

The Characterization and Description Stages of Aphthonius' Progymnasmata in Light of Hermogenes' On Style: Clarity and Abundance

Abstract: This paper will suggest correlations between the Characterization and Description models provided by Aphthonius in his Progymnasmata and with several style types in Hermogenes' treatise On Style. The first five components of Hermogenes Style rubric--Thought, Method, Diction, Figures, and Clauses--will be used to analyze the models provided in Aphthonius for areas of convergence and/or divergence.

Key Words: Progymnasmata, Description, Ecphrasis, Style, Abundance, Composition, Instruction.

This paper suggests correlations between the two styles taught by Aphthonius in the Characterization (Ethopoeia) and Description (Ecphrasis) stages of his progymnasmata,ⁱ and the styles of Clarity and Abundance (a division of Grandeur) taught by Hermogenes in his treatise *On Style*.ⁱⁱ A teacher familiar with the style of Clarityⁱⁱⁱ and Abundance would more effectively assist students in mastery of these two progymnasmata stages. Such mastery would better prepare students for the more extensive Canon of Style as presented by Hermogenes in a formal rhetoric course.

I would like to first describe the writing curriculum we have developed from Aphthonius' Progymnasmata and then compare Aphthonius' model with Hermogenes to determine that Aphthonius used rhetorical constructions in his model similar to those taught by Hermogenes.. Finally, the paper will suggest that such explicit, though limited, skill instruction in this progymnasmata exercise imparts to the student a quality of compositional thought that can be

built upon through the much larger quantity of compositional skills required to master the Canon of Style in the Art of Rhetoric. I believe that a teacher familiar with Hermogenes could draw from that familiarity to fill out Aphthonius' cryptic instructions and so aid students' success regarding these important style types.

The project to adopt Aphthonius' progymnasmata to the contemporary classroom began in 2000. Our goals included producing a rigorous writing curriculum that was both effective and efficient. Additionally, we wanted our students well prepared for two years of classical rhetoric in the 11th and 12th grade years. Aphthonius' curriculum is a vertically integrated set of exercises that lay a necessary foundation for the Canons of Invention, Arrangement, and Style. The Canons of Memory and Delivery are also practiced but not explicitly taught. We teach the fourteen stages over a period of six years beginning in the fourth grade (when students are approximately 10 or 11 years old). The Fable and Narrative stages are taught in both the fourth and fifth grade years. As the 4th and 5th grade students rewrite these stories from multiple perspectives (expand, condense, change point of view, resequence, and convert prose to poetry,) they grow in their language skills, but they explicitly master a number of discrete skills. These include six components of plot structure that Aphthonius identifies in his instructions for Narrative. In addition we added the three components of plot,^{iv} eighteen figures of description,^v and 8 figures of speech.^{vi}

In the sixth grade we review Fable and Narrative in the first quarter and begin the Chreia and Maxim stages in the second quarter and finish at the end of the year. Students, through these stages learn the discrete skills of the eight Heads of Development—four narrative types, two paraphrase approaches, praise, and transition-- and continue the mental progress towards full scale invention. The Refutation and Confirmation stages are mastered in the seventh and eighth grades. Through these stages the students become adept at using the six heads of purpose (Consequence, Possibility, Legality,

Justice, Honor, and Expediency) to discover arguments on both sides of an issue. My students would certainly agree with Cicero that inventing arguments is “the most difficult task of the writer.” In these two Junior High years they also practice the Common Topic judicial exercise and begin learning the Encomium, Invective, and Comparison stages. After mastery of these three epideictic exercises they embark on the two “Style” stages of Characterization and Description. (This paper will focus on these two stages in what follows). The final deliberative stages of Thesis and Law are accomplished in the tenth grade. Consequently, our students enter the Characterization and Description stages with a set of rhetorical tools that includes eighteen figures of Description, the eight Heads of Development from Aphthonius’ Chreia and Maxim stages, the six Heads of Purpose from the Refutation and Confirmation stages, Heads for forensic invention from Common Topic and epideictic invention from Encomium, Invective, and Comparison, and, finally, from Erasmus’ *De Copia*, Figures of Speech and Figures of Thought.^{vii}

