiis detulit, alter delatum suceptumque confecit*¹⁶). Indeed, this sentence serves less as a post-linkage to *digressio* than as a generalization of the argument up to this point in the speech. Significantly, no apology is required, nor reference to the presence of *digressio*, and the main theme can recommence with a mere *reliquum est ut...*¹⁷).

In another example¹⁸) Cicero illustrates an incident in the series of Clodius' activities with an account of the desecration of Cybele's seat at Pessinus. At its conclusion no apology is required

13) Verr. II, 4, 35.

14) Imp. Pomp. 57–8.

15) ibid. 32–5.

16) Obviously a most carefully devised sentence: cf. E. Laughton, The Participle in Cicero, Oxf. Class. and Philos. Monogr. O.U.P. 1964, p. 19.

17) Imp. Pomp. 59.

18) Harusp. Resp. 28–9.

for its relevance to the general argument is obvious, and the very brief . . . *ut ad haec haruspicum responsa redeam* is sufficient.

Similarly, the *digressio*¹⁹⁾ concerning Sulpicius' ill-conducted contest for the consulship, since it serves to develop a detail of the general account²⁰⁾, is closely related to the passages which precede and follow. No concluding link is needed or given; indeed, the *reditus* may be said to consist in the opening words of the following section: *Nunc mihi tertius ille locus est relictus orationis . . . etc.*

Later in the same speech²¹⁾ the *digressio* on Murena's misfortunes also terminates without any obvious break other than the words which open the following section: *Respondebo igitur Postumo primum . . . etc.*

To take one final example, in a *digressio*²²⁾ which concerns Capua as a source of evil to the Roman state, although the post-linkage is explicit, it provides a very neat and concise example of close integration with the main argument, here achieved within a terminal subordinate *cum*-clause: . . . *de periculo salutis ac libertatis loquor. Quid enim existimatis integrum vobis in re publica fore aut in vestra libertate ac dignitate retinenda, cum Rullus atque ei, quos multo magis quam Rullum timetis, cum omni egentium atque improborum manu, cum omnibus copiis, cum omni argento et auro Capuam et urbes circa Capuam occuparint?*

When, on the other hand, the *digressio* is used for recapitulation, assessment, relief, or summary, the new direction which the argument takes with its consequent change of tempo, must necessarily be sharply distinguished from the main theme. This, in turn, may be achieved by two main methods.

In the first place more obvious links may be used than was the case in the examples we have examined above. This is true as much of the pre-linkage as of the post-linkage²³⁾. It has been seen²⁴⁾ that the former deserved little attention in the type of *digressio* previously examined, but where it is necessary to inform the reader that the function of the passage he is considering is that

19) Mur. 43–54.

20) Cf. *inter alia* 36, ad fin.

21) *ibid.* 55–6.

22) *leg. agr.* I, 18–22.

23) Both pre-linkage and post-linkages in this category are for convenience henceforward referred to as B-type, to distinguish them from post-linkage of A-type, delineated above (note 12).

24) Cf. pp. 305f.

of recapitulation, assessment, commentary, entertainment, or relief²⁵), it is often helpful if the pre-linkage as well as the post-linkage is of a fairly obvious nature. Some examples may clarify:

(I) *Harusp. Resp.* 18–19, concerning the authority and influence of religion. This passage serves as a preface to Cicero's more detailed arguments on the main theme of the speech. The reader is made immediately aware of this by the obvious change of direction suggested by the pre-linkage, viz.: *Sed quoniam mea causa expedita est, videamus nunc quid haruspices dicant. Ego enim fateor me et magnitudine ostenti et gravitate responsi et una atque constanti haruspicum voce vehementer esse commotum...* The reader is thus invited to accept the traditional position which the *digressio* proceeds to develop, and he is further encouraged by the exhortation which follows in the post-linkage (*adhibete animos, et mentis vestras, non solum auris, ad haruspicum vocem admoveite...*) to feel a personal involvement in the argument the writer presents. As in other places Cicero cements the potential crack in the flow of the speech by summoning the co-operation of the reader who, furnished with the illustrations or commentary the *digressio* provides, is the more ready to reach the required opinion which the writer proceeds to define²⁶). The *digressio* serves as an encouragement; thus aided, the reader or listener may assume a less obviously passive and more sympathetic attitude towards the arguments which are to follow.

