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THE DIALOGUE FORM OF THE OCTAVIUS
OF MINUCIUS FELIX, ITS VALUE AND
ORIGINALITY.

by Bernard Kuefler

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	page
INTRODUCTION	v
Part one	
DIALOGUE, ITS NATURE AND EVOLUTION IN GREEK INTO LATIN LITERATURE	
I.-NATURE OF DIALOGUE	1
II.-DIALOGUE IN GREEK LITERATURE	19
III.-DIALOGUE IN LATIN LITERATURE	29
Part two	
DIALOGUE FORM OF THE <u>OCTAVIUS</u>	
IV.-ITS DIALOGUE FORM IN GENERAL	34
V.-PLATO'S INFLUENCE	41
VI.-ARISTOTLE'S INFLUENCE	52
VII.-CICERO'S INFLUENCE	60
VIII.-THE <u>OCTAVIUS</u> AND OTHER WRITINGS	81
1. Relationship to Other Apologies	
2. Relationship to Other Writers	
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS	95
BIBLIOGRAPHY	98
Appendix	
ABSTRACT OF <u>The Dialogue Form of the Octavius of Minucius Felix, Its Value and Originality</u> . .	102

INTRODUCTION

Très Cicéronien de mise en scène et de style, l'Octavius est une oeuvre séduisante... un naturel classique soutenu, des plus rares à une époque où le raffinement du style préférait s'étaler que se dissimuler.¹

These are the words with which Mr. J. Bayet describes the excellence of the Octavius. The beauty of this oldest Christian Latin apology, however, has been remarked ever since its discovery as the eighth book of Arnobius' Adversus Gentes by Balduinus in 1543. J. P. Waltzing states that this work "a toujours fait le charme des délicats et il nous paraît, sous tous les rapports digne d'être expliqué dans les classes".² This is the argument he develops in an open letter to R. P. Verest³ in which he refutes the objections against teaching this work in school. J. De Smet⁴ tried teaching the work to a group in Rhetoric in the Petit Séminaire of Malines. He came to the conclusion that it is not a dangerous work and that it is instructive and interesting, therefore worthy to be read in the classes.

1 J. Bayet, Littérature Latine, Paris, Colin, 1950, p. 649.

2 J. P. Waltzing, Octavius de M. Minucius Félix, in Collection de Classiques Latins Comparés, Paris, Desclée, De Brouwer et Cie, 1909, Edition B: Introduction et Texte, p.vii.

3 Id., ibid., Partie du Maître, p. 177-181.

4 J. De Smet, Minucius Félix dans nos Collèges, Bruxelles, Dewit, 1911. 48p.

Many studies, editions, translations and commentaries on the Octavius have been published. Over three hundred are listed in the bibliographies of J. P. Waltzing in Musée Belge, 1902, pp. 216-261, and 1906, p. 245-268, in his Studia Minuciana (Louvain, Ch. Peeters, 1906), in the Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie, Vol. II, Part 2, 1934, s.v. Minucius Félix, and in the text by Adelaide Douglas Simpson.⁵ The best text and commentary are those of J. P. Waltzing prepared for the Teubner series of 1926.

Despite the many studies treating on all aspects of the Octavius, the dialogue form has not been clearly and sufficiently evaluated. Only one short article written by G. Charlier⁶ in 1906 bears on this aspect. T. Fahy, in 1919, said in passing, "It is a dialogue of the Ciceronian rather than Platonic kind...⁷" Nine years later H. J. Baylis reaffirmed this statement when he said the Octavius is "Ciceronian and rhetorical rather than Platonic and conversational

5 A. D. Simpson, M. Minucii Felicis Octavius, Prolegomena, Text and Critical Notes, New-York, Columbia University Press, 1938, p. 103-110.

6 G. Charlier, Le Dialogue dans l'Octavius de Minucius Félix, in Musée Belge, Vol. 10, 1906, p. 75-82.

7 T. Fahy, Marcus Minucius Felix, Octavius; with introduction and notes, Dublin, Educational Company of Ireland, 1919, p. 1.

in form."⁸ In his 1950 edition, R. Arbesmann says, "The Octavius is written in the literary form of a dialogue, which is, however, sui generis... It begins in the manner of a Platonic dialogue, with the introductory narrative of the one who is recounting the whole."⁹ On the following page he adds, "the setting follows the Platonic, or Ciceronian pattern...".¹⁰ From these statements one may suspect that there are certain similarities and differences in the dialogues of Plato and Cicero.

The purpose of this study is to point out how far Minucius Felix is indebted to Greek and Roman authors and how far he is original regarding the dialogue form of his Octavius.

The problem dictates the method and plan of this study. It will review first the nature of dialogue and its evolution in Greek and Latin literature.¹¹ With this for a background,

⁸ H. J. Baylis, Minucius Felix and His Place among the Early Fathers of the Latin Church, London, Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1928, p. 1.

⁹ R. Arbesmann, Minucius Felix Octavius Translated, in The Fathers of the Church, Vol. 10, 1950, p. 314.

¹⁰ Id., ibid., p. 315.

¹¹ The task is facilitated by some recent studies: J. Andrieu, Le Dialogue Antique, Structure et Présentation, Paris, Les Belles-Lettres, 1954, 366p.

P. Grimal, Caractères Généraux du Dialogue Romain de Lucilius à Cicéron, in L'Information Littéraire, 7th year, 1955, No. 5, p. 192-198.

(continued on page viii).

the position of the Octavius may be determined by considering the influences of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, other apologists and writers.

11 ... J. Laborderie, La Forme du Dialogue Platonien de la Maturité, in L'Information Littéraire, 12th year, 1960, No. 2, p. 64-70.

M. Ruch, Le Préambule dans les Oeuvres Philosophiques de Cicéron, Essai sur la Genèse et l'Art du Dialogue, Paris, Les Belles-Lettres, 1958, 459 p.

Part one

DIALOGUE, ITS NATURE AND EVOLUTION IN GREEK AND
LATIN LITERATURE

CHAPTER I

NATURE OF DIALOGUE

Dialogue is related to drama by its form, to oratory by its need to persuade and to history by its probability. Under this three-fold division will be considered the notion of this type; its advantages over other literary forms and similarities with them; its rules of composition; its comparison with drama, poetry and prose; its development as an expression for philosophy and instruction, and its relationship to rhetorical forms of expression; finally its relationship to historical truth.

A dialogue is popularly considered as a written composition representing two or more persons as conversing or reasoning.

A didactic purpose is added in the definition of The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature,¹ "a form of literature in which the author seeks to convey information, or inculcate some lesson, under the semblance of a viva-voce discussion".