Hermogenes uses a rubric of eight categories^{viii} to teach the various Styles and their subtypes. For a number of reasons I am not incorporating the categories of Cadence and Rhythm in my analysis and so those categories are omitted in this discussion. The style of Clarity is composed of two subdivisions—Purity and Distinctness. Purity utilizes the categories of Thought, Approach, Diction, Figures, and Clauses; and Distinctness utilizes the categories Approach, Diction, Figures, and Clauses. Introducing the Characterization stage, Aphthonius writes, “Characterization 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.”^{ix} Dealing with the easiest first, the manner in which Aphthonius instructs students to arrange the material, what Hermogenes refers to as “Approach,” aligns well with

Distinctness. This sub style shares the same parameters with Purity in relation to Thought and is concerned primarily with Approach which must provide clear order to a composition which will allow a reader or hearer to easily follow the author's train of thought. The approach Aphthonius uses of present, past, and future provides such clarity to the reader as the narrative unfolds from the immediate circumstances of the present, then moves to the past to understand how these circumstances came about and to provide a contrast to the present, and finally concludes with a future consideration of their possible effects.

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 fifth and sixth stages, Refutation and Confirmation—and the Heads of Development—a set of eight skills used to develop, demonstrate, or support arguments in the third and fourth stages, Chreia and Maxim. The eight 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. Aphthonius' "Present" paragraph is the most ambiguous with the "Past" and "Future" more straightforward. 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.

What a change of fortune is mine. [Thesis—Head of Purpose] I am childless, who before was held to be blest in my children. [Cause] Abundance has turned into lack, and I am not the mother of a single child though before I was held mother of many. [Paraphrase of thesis or Cause] It would have been better never to have given birth than to have given birth for lamentation. [Converse or Head of Purpose-inexpedience] Those who lose their children are more wretched than those who never had them; what has been experienced brings pain when lost. [Paraphrase of converse]^x

The remaining sections seem to me to be less ambiguous.

The “Past” paragraph: Head of Purpose (Consequent or Possibility); Paraphrase; Example;

Example; Paraphrase; and Paraphrase for a total of six discrete rhetorical units.

Alas, I have suffered a fate like my father's. [Head of Purpose] I am Tantalus' daughter. [Paraphrase] He lived with the gods but was banished from the gods' society; offspring of Tantalus, I give proof of my birth by my misfortunes. [Example] For I was Leto's companion, and that is the reason for my misery; I have gained from her company the loss of my children, and association with a goddess has ended for me in disaster. [Example] Before it was put to the test I was a mother more to be envied than Leto; but now that this is known, I am in want of offspring - which before the proof I had in abundance. [Paraphrase] And now both my sons and my daughters lie dead, and the prouder I was of them the more hopeless my grief. [Paraphrase]^{xi}

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.

Where shall I turn? [Head of Purpose] To what shall I cling? [Paraphrase] What tomb will suffice in the face of the death of all my children? [Cause] My honors fail in the face of my misfortunes. [Paraphrase] But why do I lament these things, when I can ask the gods for a change of nature? [Converse] I see one release from wretchedness: to join the things that have no feeling. [Paraphrase] And yet I fear that even when I am seen in that form I shall still weep. [Epilogue]

Hermogenes’ rubric does nothing to contradict the above but rather deepens the instruction by adding further explicit divisions to style types. For Hermogenes, the most significant aspect to any style type is the Thought which aligns with the Canon of Invention. When instructing for Purity (the first sub-style of Clarity) Hermogenes calls for “common, everyday thoughts that would occur to anyone.”^{xii} Aphthonius’ model aligns well with this component using thought which was “common and familiar, not needing explanation.”^{xiii}

In regard 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.”^{xiv} This simple, condensed narration is one of the skills learned in the Fable and Narrative stages when student learn to condense stories,^{xv} and is used in the Characterization model by Aphthonius.

For Diction, Hermogenes calls for common words. Kennedy’s translation^{xvi} may point in this direction more explicitly than Heath’s.

