MISCELLANEA

THE HOMERIC HYMN TO DEMETER 403-4
AND CHIASMUS IN CONVERSATION

In the Hymn to Demeter we are concerned with Demeter’s speech to Persephone and Persephone’s reply (393-433). The two speeches are too long to quote in full. In the manuscripts, and also in the papyrus (P. Oxy. 2379) of the 3rd century A.D., lines 403-4 appear as αὐτὶς ἂνει μέγα θάδωμα θεοῖς θυντοῖς τ’ ἀνθρώποις, καὶ τίνι σ’ ἐξεπάτησε δόλῳ κρατερὸς πολυδέμων; However this sequence has raised doubts, as καὶ is not a natural connection here, and Ruhnken proposed a lacuna after 403. This was accepted by Allen - Halliday - Sikes, who comment “The construction is broken and a lacuna necessary”. However N.J. Richardson rejects the lacuna, in his comment ad loc.: “If there was a lacuna after 403 ... it existed already when the papyrus was written. But more probably the text is sound, and there is an abrupt break in the sense. Demeter’s question in 404 refers to the rape, not to Persephone’s having eaten in Hades, and Persephone answers her in 414f”1).

However a consideration of Persephone’s reply may give some support to Ruhnken’s suggestion. The reply falls into two parts: first Persephone tells how Hades made her eat the poppy seed (406-13), and then she relates the story of the rape (414-33). A transition clearly separates the two parts: ὡς δὲ μ’ ἀναρπάξας Κρονίδεα πυκνήν διὰ μήτιν / ἄχετο πατρός ἔμει σφέν ὑπὸ κεύθης γαῖς / ἐξερέω καὶ πάντα διξήματι ὡς ἔρεινείς (414-6).

The reply as a whole is knit together by ring-composition whereby Persephone’s opening words τοιάδο τηι μήτερ ἐρέω νυμέρη τάντα (406) are recalled at the end of her speech: τοιάδο τοι ἄρριενὴν περ ἀληθὲα πάντα ἀγορέω (433), while the same thought appears in the transition: ἐξερέω καὶ πάντα διξήματι ὡς ἔρεινείς (416).

It seems likely that the speech of Demeter, in spite of the tear in the Mosquensis at its beginning, was also enclosed by a ring, and that καὶ τίνι σ’ ἐξεπάτησε δόλῳ κρατερὸς πολυδέμων (404) recalls τέκνον μὴ μέ τι μοι σὺ νε πίσσασο νέρθην εὕσοσα βρώμης (393 f., suppl. A. Goodwin), provided, of course, that 404 refers to the eating of the pomegranate seed.

If Persephone’s reply is two-fold, we might expect Demeter to ask two questions. However on Richardson’s view there is only one question (404), which he takes as referring to the rape, and which is answered by Persephone in 414 ff. As a result 406-13 are left with no direct relation to Demeter’s speech. It is true that ὡς ἔρεινείς (416) shows that the second part of Persephone’s speech must be in reply to Demeter, but it does not follow that the first part cannot also be in reply to Demeter. With Ruhnken’s lacuna, however, and a supplement such as εἰπὲ δὲ πῶς σ’ ἔρπαξεν ὑπὸ...
A. Goodwin), Demeter asks two questions and receives a twofold reply. On this hypothesis 404 refers to the eating of the pomegranate seed, and is answered first, and εἰπέ δὲ πῶς ... ηερόεντα is answered second, in 414 ff. That it is indeed the first part of Persephone's speech which answers 404 is made likely by λαθη (411) which appears to correspond to Demeter's δόλω (404). Moreover, in her account of her abduction Persephone does not complain of being deceived by Hades; it could be said that his behaviour here exhibits βία more than δόλος. And there is nothing in 404 which points to the rape rather than to the eating of the pomegranate seed.

Persephone's opening words τοιγάρ ἐγὼ τι Μήτερ ηνεμεῖτα πάντο (406) also deserve notice. The line is not a quotation from Homer, but closely resembles some formulaic Homeric lines. τοιγάρ is found 22 times in Homer, always at the beginning of the line and followed by ἐγὼν, and always with a verb in the future. 19 times the verb is, as in the Ημνη, one of saying, either καταλέξω, ἀγορεύω, or ἐγὼ. Although ηνεμεῖτις is not found in these lines, the speaker often declares he will tell the truth, e. μάλι ἀπεικός (11x), ἀλήθειαν (3x), and ἄλθεα πάντα (2x). Moreover in Homer τοιγάρ is restricted in context, and “is only used by a person preparing to speak or act at another’s request” (Denniston, Περιστάτικα, 565). It would seem that the line in the Ημνη, which closely reflects Homer in its forms of expression, must also be Homeric in its function, and introduce a reply to the preceding speech. So both parts of Persephone’s speech, 406-13 as well as 414-33, answer Demeter’s speech, which ought therefore to contain two questions, not one. The ring composition, whereby τοιγάρ τι ἄγνυμεν περ ἁλθεία πάντ’ ἄγορεύω (433) recalls 406, also suggests that both parts of Persephone’s speech are on the same footing in relation to Demeter’s.

So it appears that the structure of Persephone’s speech gives some support to the suggestion of a lacuna after 403, and a supplement such as εἰπέ δὲ πῶς σ’ ἤρραξέν ὑπὸ ζώφων ἡερόεντα. And considerations of realism perhaps also support this view; it would be very surprising if a mother who had just been reunited with a missing daughter failed to ask her how she had been abducted.

On this hypothesis the two questions and answers are arranged chiasingly. Such an arrangement can be supported by parallels. D. Lohmann in his Die Komposition der Reden der Ilias (Berlin 1970) has demonstrated the chiastic structure of the dialogues between Andromache and Hector (Ζ 407-65, o.c., 96-9), and between Helen and Hector (Ζ 344-68, o.c., 101 f). Sometimes however there is parallelism between speeches, as for example between Lycaon’s supplication of Achilles and the latter’s reply (Φ 74-113, o.c., 105-8), and between Poulydamas’ and Hector’s speeches at Σ 254-309 (o.c., 119-20). Lohmann is concerned with the Ημνη, but chiasmus in conversation is also found in the Οδυσσεια. In particular the later epic has some examples of chiasmus in questions and answers, which are of interest in connection with the Ημνη to Demeter. At Ω 303 τοιγάρ ἐγὼ τι πάντο μᾶλ’ ἀντεξόκας καταλέξω introduces a reply to questions. Odysseus first (304-8) answers Laertes’ second group of questions, τίς πάθεν εἰς ἄνδρον ... ἔβησον (298-301), and then his first question, ποστὸν δὴ ἔτος ἔστιν (288). And, as A.