An older conception, that of Diogenes Laertius, had a more limited scope:

¹ The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature, s.v. Dialogue, 1955, p. 143.

Ἔστι... διάλογος ἐξ ἐρωτήσεως καὶ ἀποκρίσεως
 συχόμενος περὶ τινος τῶν φιλοσοφουμένων καὶ
 πολιτικῶν μετὰ πρεπούσης ἡθοποιίας τῶν προσλαμ-
 βανομένων προσώπων καὶ τῆς κατὰ τὴν λέξιν κατασκευῆς²

Its object is some philosophical or political subject while the form is one of questions and answers imitative of the personages involved.

Of these three definitions, the main characteristic is that of discussion. Dialogue is essentially a mimesis, an artistic reproduction of "good talk" or informal discussion in which, while a single theme is pursued, some digression and inconsequence is permissible and proper; the theme must be of more than topical interest, though it usually arises out of the experiences of particular persons at a particular time.³ The notion of dialogue is, in principle, opposed to that of mathema (study, science, knowledge), the dialogue being a discussion (dis-sertatio, dis-putatio) which results from the author playing several roles (Plato, Sophist, 264 a) or from an opposition between oneself and the world. Its form necessarily changes according to the nature of the public or the interlocutors.

2 Diogenes Laertius, 3, 48: "A dialogue is a discourse consisting of question and answer on some philosophical or political subject, with due regard to the characters of the persons introduced and the choice of diction". (Loeb translation).

3 Cf. The Oxford Classical Dictionary, s.v. Greek Dialogue, 1949, p. 273.

Among the different forms which a writer may use to express his thought and communicate his convictions, there are few, it seems, which present advantages as immediate and evident as the dialogue form. Whatever be the subject, the dialogue always has the merit of presenting in a lively manner the divergent opinions or opposing ideas of which the striking character itself often brings clarity to the expression. At the same time, it offers the capable writer a great facility to examine all the facets of a problem, and also to distinguish the slight differences of fine sentiments. From this literary type can be deduced its particular qualities: the thesis must be probable, the characters constant, the debate lively, with a variety of arguments and unforeseen situations, but also a profound unity despite the apparent caprices of a free conversation.⁴

M. Ruch has found that Cicero's dialogues possess these same qualities which he labels: oratorical, dramatical and historical norms.⁵ From the previous definitions we do see, in fact, that dialogue is related to rhetoric, drama and his-

⁴ Cf. M. Roustan, Le Dialogue, Méthode et Applications, Paris, P. Delaplane, (1905), p. 6-8.

⁵ M. Ruch, Le Préambule dans les Oeuvres Philosophiques de Cicéron, Essai sur la Genèse et l'Art du Dialogue, p. 17-30.

history.⁶ Its viva-voce discussion and mimic elements relate it with poetic drama; its didactic form relates it to discourse and rhetoric; and by its probability it is related to history. This triple parentage, however, can be seen only by closely examining the ancient dialogue forms.

There are no fixed rules of composition for the dialogue form handed down by tradition. Rhetoric was the only literary form exposed to public usage and its laws consigned to manuals. Dialogue form is thus free to evolve as a living form of expression, to diversify by the absence of principles restraining its formal aspect. Rules, perhaps, could have been formulated had the ancients considered the essence of this literary type, but unfortunately they never asked themselves the true nature of the dialogue. Hence, no treatise in antiquity teaches us the origin or nature of the dialogue, or the literary type to which it is related. Because of this silence, science on the theory of ancient dialogues must be obtained from a study of the works.

The only rules we have concerning dialogues are of a moral nature. In his Dialogue of Orators Tacitus says, "Non vos offendi decebit, si quid forte aures vestras perstringat,

⁶ The artistic form of dialogue has been spoken of by Plato (Protagoras, 338 a; Theatetus, 143), Aristotle, (Poetics, I, 7ff; 1447 b); Diogenes Laertius, (3, 48ff); Cicero, (Tusculanes, 1, 4, 8; Ad Fam., 9, 8, 1; Ad Atticum, 13, 19, 4).

cum sciatis hanc esse eius modi sermonum legem, iudicium animi citra damnum adfectus proferre" (27, 2). Each orator must express his inmost thoughts, "his conviction without sentimental prejudice."⁷ Cicero, however, is concerned about lyrical tendencies, "ut eos quibuscum sermonem conferamus et vereri et diligere videamur" (De Off., I, 36). There are no other explicit precepts in the great orator who refers rather to custom: "Nosti morem dialogorum" (Fam., 9, 8, 1); "consuetudo dialogorum" (Brut., 218). Each author is content to follow the rules of his predecessor, these unformulated norms of oratory, drama and history as we shall see.

The ancients seem to agree that dialogue is related to drama. Although the need to express thoughts in dramatic form did not exist in the origin of literature, according to Schmid-Stalin,⁸ different types, however, appeared by law of necessity. No doubt in the pre-classical period lyrical, epic, and dramatic works existed side by side. In the time of the Aristocracy, poets retraced the exploits and sufferings of this caste; they simply reproduced the exploits without passing judgment on them. Then, with the weakening of confidence in this society, the individual appears with his own tendencies, his critical

⁷ Cf. Plato, Protagoras, 336 d, and Dion Cassius, 46, 1, 1.

⁸ W. Schmid and O. Stahlin, Geschichte der Griechischen Literatur I, Vol. I, 1939, p. 14.

spirit, his temperament, his new ideas. Finally the art of presenting an action by narration is transformed into the art of incarnating in a personage the sentiments and thoughts of the author himself. The confession by narration is now done through the intermediary of personages who act before our eyes.

Socratic dialogues find their most natural term of comparison in dramatic art.⁹ Like drama, dialogue imitates, exteriorizes actions of several participants; it reproduces a conflict. Plato realized that it was considered poetic for the author to remain hidden behind his personages; his presence on the scene would destroy the mimic element. For the same reason Aristotle (Poet., 1460, a, 5) praises Homer for not appearing in his work. He also affirms that dialogue is a form of mimesis for which there is no particular term and ranks Plato's dialogues with poetry; they are a type of mimesis, a figurative reproduction, (Poet., I, 1447, b). Another trait of Plato's dialogues links them with poetry. They are distinguished from the simple thesis - development of a general proposition - not only by the mimic elements but also by the fact that they usually contain several theses. Coexistence of poetical and philosophical elements is clearly evident

⁹ Cf. Maximus of Tyr, Diss., 38, 1; also Cicero, Orator, 67; "Video visum esse nonnullis Platonis locutionem etsi absit a versu, tamen... potius poema putandum quam comicorum poetarum."

in the definition by Diogenes Laertius (3, 48).¹⁰

Dialogue appears, then, as a sort of hybrid situated halfway between poetry and prose.¹¹ And even though character portrayal is not an absolutely essential element of the dialogue, the ancients were generally in agreement in establishing a direct relationship between dialogue and dramatic or epic poetry under the forms of invention, character portrayal, narration and several embellishments.¹²

From its development as an imitation of life, the dialogue came to be used as a means of expression for philosophy. Since a proposition is not well stated unless opposed, the dialogue is almost necessarily a development of philosophical reflexion.¹³ In this sense its origin may be traced

10 Cf. above, p. 2 (Chap. I).

11 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, 3, 2, 37.

