

# Sting in the Tail: a Feature of Thucydidean Speeches

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THE SPEECHES of Thucydides are to a large extent uniform not only in language and style but also in the character and arrangement of the arguments contained in them. This uniformity, which was observed in antiquity,<sup>1</sup> has been studied by modern scholars,<sup>2</sup> though often only because of its relevance to the major controversy on the relation between Thucydidean speeches and their originals. Among the characteristics occurring in many speeches and providing evidence of uniformity is one which does not appear to have been noticed. It is the following: the speaker issues at or near the end of his speech a warning drawing the attention of his audience to the unpleasant consequences likely to ensue if his recommendations are not accepted and implemented. The warning, which is usually brief, constitutes an entirely new argument; the speaker is not recapitulating in his epilogue a point which he has made earlier. Examination of passages in a substantial number of speeches will show that this rhetorical feature is sufficiently common to be considered to be almost a mannerism.

The simplest examples are to be found in the speeches delivered by generals before battles (*παρακελεύσεις*). It is natural that in speeches of this kind the general lays much emphasis upon the benefits which victory will bring, but in many instances he refers briefly at the end to the painfulness of the outcome for his troops or their city, or both, if they are defeated or are guilty of cowardice. The following passages may be cited from speeches by generals:

(a) 2.87.9. "Cnemus and Brasidas and the other commanders of the Peloponnesians," addressing their troops before the second battle

<sup>1</sup> Dion.Hal. *Rompr.* 3.20, *ὁμοειδῆς γὰρ οὗτος* (sc. Thucydides) *ἐν πᾶσι, κὰν ταῖς δημηγορίαις μᾶλλον ἢ ταῖς διηγήσειν*. Dionysius here contrasts Thucydides with Herodotus, much to the advantage of the latter.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. W. Schmid, *Gesch. der griech. Literatur* I.5 (Munich 1948) 171–73; F. E. Adcock, *Thucydides and his History* (Cambridge 1963) 33–35.

against the fleet of Phormio, warn them that anyone showing cowardice will be appropriately punished. This threat is expressed very briefly and bluntly.

(b) 2.89.10. Phormio impresses upon his men that the coming battle will “either put an end to the naval aspirations of the Peloponnesians or bring nearer to the Athenians their fears in regard to the sea” (*i.e.*, that they may lose their naval supremacy, upon which their survival depends).

(c) 5.9.9. Brasidas before the battle of Amphipolis assures his local allies that in the event of defeat, if they escape enslavement or death at the hands of the Athenians, they will have to endure a subjection even more oppressive than that of the past. Hence they must not relax (*ibid.* 10).<sup>3</sup>

(d) 6.68.3–4. Nicias points out to his troops the vulnerability of their position in the limited area which they have occupied on the shore of the Great Harbour; because the Syracusan cavalry is so powerful, they will have difficulty in withdrawing unless they are victorious.<sup>4</sup>

(e) 7.64.1. Nicias, speaking when the final battle in the Great Harbour is about to begin, draws the attention of his Athenian troops to the consequences of defeat both for themselves and for their compatriots at home. Athens has no fleet or army left comparable with those at Syracuse and will not be able to withstand the Peloponnesians, reinforced, as they will be, by an expeditionary force of Siceliots. The Athenians now in Sicily will be at the mercy of the Syracusans and will be punished for their imperialistic ambitions; the Athenians at home will be at the mercy of the Spartans. In this passage, which is more elaborate than most, Nicias is characteristically trying to inspire his dispirited troops with something of his own unselfish patriotism; hence his insistence that, as well as their own safety, the very existence of their city depends upon their efforts.

(f) 7.68.3. “The generals of the Syracusans and Gylippus,” in a speech which forms an antilogy with that of Nicias, urge their men not to relax their efforts and not to be content merely to let the enemy escape. The result of any relaxation will be to forfeit the satis-

<sup>3</sup> The verb *μαλακίζεσθαι* is also found in two of the other passages in this list, namely 7.68.3 and 7.77.7.

<sup>4</sup> O. Luschnat, *Philologus* Supplbd. 34.2 (1942) 77–79, observes that this passage reflects the habitual pessimism of Nicias.

faction of taking vengeance on the Athenians, who came to enslave Sicily (*ibid.* 2), and of making Siceliot liberty more secure than ever. This passage differs somewhat from others because failure to respond to the exhortation of the speakers would not prove disastrous to the audience but only sacrifice the accomplishment of desirable aims.

(g) 7.77.7. When the Athenians are on the point of withdrawing from Syracuse by land, Nicias declares that courage is essential, since there is no place of refuge in the vicinity where they can find safety if they relax their efforts. He also suggests, more briefly and less directly than in his previous speech, that Athens cannot hope to survive the loss of manpower which the destruction of his army would involve.