(II) *Arch. 12–31*, in praise of poetry and famous men. This lengthy *digressio* begins with the pre-linkage: *Quaeres a nobis, Gratti, cur tanto opere hoc homine delectemur. Quia suppeditat nobis ubi et animus ex hoc forensi strepitu reficiatur et aures concilio defessae conquiescant.* Archias' influence on Cicero's education and the latter's dedication to literature had already been referred to in the preceding sections²⁷), and the reader is well prepared for the (hypothetical) question which Cicero attributes to Grattius. The skilful link leads naturally to the *digressio* which pro-

25) In his reference to *delectatio* (loc. cit.) Cicero appears to suggest that a fairly uniform character belongs to all examples of *digressio*. In fact, the number of examples the purpose of which may be regarded as mere entertainment is quite small. It seems preferable to understand *delectatio* in the wider and vaguer sense of 'relief from the main theme', whatever the nature or purpose of such relief may be, and although, as we have seen, the extent of its divorce from the main theme will vary according to that purpose.

26) Cf. *De Orat. II*, 312 where Cicero speaks of the connexion between *digressio* and emotive language.

27) Sections 1–4.

ceeds to recapitulate and expand the earlier account of Archias' influence on Cicero. Later²⁸⁾ the post-linkage makes explicit reference to the digressive character of the preceding passage and to its obvious break with the more conventional kind of argument which had occurred before the *digressio*²⁹⁾, viz.: *Quae de causa pro mea consuetudine breviter simpliciterque dixi, indices, ea confido probata esse omnibus; quae a forensi aliena iudicialique consuetudine et de hominis ingenio et communiter de ipsius studio locutus sum, ea, iudices, a vobis spero esse in bonam partem accepta, ab eo, qui iudicium exercet, certe scio.*

(III) dom. 3–31, in defence of Cicero's political conduct. Again, Cicero begins this review of his activities with a considerable pre-linkage, viz.: *Sed quoniam ille demens, si ea quae per hos dies ego in senatu de re publica sensi vituperasset, aliquem se aditum ad auris vestras esse habiturum putavit, omittam ordinem dicendi meum: respondebo hominis furiosi non orationi, qua ille uti non potest, sed convicio, cuius exercitationem cum intolerabili petulantia tum etiam diuturna impunitate munivit;* and ends with the apologetic post-linkage: *Intellego, pontifices, me plura extra causam dixisse quam aut opinio tulerit aut voluntas mea; sed cum me purgatum vobis esse cuperem, tum etiam vestra in me attente audiendo benignitas proverxit orationem meam. Sed hoc compensabo brevitatem eius orationis quae pertinet ad ipsam causam cognitionemque vestram...*

However, instead of using such obvious linkages, *digressiones* of this second variety sometimes begin with a sharp change of style which will replace the more conventional links; its very abruptness is then sufficient warning of the *digressio* which is to follow, e.g.:

(I) Verr. II, 4, 56–7, which examines certain aspects of Verres' behaviour and compares them with the character of Lucius Piso. This comparison which serves as a rough summary of Verres' avarice, is prefixed by an exclamatory link: *O tempora! O mores!* The transition to what follows: *Nihil nimium vetus proferam* and the account of Lucius Piso, is then easily achieved. Such a link, though brief, produces the necessary pause in the main argument, and is enough to suggest the comparison of the present age with an earlier one.

(II) Cluent. 15, concerning the denunciation of Sassia, also

28) Section 31.

29) Sections 1–11.

opens with an exclamatory pre-linkage: *O mulieris scelus incredibile et praeter hanc unam in omni vita inauditum! O libidinem effrenatam et indomitam! O audaciam singularem!*

(III) *ibid.* 109–112, summarizing the character of the tribune Qinctius Oppianicus, with the pre-linkage: *Iam insolentiam noratis hominis: noratis animos eius ac spiritus tribunicios. Quod erat odium, di immortales! quae superbia! quanta ignoratio sui! quam gravis atque intolerabilis adrogantia!*

Occasionally, the change of style takes the form of an interjected question, viz.:

(IV) *Pis.* 68–72, concerning Philodemus the Epicurean. *Dicit aliquis: unde tibi haec nota sunt?*