12 Cf. M. Ruch, Op. Cit., p. 21.

13 J. Gould, The Development of Plato's Ethics, Cambridge, 1955, p. 23, finds that dialogue form is the only one suitable for the expression of Plato's philosophy:

"Philosophy is the achievement of certainty, and certainty, as Socrates meant it, is the inward agreement of one with another's views, only to be achieved in ad hominem conversation, only to be expressed in action."

This progression towards certitude is achieved by the rejection of error and Plato exploited this principle of contradiction of the dialogue form. According to Victor Goldschmidt, Les Dialogues de Platon, Structure et Méthode Dialectique, Paris, P. U. F., 1947, p. 18: "En général, la persuasion de Socrate est aidée du fait que tout homme même le Protagoras du Théétète (166 b), reconnaît le principe de contradiction." With the impetus given it by Plato, dialogue became determinant for the whole Academy.

back to Zeno of Elea (460 B.C.) who started dialectics by opposing sensible knowledge to intellectual knowledge. Then Alexamenos of Teios was the first to present discussions of Socrates. Dialogue form which Plato used, therefore, exists before him¹⁴ but it will become determinant for the whole Academy.

Even if the literary form changes from the reflexion of several to an exposition by one person examining all aspects of a problem, the purpose and the necessity of avoiding subjectivism remained the same, the discovery of truth. This evolution of form, however, was inevitable from the time when dialogue ceased to reproduce the conversations of Socrates. The change in form is seen in the last dialogues of Plato where dramatic convention is often neglected, the principal person speaking at length without interruption. Aristotle later attributes to his master a long development on good.¹⁵ Thus

14 The article on Dialog in Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum (Theodor Klauser, editor), affirms that the dialogue was used for a long time in the Orient and Egypt. There it had attained a perfect form and treated the problem of life and hereafter. In Mesopotamia also it is found in the funeral style and in their mythology: Dimuzi and Enkidu. Israel cultivated this form occasionally as is seen in the story of Job. However, it has not been proven that Plato was influenced directly by these dialogue forms.

15 Cf. H. Ouvré, Les Formes Littéraires de la Pensée Grecque, Paris, Alcan, 1900, p. 420, quoted by Ruch, Op. Cit., p. 30.

dialogue became the preferred expression for Greek philosophic thought until the time when it ceased to be the form of real or possible conversations and became only a convenient mantle for all sorts of ideas and doctrines.

Once philosophy descended from the Socratic heights it sought new means of expression which were not subordinated to the reproduction of a living scene. Forced by the necessity of teaching and in the desire to gain adherents, dialogue no longer employed a poetical form but rather a rhetorical one. From this developed the protreptics of Aristotle. Plato's model, a unique synthesis of poetry and philosophy, was completely lost for Greece. Poetical and oratorical forms however, were both transmitted by the teaching of the peripatetics and their disciples. Dialogue thus became related to rhetoric by its association with philosophy and exposition of ideas with the intention of gaining adherents.

Relationship to rhetoric becomes most evident when dialogue takes the form of a didactic conversation with a precise purpose. Persuasion in the domain of ideas was already the object of the first poetic type, the didactic poem. By its moralizing or philosophical form, the didactic poem is a direct ancestor of dialogue. Considering the destination of the dialogue then, it is most closely attached to the genus demonstrativum because it always has for its object to obtain the adherence of a person to an idea, a virtue, discipline or

occupation. With no author in antiquity except perhaps Isocrates is art cultivated simply for the sake of art. Art must instruct, teach, convince. There is always a didactic purpose even when it serves as an exercise in the case of disputatio.

Dialogue has always imitated the forms of oral instruction. From Plato to Aristotle there is no decadence but a new adaptation, and among the forms of instructions used in the hellenistic period the disputatio certainly offers the greatest possibilities for variety and charm.

One form of disputatio, the diatribe which is essentially a conference on a philosophical topic made before a group of non-philosophers, exerted perhaps an influence on Cicero's style, strongly impregnated with rhetoric.¹⁶

Like diatribe, the letter is a friendly conversation between professor and student. Between the form of the letter and that of the dialogue there is no difference in nature but only of degree. For this reason in Cicero's works there will be a priori no separation between the prooemium, which takes

¹⁶ According to W. Capelle's article on Diatriben in Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum, diatribe is addressed to a different class than the dialogue. After the Greeks lost their political independence to the Macedonians, they kept their domination over minds. They became more desirous of propagating their ideas among the populous than among the refined classes by dialogues. From this is born the diatribe. It is not a literary genre but a type of oral propaganda which is addressed to large masses in the cities east of the Mediterranean.

the form of a dedication, and the dialogue treatise.

The nearest relative of disputatio, however, is the oratorical debate. Isocrates is the first to compose discussions in which students criticize the exposition of a teacher who explains to them his intentions.¹⁷ One can also see how easily the opposing speeches in Thucydides, Caesar and Livy could be transposed into dialogue. By reducing it to alternate speeches, - and this is its very structure, one might conclude that the closest literary type to dialogue is rhetorical discourse. But the ancients did not make this relationship, and Cicero himself admits that he knows no dialogue technique: "Contentionis praecepta rhetorum sunt, nulla sermonis, quamquam haud scio an possint haec quoque esse" (De Off., I, 132). Each author thus makes his own laws in conformity with the tradition of previous models.

We know, however, that Plato tried to divorce rhetoric from philosophy. In his Phaedrus, he distinguishes between rhetoric which attached to current ideas as conceived by his contemporary Isocrates, and philosophy which is the only one worthy of man because it is a search for truth. Cicero later in conciliating the two disciplines to form a complete man becomes the disciple of both Isocrates and

¹⁷ Cf. Isocrates, Philippus, p. 17-23; Panathenaicus, p. 200 ff.

Plato.¹⁸ His dialogues answer the requirements both didactic (as the speeches of genus demonstrativum) and the need to please (delectationis causa). Thus philosophy, as the sum of knowledge and art of living, and eloquence are rival ideas in appearance only. Eloquence is the esthetic means of expressing thought in a pleasing manner. The greatest authors of antiquity knew no separation of matter and form, so dialogue then belongs to oratorical art.