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.^{xvii} His model includes a number of figures including synonymia—in particular harsh [*wretched, banished, misery, death*], and possibly low [*lack*], or poetic [*lamentation, tomb, offspring*] words; enallage-- particularly direct constructions with simple verb forms [*I am childless; For I was Leto's companion; My honors fail in the face of my misfortunes.*]; Periphrasis ,[*in my children; offspring of Tantalus*]; simple or accessible metaphors [*in the face of my misfortune; the things that have no feeling*]; metalepsis [*Abundance has turned into lack; I give proof of my birth by my misfortune*]; as well as direct question [*Where shall I turn? To what shall I cling? What tomb will suffice in the face of the death of all my children?*], antithesis [*Those who lose their children are more wretched than those who never had them*], and simile [*like my father's*].

For clauses, Hermogenes calls for short clauses that should express complete thoughts in themselves. Both the main and subordinate clauses in Aphthonius' model tend to be short. 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.

For word order Hermogenes requires that it be simple and direct, using subject/verb constructions. Aphthonius largely uses such straight forward constructions.

Hermogenes' second sub-style of Clarity is Distinctness and without going through his entire discussion, I will note that Aphthonius' model, similar to Hermogenes' instruction includes aspects such as antithesis and a speaker asking himself a direct question.

In concluding this section on Characterization, I believe Aphthonius' model correlates well with Hermogenes' explicit instructions for Clarity with its two subdivisions of Purity and Distinctness. Further, we have found that using explicit instructions from Hermogenes to supplement Aphthonius' cryptic guidelines allows our contemporary students to internalize and transfer these writing styles to compositions beyond the progymnasmata exercises. This suggests to me that teachers in the past who used Aphthonius would be reminded by his brief instructions what the end product of the exercise should look like and would then be able to draw on his own stylistic tools to give his students instructions which would allow mastery of explicit style components.

Turning to the second "style" exercise of Description I must mention that my curriculum was developed initially without knowledge of Hermogenes' treatise *On Style*. Our instruction for the Description stage at Whitefield^{xviii} was the least structured of all the progymnasmata stages. We divided the Description exercise as Aphthonius outlines, then added a required word count range for each section akin to the word count in Aphthonius' model, with each section containing an argument developed by description and concluded with an epilogue. To these descriptive sections we add an introduction and conclusion. Students were given wide latitude to use their rhetorical skills to complete the lengthy word count requirement and, hopefully, to achieve Aphthonius' cryptic goals. From Aphthonius alone teacher and student receive no

explicit instruction for creating this style type demonstrated in the model. As with Characterization only a description of the style is given along with the model.

Knowledge of Hermogenes significantly altered our understanding of the rhetorical devices in the Description stage. As mentioned above, Hermogenes uses a rubric of eight categories^{xix} to teach Style with Abundance utilizing the first four of these categories--Thought, Method, Diction, and Figures. These four components for Hermogenes include more than thirty discrete rhetorical constructions. Aphthonius' model does, in fact, use a number of these rhetorical constructions. Again, an instructor drawing from the rubric and text of Hermogenes would provide students with greater precision and flexibility in their choices to create the style called for in the Description exercise of Aphthonius' progymnasmata. Hermogenes provides a detailed but relatively simple framework that creates specific style types while allowing the students maximum creative choices in their compositions. As suggested above, supplementing Aphthonius' instruction with Hermogenes' pedagogy is far more satisfying to teacher and student, and I believe ultimately equips the students more effectively and efficiently with the compositional skills they need for transference and creativity.

In introducing the Description stage, Aphthonius writes that Description is "an expository discourse that brings the object exhibited vividly into view."^{xx} He then goes on to discuss appropriate subjects for the exercise and their proper arrangement. He concludes with, "In description one should adopt a free, relaxed style and ornament it with different figures, and in general hit off the objects being described."^{xxi} Aphthonius' third component, "hitting off"^{xxii} the objects being described"^{xxiii} corresponds to the first component in Hermogenes' rubric--Thought, which may be achieved, he writes, by "adding an idea that is extraneous." He then devotes a long paragraph instructing that