These Thucydidean versions of speeches by generals tend to be short,<sup>5</sup> and some of them, notably the first by Nicias in Sicily (6.68), are very short. Accordingly it is not perhaps of any great significance that in each of the instances cited above the warning issued by the general occurs at or near the end of his speech and that similar warnings are not found elsewhere. On the other hand, there are only twelve παρακελεύσεις in the whole *History*,<sup>6</sup> so that it is remarkable that these warnings occur in no less than seven of them.<sup>7</sup>

The same rhetorical feature may be observed also in political speeches delivered to public assemblies, as the following list of passages, each of them at or near the end of the speech, will show:

(a) 1.36.3. The Corcyrean envoys conclude their appeal to the Athenian assembly by pointing out that, if the Athenians reject their request for an alliance and Corinth reduces Corcyra, Athens will have to fight at sea against the Corcyrean and Peloponnesian fleets combined. The envoys have, a little earlier in their epilogue (*ibid.* 1), touched upon disadvantages which rejection of the proposed alliance will bring upon the Athenians, but elsewhere they dwell rather on the advantages of acceptance.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> The original speeches upon which they are based are unlikely to have been lengthy.

<sup>6</sup> The speech of Archidamus at the Isthmus (2.11) is normally included among the twelve, although it was delivered to an audience limited to officers and was not followed by any military operation worthy to be termed a battle.

<sup>7</sup> The speech mentioned in the previous note might perhaps be added to the seven, since a phrase at the end of it, *μεγίστην δόξαν οἰόμενοι τοῖς τε προγόνοις καὶ ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς ἐπ' ἀμφοτέρα ἐκ τῶν ἀποβαινόντων* (2.11.9), contains a warning that failure to observe the recommendations of Archidamus would bring disgrace upon the Peloponnesians.

<sup>8</sup> The Corinthian envoys devote most of their counter-speech to the theme that Athens by allying with Corcyra will be violating treaty obligations, but near the end (1.42.1–2, *cf.* 43.4) they argue that the Athenians, if they accept the alliance, will injure their own inter-

(b) 1.71.4. The Corinthian representatives at the first congress at Sparta urge the Spartans to invade Attica without delay, as they had promised, and issue a threat that they themselves with other members of the Spartan alliance will secede if action is not taken. The tone of the passage is unimpassioned, almost conciliatory, and the Corinthians proceed to argue that secession would be justifiable (*ibid.* 5), but their warning is plain enough, even though there is reason to doubt whether they seriously intended to carry it out.<sup>9</sup>

(c) 1.78.4. The Athenian envoys, addressing the same congress, end their speech by issuing a blunt warning that, if Sparta decides to start a war, Athens will take appropriate steps to retaliate. This warning is somewhat unexpected, since the speech, though totally unyielding, consists mainly of self-justification.

(d) 3.14.1. The Mytilenean envoys at Olympia, appealing for support in their revolt, declare that, whereas widespread benefit for all will result from their success, even more widespread damage will be caused if the appeal is rejected and the revolt is suppressed. This damage has been in part defined in a sentence in the preceding paragraph (13.6).

(e) 4.20.1. The Spartan envoys sent to negotiate at Athens during the Pylos episode warn the Athenians that, if they refuse to consent to a reconciliation now, they will incur the permanent enmity of the Spartans, both public and personal.

(f) 4.87.2. Brasidas, after urging the Acanthians to revolt from Athens, threatens to coerce them by devastating their land if they reject his proposition. He then seeks to justify his threat (*ibid.* 3–5), which in fact proved very effective (88.1).

(g) 6.18.7. In the debate at Athens on the expedition to Sicily Alcibiades concludes his speech with a general statement that, if a city which is naturally enterprising changes its policy and lapses into inertia (*ἀπραγμοσύνη*), the consequences will at once be disastrous. He has made much the same point, with specific reference to Athens, in the previous sentence (*ibid.* 6).

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ests. In 1.40.6, however, they have already referred rather more specifically to damage which in their view the alliance will cause to the Athenians (Steup in an appendix on this sentence suggests transposing it to the end of 1.42, but this proposal is rightly rejected by Gomme, n. *ad loc.*). Accordingly this speech, despite some affinity to those listed here, would not be appropriately included.

<sup>9</sup> D. Kagan, *Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War* (Ithaca [N.Y.] 1969) 291–93.

(h) 6.80.4. Hermocrates, speaking in the assembly at Camarina as the spokesman of Syracuse, warns the Camarineans that they will bring nothing but harm upon themselves by supporting the Athenians, whatever the outcome of the war. If Athens wins, they will become subjects of the Athenians despite their contribution to the Athenian victory; if Syracuse wins, they must expect reprisals for having endangered Syracusan security. The following sentence (*ibid.* 5), which concludes the speech, ends with a threat that Syracusan enmity will be lasting.<sup>10</sup>

In this list only speeches have been included in which warnings against the consequences of rejecting the advice of the speaker occur at or near the end; speeches containing similar warnings at other points have not been considered.<sup>11</sup> The list from symbouleutic speeches may be thought to be less impressive than the list from military speeches. There are twenty-three symbouleutic speeches in the *History* and only twelve military speeches, so that proportionately the rhetorical feature to which attention has been drawn is less common in the former than in the latter. Since, however, the former are relatively lengthy, complex and varied in their content, the occurrence of this feature at or near the end of eight of them, and nowhere else in the same speech, is striking and provides a stronger indication that it is an idiosyncrasy than the examples in the shorter and simpler military speeches. The two lists of passages show that this feature is to be found in all sections of the *History* which contain speeches and that it is apparently not confined to any particular category of speech or of speaker. There could, however, be some significance in the fact that in very few instances can Thucydides have heard the original speech himself.