Related to drama by its form, to oratory by its need to persuade, dialogue is also related to history by its probability. History for the ancients, however, did not have the same veracity as it possesses today. Its development from epic poetry is one proof of its creativeness.

It seems that a Greek author may adopt any of three attitudes towards reality: the fabulous which invents, creates (ποιησις), the probable which persuades (πιθανότης), finally the truthful which imitates, reproduces (μιμησις).

The first characterizes the epic poet. From the epic type arise not only piecemeal hymns which develop in the field of prose to pompous eloquence, but also history which, in safeguarding Homeric continuity, will give birth in turn to the novel and another type, memoirs. Thus the epopee breaks down and alternates by passing into the field of prose but

18 Cf. Cicero, De Oratore, 2, 94; Orator, 40.

retains its essential character which is that of fiction with regard to events. A study of Herodotus will convince anyone of this.¹⁹

Historiography then is generally conceived as a free invention, even by Thucydides and Polybius who are nearest the modern conception. Laws for this type are hard to come by because rhetorical principles concerned only speeches and not the other literary types.²⁰

Cicero's distinction in the types of narration, however, permit further comparisons with fiction, truth and probability of the dialogue. He distinguishes three different types of narration:

narratio est rerum gestarum aut ut gestarum expositio: fabula est in qua nec verae nec veri similes res continentur; historia est gesta res ab aetatis nostrae memoria remota; argumentum est ficta res quae tamen fieri potuit. (De Inventione, I, 27).

According to H. Peter²¹ this triple distinction, fabula, historia, argumentum, correspond plainly to the three of the Greeks: μυθικόν (epopee), ιστορικόν (history), πλασματικόν

19 Cf. E. Legrand, Herodote, Histoires, Introduction, Paris, Les Belles-Lettres, 2nd edition, 1932, p. 83 ff.

20 The only work in antiquity presenting methodology for history is that of Lucian, The Way to Write History.

21 H. Peter, Wahrheit und Kunst, Geschichtsschreibung und Plagiat im klassischen Altertum, Leipzig, 1911; Cf. M. Ruch, Op. Cit., p. 24.

(drama). Since dialogue is situated at an equal distance from pure fiction and the direct reproduction of truth, it may be considered as closely related to the narration called argumentum: res ficta quae tamen fieri potuit.

Dialogue is founded on an invention or at least transformation of the real (ποίησις). It could be defined as an "ideal reconstruction" as Xenophon undertook in his Cyropaedia: "Cyrus ille a Xenophonte non ad historiae fidem scriptus, sed ad effigiem iusti imperii" (Quint., 1, 1, 23). Whatever fiction there might be must be in accordance with probability.²² Since verse was not a distinctive mark of poetry,²³ the dialogue in Aristotle's mind (Poetics), because of its poetic elements of invention is philosophical news in the same way as the Myths of Pherecydes, Xenophon's novel with a philosophical tendency (Cyropaedia), and the juridical or set speeches of the sophists.

Historical veracity of dialogues is also comparable to the speeches of Thucydides. A. Croiset says that his speeches are:

22 Cf. Cicero, De Republica, 2, 28: "Id totum neque solum fictum, sed etiam imperite absurdeque fictum; ea sunt enim non ferenda mendacia, quae non solum ficta esse, sed ne fieri quidem potuisse cernimus."

23 Cf. above, p. 6, note 9.

ni des reproductions sténographiques, ni des comptes rendus analytiques, ni des exercices littéraires sans rapport avec la réalité, mais des reconstructions idéales, dans lesquelles l'historien s'appuyant sur quelques données positives, mais fragmentaires, les complète en vertu d'une logique intime que sa connaissance des personnes et des choses lui permet de saisir et de suivre. Ainsi l'ouvrage de Thucydide, contient à défaut de la vérité terre à terre ce qui est cette vérité supérieure qu'Aristote attribuait comme privilège à la poésie; mais c'est, malgré tout, une vérité mélangée d'artifice.²⁴

And Ruch goes on to say that, "Il nous semble que Platon ne procède pas autrement dans les dialogues socratiques."

From the remark of A. Croiset above, it would appear that Joseph de Maistre²⁵ is too severe when he condemns dialogue as a false type:

Quant au dialogue, ce mot ne représente qu'une fiction; car il suppose une conversation qui n'a jamais existé. C'est une oeuvre purement artificielle: ainsi on peut en écrire autant qu'on voudra, c'est une composition comme un autre, qui part toute formée, comme Minerve, du cerveau de l'écrivain. Ce genre nous est donc absolument étranger.

The criticism may be true for certain dialogues but is unjust for the literary genre itself. The Oxford Classical Dictionary²⁶ affirms a historical source of dialogues.

²⁴ A. Croiset, Guerre du Péloponèse, Paris, Hachette, 1886, p. 68 ff.; quoted by M. Ruch, Op. Cit., p. 25-26.

²⁵ J. de Maistre, Soirées de Saint-Petersbourg, viiie Entretien, Lyon-Paris, 1870, II, p. 92 ff.

²⁶ The Oxford Classical Dictionary, s.v. Greek Dialogue, nos., 2 and 3, 1949, p. 273 ff.

In the evolution of this literary type, tradition - "vetustatis fides, ab hominibus magnis praeceptorum loco ficta" (Quintilian, 12, 4, 2) - is all powerful. It obliges respect for myth in tragedy and explains why Plato until almost the end of his life retains the Socratic myth in representing him as an apologist, an ideal figure or the spokesman for the Academy. And since the Greeks had only one type of tragedy - historical, Aristotle was able to assimilate mythology with history. Thus myths, transformed into tragedies, are conformed to the fides historica, while comedies are pure fiction. One might suppose then that dialogue for the Greeks would be a serious type situated between tragedy which is the imitative history and comedy which is pure invention.

By comparing dialogues with historical works, speeches, narrations, and myths we see that it possesses a probability resembling most closely that of historical works. It is a superior type of fiction, penetrated with reality so that one might call it "an ideal reconstruction".

In summing up our knowledge of the theory of dialogue, we see that although the ancients never asked themselves the true nature of dialogue and consequently provide no clear answer, it originated from three sources: drama, rhetoric and history. As a reproduction of a drama which is concerned with ideas, an instrument of persuasion and an expression of truth, dialogue is related to drama by its form, to oratory by its

need to persuade and to history by its probability.

Between drama, rhetoric and history, however, there is no separation; these attitudes exist independently only in theory. The epopee contains dialogues which belong to drama; didactic poems contain myths which belong to epic narrations; drama even from its origin has a didactic purpose. Dialogue, however, is related to these three types simultaneously: it is an action (μιμησις) analogous to a real action, which should persuade (πιθανότης) although it is founded on an invention or at least a transformation of the real (ποίησις). Thus drama, discourse and history contributed to the creation of this literary type which alone satisfies the requirements of imitation, probability and creation.