the extraneous may be added through narration of the initial thought by answering such questions as when, where, why, and how, as well as something's state and intention. He completes the paragraph by transitioning to the final source of "extraneous" Thoughts—proofs. First he lists eight common topics and then concludes by comparing his treatment to the use of enthymemes and examples not so much as "additional details but rather kinds of proof."^{xxiv} A brief digression is necessary here for this instruction deviates from John of Sardis' commentary that explicitly states that enthymemes, as well as periods, should not be used in Description.^{xxv} I am not quite sure what to make of this statement as it appears to me that Aphthonius' model consistently utilizes enthymemes. I take refuge in the mystery of the enthymeme and await further enlightenment. What Aphthonius writes in a brief clause "hit off the objects being described," Hermogenes expands into six types of narrative invention, eight argumentative inventions, and the use of enthymemes and examples.^{xxvi} He goes on to add three additional paragraphs with instruction in how to use these specific skills and gives examples. All of these explicit tools are ways that a student might fulfill the progymnasmata exercise.

Aphthonius uses many of these same tools to develop additional thought in his model. For example, using an enthymeme from a Common Topic of what might be either consequence or expedience he writes, "Citadels are established for the common security of cities - *for they are the highest points of cities.*" Or an example from comparison by difference: "The center of Athens held the Athenian acropolis; but the citadel which Alexander established for his own city is in fact what he named it, *and it is more accurate to call this an acropolis than that on which the Athenians pride themselves.*" Such Thought inventions or "proofs" can be found throughout Aphthonius' model. The model also develops additional Thought through narrative details with circumstances akin to Hermogenes instruction. The following example includes agent, action, time, place, manner, and cause: "Here it is possible *to approach on foot* [agent and action] and the road is *shared* [manner] also with those *who*

approach on a wagon [time]; there flights of steps have been cut [place] and there is no passage for wagons [cause].”

As mentioned earlier, students coming to the Description stage would be adept with narration and its division, the six Heads of Purpose for the invention of proofs, the use of examples, and, to some extent, enthymemes called for by Hermogenes. However, only a teacher who had mastered Hermogenes (or something like him) would know that these skills could be used to create the style Aphthonius was modeling and calling for.

Hermogenes’ second style component is Approach and for Abundance he calls for two types of inversion.^{xxvii} The first places the reasons or proofs for a statement before the statement itself, and the second calls for re-sequencing narrations. Imaginatively, such inversions allow an audience a freer range of thought around ideas before the assertion or narrative becomes clear. One might suggest that this absence of formal, logical structure promotes a free, relaxed style in contrast to a more straightforward coherence achieved by statement followed with reasons and proof or the natural, chronological development of a story. For example, reversing the order of details in order to create a parenthesis of the first, Aphthonius writes, “The colonnades are roofed, and the roof is made of gold, *and the capitals of the columns are made of bronze overlaid with gold.*” Or stating the reasons and facts that support a statement before making the statement, he writes, “A hill juts out of the ground, rising to a great height, and called an acropolis on both accounts, both because it is raised up on high and because it is placed in the high-point of the city.”

Further, under Approach, Hermogenes instructs students to narrate what would happen if something was not done. Aphthonius writes, “In the middle there rises a column of great height, making the place conspicuous (someone on his way does not know where he is going, unless he uses the pillar as a sign of the direction) and makes the acropolis stand out by land and sea...”

Hermogenes' third category is diction.^{xxviii} Typical of his writing he himself creates an abundant style here by resequencing his approach. He discusses the use of parallel structure and after giving examples he states that such grammatical structure and synonymy is more a matter of Approach than diction. In any event again we find such parallel constructions in Aphthonius' model. Two of innumerable examples are "both because it is raised up on high and because it is placed in the high-point of the city;" and, "for flight after flight leads higher and higher."

Finally, the fourth category is the figures, which comprise several pages of text and numerous possibilities.^{xxix} Generally Hermogenes states that figures which create abundance are figures that "imply a second thought or even a third one."^{xxx} He identifies ten or so from which I have chosen three to compare with Aphthonius.

1. Use of subordinate clauses—it is hard to find a sentence in the model that does not use subordination.
2. Figures that imply multiple thoughts through enumeration or ellipsis

"One is a road, the other a way of access"

"Some are repositories for the books, open to those who are diligent in philosophy and stirring up the whole city to mastery of wisdom. Others are established in honor of the ancient gods."

3. Figures that involve both negation and affirmation—three examples:

"On the columns rises a building with many columns of moderate size in front, not of one color..."