It might reasonably be suggested that he is merely following a conventional practice of Greek oratory which any contemporary speaker might be expected to adopt. To be dogmatic on this point would be very unwise, since unfortunately no complete symbouleutic or mili-

<sup>10</sup> A passage which has some affinity to those included in this list is 3.40.7, where Cleon in the debate on the fate of the Mytileneans suggests, somewhat obliquely, that leniency towards the allies has the effect of diverting to the suppression of revolts energy which ought to be directed against the real enemies of Athens. He has, however, already made the same point more fully and specifically (39.8), so that the passage is not parallel with the rest and must be excluded.

<sup>11</sup> The warnings by Archidamus (1.82.5), Pericles (1.140.5–141.5 and 143.5), Hermocrates (4.60.2) and Alcibiades (6.91.1–4) may be cited.

tary speech has survived from the period when he was writing his *History*;<sup>12</sup> but the relative abundance of the former type from the fourth century does supply some basis for a tentative conclusion. In the rather unsophisticated and superficial speeches of Xenophon in the *Hellenica* there do not appear to be any parallels with the feature observed in Thucydides, except perhaps for the speech of Critias demanding the death of Theramenes (2.3.24–34), which is forensic rather than symbouleutic. Critias concludes by arguing that to spare Theramenes would endanger the cause of the oligarchs (*ibid.* 34).<sup>13</sup> Speeches for the prosecution written by Attic orators, which are in some cases largely political, normally end with an appeal to the jury; this appeal may include warnings to its members suggesting that they will be most unpopular in the eyes of their fellow citizens<sup>14</sup> or of their own households<sup>15</sup> if they acquit the accused, or, less crudely and more commonly, that an acquittal will prove damaging to the interests of the state.<sup>16</sup>

It is, however, the speeches on foreign policy delivered in the Assembly by Athenian politicians of the fourth century that have the closest affinity to most Thucydidean speeches, even though, being originals and not summaries, they tend to be much longer; and it is here that parallels with the feature observed in Thucydides might be expected to be found if it were a rhetorical device commonly used by Greek orators over a considerable period. Demosthenes concludes several of his speeches on relations with Macedonia by trying to impress upon the Athenians how disastrous the consequences will be if

<sup>12</sup> In the speech entitled *Περὶ πολιτείας*, which has survived under the name of Herodes Atticus but is believed by many scholars to have been written in the last years of the fifth century B.C. (though not by U. Albinus, who published an edition in 1968), the speaker concludes by warning his Larisean audience against the consequences of rejecting his advice to ally with Sparta and not with Archelaus (35–37). He has, however, already covered much the same ground in greater detail (especially 20–27).

<sup>13</sup> It is noteworthy that Xenophon probably heard this speech himself. It may well reproduce what was actually said rather more closely than most other speeches in the *Hellenica*, which appear to have been almost wholly invented by Xenophon. The only speech in the *Hellenica* by a general before a battle is that of Thrasybulus when about to lead his democrats against the Thirty and their supporters (2.4.13–17): it does not refer to the consequences of defeat.

<sup>14</sup> Dem. 25 (*Against Aristogeiton A*) 98–101.

<sup>15</sup> [Dem.] 59 (*Against Neaera*) 110–11.

<sup>16</sup> Lys. 1 (*On the Murder of Eratosthenes*) 48–49 and 22 (*Against the Corndalers*) 17–19; Dem. 24 (*Against Timocrates*) 217–18; Lycurg. *Against Leocrates* 149–50; Deinarch. 1 (*Against Demosthenes*) 113.

they reject his call for vigorous action to curb the aggression of Philip: the best examples are the *First Olynthiac* (1.25–27), *On the Chersonese* (8.77) and the *Third Philippic* (9.75).<sup>17</sup> There is, however, a fundamental distinction to be drawn between these cases and those noted in Thucydides. Demosthenes is not making a new point but one on which he has laid much emphasis: he has already denounced Athenian inaction and insisted on the damaging effects of its continuance. Accordingly, there seems to be no good reason to believe that Thucydides is, consciously or unconsciously, adopting an accepted rhetorical convention. He is, as in many other respects, following his own bent.

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. the end of the speech *For the Megalopolitans* (16.30), which deals with Athenian foreign policy in another area. The political pamphlets of Isocrates, which are so highly rhetorical though not actually spoken to an audience, do not, it seems, yield any parallels.