In the final analysis, though, dialogue originated above all by the need to render objective, to make ideas common and this tendency is manifested by the increasing development of prose which also invents and creates. This is the complex and varied origin of the dialogue form.

The preliminary study on the theory of dialogues shows that this literary form is not restrained by explicit rules. Its form, thus, governed only by tradition, is subject to change when various authors adapt it to suit their particular needs. Some of these changes are more evident than others.

One particular characteristic of dialogue form which has changed, that of structure, has been the topic of a

particular study by A. Andrieu.²⁷ In tracing the dialogue structure from Plato to Cicero, he has indicated the possible forms it may follow. His study is based upon the recorded ideas of the authors upon their own works, and from these ideas he has reconstructed the history of dialogue structure.

Other forms of evolution are seen in the changes from the Socratic question and answer method to a more rhetorical method, in the conception of historical truth, types and duration of scenes, purposes of the prooemium, author's role and many other minor traits. By retracing the practices of the most important authors we are able to determine the manner in which the Octavius resembles or differs from previous authors.

²⁷ J. Andrieu, Le Dialogue Antique, Structure et Présentation, Paris, Les Belles-Lettres, 1954, 366p.

CHAPTER II

DIALOGUE IN GREEK LITERATURE

Almost all of the characteristics of Greek dialogues may be found in the works of Plato and Aristotle. Only a few characteristics of other authors can be retraced.

1. Plato's Dialogues.

Plato's dialogues are characterized by a preference for dramatic speech over narrative speech and narration. They also show dramatization in character portrayal, setting, tension of the lector and occasion for the discussion. Dramatization decreases in the last dialogues, however, under the influence of rhetoric.

In a text of Republic (III, 394, b) a distinction is made between narration or indirect speech in which the author transposes everything into his own words and direct speech which reproduces the words of the speaker verbatim. According to Diogenes Laertius (3, 50) and Plutarch (Quaestiones Conviviales 7, 8, 1) Plato's direct speech may be either dramatic, i.e. similar to the speech used in dramas, or narrative as when a narrator appears to relate the speeches.

Plato preferred the dramatic speech over narrative speech in his dialogues. This may be inferred from the text

of Republic (III, 394, b) where it is presented as a development and perfecting of narration. It may also be concluded from the prologue to Theaetetus (143 b) where Euclide related a conversation in its first dramatic form to avoid the monotonous insertions "he said, I said" of narrative speech.¹ It was also the practice of Plato to introduce juxtaposed replies in the course of a conversation related in narrative speech,² and to employ dramatic speech in most of his dialogues.³ Dramatic speech is used exclusively in the first and last six dialogues he wrote.⁴

Reasons for his preference of this type may be traced to his early career as a dramatic poet.⁵ When he became a

1 Plato's desire to avoid the use of insertions is quite understandable after one reads in the Parmenides (137) the cumbersome formula "Antiphon told us that Pythodorus said that Parmenides said".

2 Cf. Plato, Parmenides, 137 c.

3 He uses it exclusively in twenty of twenty-eight dialogues.

4 Plato, Hippias Minor, Alcibiades, Apology, Euthyphro, Crito, Greater Hippias, and Sophist, Politicus, Philebus, Timaeus, Critias, Laws. The Apology is included here because although it resembles a recorded speech it also contains a few questions and replies which associate it with dialogue.

5 Cf. Robin, Platon, Paris, Alcan, 1938, Ch. I, La Vie et les Ecrits, referred to by J. Laborderie, La Forme du Dialogue Platonicien de la Maturité, in L'Information Littéraire, 12th year, 1960, No. 2, p. 64.

disciple of Socrates he renounced his literary career⁶ but found that dramatic speech was the best one suited to preserve the memory of a living presence and keep alive the spirit of Socrates.⁷ The primary purpose of the dialogues was not to dramatize the sayings and doings of Socrates but to fix a scene of life.⁸

Narrative speech was also used effectively in eight works.⁹ Insertions were employed with good effect,¹⁰ even to indicate a time displacement.¹¹ Narrative speech is employed in the preliminary conversations of five dialogues¹² and in the bodies of three others. The reports may be either first (Phaedo) or second hand (Symposium).

There are three reasons given for Plato's use of narrative dialogue. By it he was able to achieve dramatic

6 J. Laborderie, La Forme du Dialogue Platonicien de la Maturité, in L'Information Littéraire, 12th year, 1960, No. 2, p. 64.

7 A. E. Taylor, Plato, The Man and His Work, London, Methuen and Co. Ltd., sixth edition, 1949, p. 21.

8 U. V. Wilamowitz, Platon, Sein Leben und seine Werke, Berlin, Weidmann, 3rd ed., 1929, II, p. 29; quoted by M. Ruch, Le Préambule dans les Oeuvres Philosophiques de Cicéron, p. 19.

9 Plato, Lysis, Charmides, Protagoras, Phaedo, Symposium, Euthydemus, Republic and Parmenides.

10 J. Andrieu, Le Dialogue Antique, p. 316-317.

11 Id., Ibid., p. 320.

12 Plato, Lysis, Charmides, Protagoras, Republic and Parmenides.

life and color¹³ even if this was not his foremost intention. Narrative speech in the prologue also enabled him to interpret and dedicate the work (Parmenides). It was also able to accommodate more than four interlocutors.¹⁴

Dramatization may not have been the primary aim of Plato's dialogues but it exists to such an extent that Aristotle did not hesitate to classify them with poetry (Poetics, 1, 1447, b, 11). Dramatization is most evident in character portrayal, setting, tension of the lector as he arrives at the truth, and in the occasion of the discussion.

Socrates always plays the leading role but there are many other personages and diversity in action.¹⁵ Speeches are imitative in general form and tone to those given by the real personages.¹⁶ Interlocutors are portrayed in their original personality¹⁷ with all their individual traits.¹⁸ In the last dialogues, however, Socrates does not always play the leading role. He does not enter into the conversation of the Laws at

13 A. E. Taylor, Op. Cit., p. 19.

14 J. Andrieu, Op. Cit., pp. 285 and 306 ff.

15 M. Ruch, Le Préambule dans les Oeuvres Philosophiques de Cicéron, p. 34.

16 M. Roustan, Le Dialogue, p. 110-111.

17 Id., ibid., p. 22.

18 E. Chambry, Platon, Oeuvres Complètes, Introduction to Vol. 1, Paris, Garnier, 1947, p. xxiv.

all. Even when he is present, his personality, together with that of the other participants is submerged by the argument itself. Dramatization of characters thus gives way to the influence of rhetoric in the last dialogues of Plato.