(V) *Sest.* 91, concerning society's development from savagery to civilization. *Quis enim nostrum, iudices, ignorat ita rerum naturam tulisse...?*

The *digressiones* of this type, which begin with a sharp contrast of style, frequently terminate with a post-linkage (henceforth referred to as type B 1) which matches as far as possible the often exclamatory or superlative elements, or sometimes the interrogative form of the preceding pre-linkage. Occasionally³⁰), the contrast is more subtle, and consists of a change from a plain to a grander style at the commencement of the pre-linkage, and, conversely, a change back again from a grander style in the post-linkage to a comparatively plain style in subsequent passages. In delivery the contrast would be unmistakable. Sometimes, however, the post-linkage will instead consist of a reference, explicit or implicit, to the presence of the *digressio* (and is henceforth referred to as type B 2), which we have already³¹) seen to be a common method of inserting a *digressio* of this second class into the main argument.

The post-linkages corresponding to the pre-linkages noticed above (I–V) are as follows:

(I) *Verr.* II, 4, 57 (post-linkage, type B 2): *Nullo modo possum omnia istius facta aut memoria consequi aut oratione complecti; genera ipsa cupio breviter attingere, ut hic modo me communuit Pisonis anulus, quod totum effluxerat.* The post-linkage both summarizes briefly the contents of the *digressio*, and leads the reader on from generalities to the particular theme which follows.

30) Cp. *Sest.* 60–63, and *infra* pp. 313f. (IX).

31) *Vide supra* note 22.

(II) Cluent. 15 (post-linkage, type B 1): *Perfregit ac prostravit omnia cupiditate ac furore: vicit pudorem libido, timorem audacia, rationem amentia.* The use of alliteration, combined with a climax of parison, neatly concludes this *digressio* with an effect similar to that produced by the series of alliterative exclamatory phrases which had constituted the pre-linkage.

(III) ibid. 112 (post-linkage, type B 2): ... *sed, ut illuc revertar quo...* (an example of explicit termination of a B 2 type *digressio*).

(IV) Pis. 72 (post-linkage, type B 1): ... *sed idem casus illum ignarum quid profiteretur, cum se philosophum esse diceret, istius impurissimae atque intemperantissimae pecudis caeno et sordibus inquinavit.* Here, the allusion in superlative adjectives to Piso, late in the concluding sentence of the *digressio*, provides an easy transition to the opening *qui* of the following passage.

(V) Sest. 91 (post-linkage, type B 2): *Atque inter hanc vitam perpolitam humanitate et illam immanem nihil tam interest quam ius atque vis.* The two states, of savagery and civilization, discussed in the *digressio* are recapitulated in the post-linkage.

Some further B-type linkages are appended:

(VI) Balb. 12–13 an eulogy of Cn. Pompeius: ... *nos etiam in ipsa religione et legum et foederum conservanda qualis fuerit Cn. Pompeius dubitabimus?* (Pre-linkage, B 1). *Hunc quisquam, incredibili quadam atque inaudita gravitate virtute constantia praeditum, foedera scientem neglexisse violasse rupisse dicere audebit?* (Post-linkage, B 1).

(VII) Rab. perd. 28–30, an eulogy of C. Marius: *Adeone hospes es huiuscē urbis, adeone ignarus disciplinae consuetudinisque nostrae, ut haec nescias, ut peregrinari in aliena civitate, non in tua magistratum gerere videare?* “*Quid iam ista C. Mario*”, inquit, “*nocere possunt, quoniam sensu et vita caret?*” (Pre-linkage, B 1). *Quae re, si eos qui iam de vita decesserunt ornabimus, iustiorem nobis mortis condicionem relinquemus.* Sed si illos, *Labiene, quos iam videre non possumus neglegis, ne his quidem quos vides consuli putas oportere?* (Post-linkage, B 1).

(VIII) Mur. 61–66, on Stoic precepts and paradoxes: *Et quoniam non est nobis haec oratio habenda aut in imperita multitudine aut in aliquo conventu agrestium, audacius paulo de studiis humanitatis quae et mihi et vobis nota et iucunda sunt disputabo.* (Pre-linkage, B 1). *Quare, ut ad id quod institui revertar...* (Post-linkage, B 2).