"The decoration of the court is not single. For different parts are differently decorated, and one has the exploits of Perseus."

"As one was not sufficient for the making, builders of the whole acropolis were appointed to the number of twelve."

I believe that Aphthonius is using the rhetorical constructions in his model that Hermogenes teaches in his curriculum. This belief then allows me to draw from Hermogenes' text to add detail to my instruction and give flesh and bones to Aphthonius cryptic text.

I would conclude this analysis of Description by saying that our original teaching of this stage based only on Aphthonius' brief introduction and his model did impart to students the ability to write with an abundant style. However, limited to the cryptic three-fold components articulated by Aphthonius our students had difficulty transferring their skills around abundance to compositions other than the Description exercise. However, with familiarity of Hermogenes' pedagogy we are able to add explicit or discrete skills to Aphthonius' general instructions. Our students are now achieving mastery in the form of transferrable skills. I believe mastery in this style type is being achieved through the use of these discrete skills in multiple exercises requiring deep mental cognition. This mastery creates a quality of rhetorical thought not present before the instruction. I also believe, based on my experience, that our classical predecessors who used Aphthonius' progymnasmata would have been familiar with concepts of style such as taught by Hermogenes. With such knowledge the cryptic instructions given by Aphthonius are not cryptic at all but rather point to a large body of this common knowledge the instructor would have accessed to equip their students with explicit skills.

Finally, I should mention that the additional specificity provided by Hermogenes has not been difficult to include as we teach the progymnasmata, and better prepares our students for the sophisticated system they will learn in the Canon of Style in their 11th and 12th grade years. I will suggest that in the twenty first century classroom of Secondary formal Rhetoric,

Hermogenes' treatment of Abundance, as exemplified by Aphthonius, deepens a student's rhetorical skill by learning to utilize some thirty discrete, composition skills previously internalized. The use of these skills allows students to make language choices not only in relation to their text, to the logos, but with a view to themselves and their audience, to the ethos and pathos of the composition in the crafting of each particular sentence. The mastery of this Canon of Style by High School students would be difficult if not impossible without the seven years of Progymnasmata training, and teacher familiarity with Hermogenes enhances the student's mastery of the Progymnasmata.

ⁱ Aphthonius, *Progymnasmata*, trans. Malcolm Heath, and was last updated on 9 December 1997. <http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/resources/rhetoric/prog-aph.htm>.

ⁱⁱ *Hermogenes' 'On Types of Style,'* trans. Wooten, Cecil W., UNC, 1987

ⁱⁱⁱ Wooten, p. 8-18

^{iv} Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. Ingram Bywater, Random House, New York, 1984, p.236-237.

^v Cf. <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Figures/Groupings/of%20Description.htm>. Accessed 1/19/16

^{vi} Erasmus of Rotterdam, Desiderius, *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, trans. Donald B. King and H. David Rix., Medieval Philosophical Texts in Translation No. 12, Marquette University Press, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1999, Book One.

^{vii} Ibid.

^{viii} Wooten, p. 3

^{ix} Malcolm Heath, and was last updated on 9 December 1997.

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/classics/resources/rhetoric/prog-aph.htm>

^x Ibid.

^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} *Hermogenes' On Types of Style*, trans. Cecil W. Wooten, University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 1987, p. 8.

^{xiii} Ibid. p.8

^{xiv} Ibid. p.15

^{xv} 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 us. 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.

^{xvi} Kennedy, George A. *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*. Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, GA. 2003. p. 116-117

^{xvii} Compare with Aphthonius' model for Description, a stage that calls for elaborate, figurative language

^{xviii} Whitefield Academy, where I have taught since 2001, is a classical Christian school with grades PreK-12.

^{xix} Wooten, p. 3

^{xx} Heath

^{xxi} Heath

^{xxii} As in accurately depicting. Kennedy translate this phrase as “creating an imitation of the things being described.” p.117

^{xxiii} Heath.

^{xxiv} Wooten, p.44

^{xxv} Kennedy, George A. *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*. Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, GA. 2003. p. 219.

^{xxvi} Wooten, p. 42

^{xxvii} Wooten, p. 45-46

^{xxviii} Wooten, p. 46-47

^{xxix} Wooten, p. 47-54

^{xxx} Wooten, p.47