In the first dialogues the scenes approach those of dramatic poetry.¹⁹ Socrates joins a discussion which may take place anywhere, often in the streets of Athens. Knowledge of the local and temporal circumstances proceeds by allusions to a great extent so that it is often difficult to situate the scene. With the use of narrative dialogue he was able to give a more elaborate setting to the work, and overcome the fortuitous aspect of previous dialogues.²⁰ In the last works, however, details of the scene are submerged by the argument.

Tension of the lector as he progressively sees the truth is another element of dramatization. This too is subject to change. The first dialogues proceeded slowly by a devious route of questions and answers.²¹ In the last dialogues the exposition is more rhetorical with little care for plausible

19 M. Ruch, Op. Cit., p. 33.

20 J. Laborderie, Art. Cit., p. 65-66.

21 According to A. Puech, the structural complication of apparent digressions from which there is an imperceptible return to the main theme is ascribed to Plato's more or less conscious imitation of Homeric composition, especially in the Iliad. Cf. article Quelques Remarques sur l'Art de la Composition dans les Dialogues de Platon, in Comptes Rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 1940, p. 319-322.

duration and very few questions and answers.²² The sceptic attitude of Socrates too is abandoned in favor of a dogmatic exposition.²³

Some of the dialogues too attempt to be reproductions of conversations which took place during historical events. The Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, and Phaedo portray scenes and incidents at the end of Socrates' life. Charmides is attached to the battle of Potidaea. By attempting to reproduce with historical accuracy, the conversations assume a dramatic tone.

Dramatization was not the primary intention of Plato, but the practice is evident. Authors attribute this to two reasons; Plato had a great artistic ability²⁴ combined with a penetrating psychological insight.²⁵

A preference for dramatic speech over narrative, and a subconscious dramatization in the first dialogues which is replaced in the last dialogues by a rhetorical form - these are the characteristics of Plato's dialogues.

22 e.g. Plato, Laws.

23 J. Laborderie, Art. Cit., p. 65.

24 E. Chambry, Op. Cit., p. xxvi.

25 M. Rouston, Op. Cit., p. 26-27.

2. Aristotle's Dialogues.²⁶

Aristotle's dialogues are characterized by the alternation of continuous and rhetorical speeches, the practice of entering the scene himself, and the custom of introducing by particular prooemia.

Some fragments show Aristotle still retaining the Socratic technique of question and answer but when the mass of knowledge was too great to be accommodated by the Socratic form of conversation Aristotle employed a new form. He opposed one speech to another; one interlocutor proposed the subject, assumed the direction and gave a resumé at the end. Speeches were composed according to the principles of rhetoric and the dramatic element was almost inexistant. This represents another step after the Laws of Plato in which a single speech was predominant; with Aristotle it was a disputatio.²⁷

Aristotle's greatest innovation was to enter himself into the scene as an interlocutor or protagonist. Those in which he participated as protagonist led to a conclusion.²⁸ The other dialogues varied greatly and presented all the intermediary degrees between dialogue and treatise. By

26 The study by M. Ruch, Op. Cit., indicates the main characteristics. Cf. pp. 39-43, 50-51, 57-65, 325-328.

27 Cf. Cicero, De Oratore, 3, 80; Orator, 67.

28 Cicero, Academica Priora, 2, 59.

participating in the discussion Aristotle was also able to present his own opinion on a topic. This is an advance from Plato's method.

There is an innovation too in the use of prooemia. Aristotle divided his works into discussions of plausible and logical length, and introduced each part or book with a separate prooemium. These served to introduce summarily the personages and to give preparatory philosophical explanations. Aristotle appeared in them as composer and to address the lector directly.

In summarizing the characteristics of Aristotle's dialogues, one sees that they are generally distinguished from Plato's by the contradictory conference, a disputatio in contrarias partes, (Cicero, Fam., 1, 9, 23), by its continuous exposition, (Att., 13, 19, 4; Quint., 3, 5, 1), and by the author's participation in the prooemium to present his personal opinions, and in the dialogue as protagonist.

3. Dialogues of Others.²⁹

A few characteristics of the lost dialogues between Aristotle and Cicero may be traced through the practices of Cicero.

²⁹ The work of Ruch, Op. Cit., p. 45-55, provides numerous ideas and references on the dialogue form of Greek authors besides Plato and Aristotle.

Philo of Larissa and Antiochus of Ascalon exposed their ideas by alternating the thesis and antithesis, representatives of different schools successively taking their stand.

Dicaearchus probably employed historical personages, political discussions and settings in the past.

Dialogues of Heraclides were divided into several books while the title was usually drawn from the content, not the interlocutors. Scenes portrayed the distant past and excluded the participation of himself and living persons. There were numerous and famous interlocutors, frequent comings and goings, changes in the group, extension of conversation over several days, changes in scenery, alternation of conversations and discourses, and a rich and varied setting from beginning to end. The discussion was linked to a narration and the dialogue presented as "news". Like the dialogues of Aristotle they were probably introduced by prooemia which were somewhat independent from the subject of the dialogue.

Up to Terence the prologue kept its original characteristics defined by Aristotle,³⁰ then it became simple exposition no longer determined by the contents of the work but by the circumstances which motivated its composition.

30 Aristotle, Poet., 1452, b 19.

Characteristics of Greek dialogues foreshadow the characteristics of the Latin dialogues.

CHAPTER III

DIALOGUE IN LATIN LITERATURE

Use of dialogue was not reserved to the Greek writers. The Latin authors employed it from the earliest times and Cicero brought it to its perfection.

1. Latin Dialogue in General.

Plautus and Terence employed dramatic dialogue in their comedies, but they simply borrowed the form from the Greek models. The Latin form probably appeared first with the Satires of Lucilius.¹ By this time the dialogue form was widely diffused by post-Socratic philosophers and the cynics.

Prose dialogue at Rome began with M. Junius Brutus who composed his three books De Iure Civili in the form of dialogues with his sons (Cicero, De Oratore, 2, 224). These, like Cicero's, and the Roman dialogue generally, followed the Aristotelian rather than the Platonic model: the principal part in each dialogue was played by one interlocutor (sometimes the author himself) who expounded his view dogmatically in long speeches, the part of the other characters being

¹ R. Hirzel, Der Dialog, Leipzig, Hirzel, 1895, I, p. 423 ff., reported by Pierre Grimal, Caractères Généraux du Dialogue Romain de Lucilius à Cicéron in L'Information Littéraire, 7th year, 1955, No. 5, p. 192.

reduced to a minimum. Each dialogue was preceded by a staging giving the place and the occasion of, with the names of the participants in, the conversation.