(IX) Sest. 60–63, on Cato’s part in the dethronement of

Ptolemaeus: *At etiam eo negotio M. Catonis splendorem maculare voluerunt ignari, quid gravitas, quid integritas, quid magnitudo animi, quid denique virtus valeret, quae in tempestate saeva quieta est et lucet in tenebris et pulsa loco manet tamen atque haeret in patria splendetque per sese semper neque alienis umquam sordibus obsolescit.* (Pre-linkage, B 1). *Ille vero eidem tempori cui nos, eiusdem furori, eisdem consulibus, eisdem minis, insidiis, periculis cessit. Luctum nos hausimus maiorem, dolorem ille animi non minorem.* (Post-linkage, B 1). Contrast, however, the plainer style of what follows: *His de tot tantisque iniuriis in socios, in reges, in civitates liberas consulum querella esse debuit; in eius magistratus tutela reges atque exteriae nationes semper fuerunt. Ecquae vox umquam est audita consulum? Quamquam quis audiret, si maxime queri vellent? etc.*³²⁾.

A tentative summary appears to be possible.

1. The qualities which Cicero thought desirable in passages which link *digressio* to the main argument seem to vary with the function which a particular *digressio* fulfills. *Aptus et concinnus* may accordingly be regarded as a ‘blanket term’ with a wide reference to the styles which different contexts would ideally require.

2. More specifically, examples of *digressio* in Cicero’s speeches appear to fall into two broad categories which we have designated A-type and B-type. (a) The former reveal a close connexion with the main argument and tend to be used to expand certain details which are necessary to the fuller understanding of the main theme as a whole. Consequently the linkages of the *digressio* tend to be closely integrated and almost completely unobtrusive. (b) The latter, on the other hand, which we have subdivided into categories B 1 and B 2, are concerned rather with recapitulation, summary, or relief. The change of direction which the passage assumes is emphasized by the linguistic devices employed in the linkages. B 1 linkages (pre- and post-) consist in a stylistic change, sometimes to exclamatory or interrogative form, sometimes to an unmistakably grand style. B 2 linkages, on the other hand, comprise an explicit or implicit admission of the presence of *digressio*.

3. In general, the linkages used incline toward a greater conciseness after the earliest examples, but this is probably best regarded as but one aspect of Cicero’s effort to curb *licentia*.

32) Compare, too, the contrast in style between the preceding section (59) and the splendid parallelisms of the pre-linkage.

4. Finally, the present writer is aware that it may be possible to represent some examples of linkage to *digressio* as not falling neatly into any one of the above categories. Nevertheless, it is hoped that this categorization will serve to explain the most obvious distinctions which may be made.

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LUCRETIUS' STRATEGY IN DE RERUM NATURA I

There is, it may confidently be said, some consensus about the degree to which central doctrines of Epicurean physics are embodied in Book I of *de rerum natura*¹). The two traditional axioms from which Lucretius takes his start (*principium*): *nihil e nihilo gigni* and *nihil ad nihilum redire* (vv. 149–214; 215–264) occupy an analogous place in Epicurus' *Letter to Herodotus* (38 f.) where they likewise precede the exposé of specific Epicurean theories. For Epicurus (ad Hdt. 39) τὸ πᾶν ἔστι {σώματα καὶ κενόν} ²). Lucretius, as we shall see, agrees and offers arguments for the reality of the void and the necessity of positing it (vv. 329–69) whose primary basis is Epicurus' own argument in ad Hdt. 40. Bodies, we learn at vv. 483 ff., are divided into compounds and the constituents of the compounds which are of course the atoms. This fundamental piece of physical theory reproduces the distinction between συγκοίσεις and “those (bodies) of which these are made” (ad Hdt. 40 fin.). There are besides bodies and the void no other realities: *coniuncta* (properties) and *eventa* (accidents or events) whose claim to such status must for some reason be examined are ruthlessly discredited by Lucretius (vv. 418–82), who

1) To Carlo Giussani (T. Lucreti Cari de rerum natura libri sex, vol. 1, Torino 1896, pp. 1 ff.) belongs the merit of having shown the extent of correspondences between Lucretius' Book I and Epicurus' ad Hdt. 38–42. More recent studies will be cited in later notes.

2) With Gassendi, Von der Mühll, Arrighetti, Rist and others I prefer this supplement to Usener's {σώματα καὶ τόπος}.