Latin dialogues are generally characterized by the aristocratic tone seen in the setting and characters, and in the effort to individualize the personalities of these characters.

2. Cicero's Dialogues.

Cicero's dialogues show multiple influences of the Latin dialogue tradition and the followers of the eminent Greek philosophers. Cicero also tried to imitate Plato,² Aristotle,³ and Heraclides but with much liberty. He tried to break with the ancient Latin tradition⁴ by assuming a broader and less scholarly attitude than that of contemporary philosophers, and broke with the cynic influences and Menipian dialogue. His dialogues, however, reply to conditions of Roman life and thought by reflecting an essentially

2 G. Charlier, Le Dialogue dans l'Octavius de Minucius Félix, in Musée Belge, Vol. 10, 1906, p. 81.

3 J. Bayet, Littérature Latine, p. 206.
M. Ruch, Le Préambule dans les Oeuvres Philosophiques de Cicéron, p. 8, says that after Plato there remains practically nothing of the models from which he was inspired. Fragments permit the reconstruction of a few ideas, but there is no enlightenment on the form used.

4 P. Grimal, Caractères Généraux du Dialogue Romain de Lucilius à Cicéron, p. 198.

~~aristocratic~~ society interested in action more than in contemplation.

Prooemia of Cicero's dialogues in general possess a unity with the body of the work achieved by the author's appearance in them to link the past with the present, to present the topic, and to indicate the manner in which the work is to be understood. The three-fold purpose of the prooemium: expository, prefatory, and historical is derived from Plato, Aristotle and his own invention. Marking the limits of the preliminary conversation is a promenade which ends when the main topic of conversation is opened. As a preface it renders the discussion intelligible by summarizing traditional doctrine. Historical justification is achieved by relating the circumstances of the conversation, its time and place. A developing individualism and aristocratic spirit require that philosophic discussions correspond to periods of otium⁵ and preferably in one of his country villas.⁶

With regard to the body of the dialogue the discussion follows the rhetorical style of Aristotle rather than the short question and answer method of Plato. It was aided by the Roman practice of altercatio (Brutus, 158 and 173) and

5 M. Ruch, Op. Cit., p. 73-85.

6 J. Bayet, Op. Cit., p. 206, finds that the gardens of Cicero's villas form "cadres naturels aimables, un peu artificiels" for the discussions.

the disputatio in utramque partem.⁷ The authenticity of the discussions is determined by the concept of sententia⁸ according to which only the basis and general parts are real. They are thus ideal reproductions or contemporaneous or past reality. Characters employed are important men capable of giving weight to his ideas (De Amicitia, 4). In the first dialogues the personalities of these men are respected; they are portrayed and speak in a manner conformed to their character and situation, but also ideally in function with the data.⁹ Later on, however, they tended to be less historical.¹⁰ Scenes may depict the past or the present and the personages deceased or living. Dialogues may even be written in memory of the deceased. Discussions are also of probable length and introduced by separate prefaces which attempt to unite the various parts.¹¹

7 The Latin notion which corresponds to the Greek dialogos is implied in the verbs disserere (to link ideas) and disputare (to examine point by point a question), whence the term of disputationes which designates the genre.

A disputatio or discussion would take the form of a treatise if it were not transformed into a conversation with a real or fictive interlocutor. Cf. M. Ruch, Op. Cit., p. 169.

8 M. Ruch, Op. Cit., p. 404-405.

9 Id., ibid., p. 364-365.

10 Id. ibid., p. 19.

11 Id., ibid., p. 332.

From texts of the Tusculanes (I, 8) and De Amicitia, (3), it would appear that Cicero preferred dramatic speech for its technical facility and actualization. However, the excuse given by Cicero for its use in De Amicitia is not valid¹² because he simply copied the transitional phrase from Plato's Theaetetus (143 b). Most of the time Cicero employed narrative speech with the possibility of adding juxtaposed replies during the course of the conversation. His use of insertions is rather limited in variety¹³ and they manifest a certain rigidity which the author probably felt when composing his Tusculanes. They did not, however, cause him to abandon narrative speech for dramatic speech entirely.

These characteristics of Greek and Latin dialogues form a context from which one may evaluate the dialogue of Octavius of Minucius Felix.

12 Id., ibid., p. 319.

13 J. Andrieu, Le Dialogue Antique, p. 320.

Part two

DIALOGUE FORM OF THE OCTAVIUS

CHAPTER IV

ITS DIALOGUE FORM IN GENERAL

By the information gathered in determining the nature of dialogue and its evolution in form from Plato to Cicero, the task of evaluating the dialogue form of the Octavius is greatly facilitated.

Most authors, when speaking of the Octavius, commonly classify it as a dialogue without further restrictions. There are some, however, who find it necessary to give a few precisions. G. Charlier even wrote a short article on this particular problem.¹

In his study, Mr. Charlier² presents two conceptions of dialogue. For some, he says, dialogue is a formal artifice to confront the arguments of two contrary theses. By limiting it to a dialectical procedure, they render the scene useless and personality of characters of little value. For others, dialogue is a dramatical composition within a precise setting and with original characters. Its didactic character remains but the form is not simply a decorative ornament to conceal the dryness of argumentation, it is a familiar

1 G. Charlier, Le Dialogue dans l'Octavius de Minucius Félix, in Musée Belge, Vol. 10, 1906, p. 75-82.

2 Id., ibid., p. 76.

conversation, tempered, delicate and polite.

After noting that the critics adverse to Minucius Félix find a grave fault in the main part of the dialogue by its lack of a question and answer type of discussion, Mr. Charlier goes on to say that there is little more than two long speeches of lawyers, each of whom defends his theses with numerous and varied arguments without a single interruption. It would appear to him that the conversational quality is lacking:

Reconnaissons-le: il n'y a point là de dialogue véritable, et il serait inutile de chercher les qualités spéciales que requiert la forme dialoguée dans ces deux monologues coupés d'un court intermède. Minucius lui-même d'ailleurs - il le déclare par la bouche de ses personnages - ne voit dans son oeuvre qu'une actio suivie d'une responsio.³

Then, after tracing the outline and general ideas of the work he concludes: "on ne peut ranger l'Octavius dans aucune catégorie bien tranchée de dialogues".⁴

R. Arbesmann⁵ too, adds a restrictive qualification to the attribution of the term dialogue: "The Octavius is written in the literary form of a dialogue, which is, however, sui generis." His argument is:

3 Id., ibid., p. 79.

4 Id., ibid., p. 82.

5 R. Arbesmann, Minucius Felix Octavius Translated, in the Fathers of the Church, Vol. 10, 1950, p. 314.

The usual form of literary dialogue, especially practiced and brought to perfection by Plato, and imitated by Cicero in his De Natura Deorum, presents several interlocutors who carry on a dialogue in the form of a conversation, enlivened by questions and answers, difficulties raised and solutions given in the manner of a serious conversation.

After reading the Octavius one must agree that this work possesses a very limited conversational quality. Although it satisfies the philosophical and didactic requirements of the definitions given by The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature and Diogenes Laertius,⁶ and possesses a style imitative of the characters involved,⁷ there is no question and answer type of conversation. However, we may ask whether a question and answer type of conversation is really necessary for a discussion. It was mainly in the first works of Plato up to Theaetetus that dialogue form employed a question and answer type of conversation. Plato's last dialogues possess very little of it, while Aristotle's dialogues were even more rhetorical and Cicero's dialogues, especially the De Natura Deorum, contain no question and answer type of conversation worth mentioning. With Cicero this procedure was replaced by an exchange of ideas, each speaker exposing his ideas with few interruptions.

6 Cf. above, p. 2.

7 Cf. Plato's Influence, below, p. 41.

Neither the Octavius nor the De Natura Deorum thus fulfill the notion of Diogenes Laertius (3, 48). However, this notion of dialogue cannot be used for all dialogues because it fails to embrace the evolution of this form from Plato's dramatic to Cicero's rhetorical practice. The Octavius must not be excluded from the classification as a dialogue simply because it lacks a question and answer type of conversation. In its exposition it follows the rhetorical form in vogue at that time and satisfies as well as the De Natura Deorum the present day definition of a "viva-voce discussion".⁸

G. Charlier's division of dialogue into two forms is an oversimplification of the subject. His two conceptions of dialogue represent the antipodes of the many conceptions of dialogue. In reality, there are many degrees from one position to the other and the clearest evidence we have of this is the evolution of form in Plato's dialogues. The Octavius corresponds most closely to the second conception of Mr. Charlier; it is a dramatical composition within a precise setting and with original characters. Later on it will be shown how its form of exposition and discussion resemble that of Book I of De Natura Deorum. The one cannot be excluded from the classification of dialogue without the exclusion of the other.

⁸ Cf. above, p. 1.

Since the conversation of this dialogue is in contrast to the question and answer type normally used by Plato, and since in this respect it follows the De Natura Deorum, it is most confusing to state as does Arbesmann⁹ that Cicero imitated in his De Natura Deorum the dialogue form of Plato. In reality the rhetorical form of conversation employed by Cicero is in direct contrast with that employed by Plato. And since the term dialogue is readily attributed to the works of both authors, it may also be attributed without hesitation to the Octavius.

Having thus decided that the Octavius is really a dialogue one may go on to see what influences from previous writings it has undergone. The relationship to the dialogues of Plato, Aristotle and Cicero will be studied in detail, but Minucius did not restrict his sources to these authors alone. He seems, in fact, to be inspired by the whole Greek and Latin tradition.

A study of the sources for the Octavius leads one to conclude with P. Monceaux that this charming work is in great part:

une mosaïque d'idées, de scènes et de détails
pris de tous côtés ... ¹⁰ Minucius appartient à

9 R. Arbesmann, Op. Cit., p. 314.

10 P. Monceaux, Histoire Littéraire de l'Afrique Chrétienne, Paris, Vol. I, 1901, p. 490.

cette famille d'aimables lettres qui font quelque chose avec rien, qui n'inventent guère, qui imitent beaucoup et s'emparent sans scrupule du bien d'autrui, mais qui valent par la mise au point, par le bonheur du rendu et le sentiment de nuances.^{10b}

A similar appreciation is expressed by J. P. Waltzing:

L'Octavius est une mosaïque de pensées et de style, si habilement, si naturellement agencée, que le lecteur non prévenu ne s'aperçoit pas qu'il a affaire à un vrai travail de marqueterie.¹¹

Minucius seems to be well versed in Greek and Latin classics as well as in the Christian apologists. Besides the influences of the principal authors: Plato, Aristotle and Cicero, there are other images and expressions drawn from Homer, Hesiod, Xenophon, Florus, Horace, Juvenal, Lucan, Lucretius, Martial, Ovid, Sallust, Tibullus, Virgil and Seneca.¹² Another author which may have inspired Minucius is Justin - Trogus the historian.¹³ Although it was mainly the content of these authors upon which Minucius drew inspiration,

^{10b} Id., ibid., p. 508.

¹¹ J. P. Waltzing, Minucius Félix et Platon, in Mélanges Boissier, Paris, Fontemoing, 1903, p. 455.

¹² J. P. Waltzing in his commentary of the Octavius indicates which passages are similar to works of previous authors. Cf. Octavius de M. Minucius Félix, in Collection de Classiques Latins Comparés, Paris, Desclée, De Brouwer et Cie., Edition A, 1909, p. 45-183.

¹³ Cf. M. Galdi, Quid Minucius Felix in Octavio Conscribendo a Trogo seu Iustino Deriveraverit, in Rivista Indo-Greca-Italica di filologia, lingua, antichità, 1932, p. 136-139.

they indirectly influenced his form as well. It would have been impossible to present their numerous arguments in a more concise form than in the rhetorical form of exposition used in the two speeches.

Many of the resemblances to other authors could be due to chance and literary traditions; numerous ideas, facts, phrases and dictums were common property of the cultivated class. So also with the various characteristics of dialogue form. It is impossible, in most cases, to state whether Minucius follows a general tradition or whether he borrows directly from a particular model.

CHAPTER V

PLATO'S INFLUENCE

Influences of the Platonic dialogue are seen most vividly in the picturesque introduction, character portrayal and digression on the merits of argumentation. Besides these, there are a few minor characteristics which resemble the works of this Greek writer.

A pleasant surprise awaits the lector in the first pages of the Octavius. One would ordinarily expect of an apologist a work which is more attached to the force of arguments and value of demonstrations than to the beauty of form and style. Instead of a dialectician we find a literary work of one who in many places "n'est pas loin d'être un poète".¹

For Baylis, "A bare outline can give no impression of the extreme grace and beauty of the prologue... reminding one, as it does, so forcibly of the opening of Florus in his Virgilius orator an poeta?"²

Herbert Wright says:

The dialogue, in spite of the inevitable traces of the general decadence of taste, attains a rare degree of limpidity, elegance and grace. The

1 G. Charlier, Le Dialogue dans l'Octavius de Minucius Félix, p. 76.

2 H. J. Baylis, Minucius Felix and His Place Among the Early Fathers of the Latin Church, p. 2.

~~introduction~~ especially is a masterpiece because of the naiveté and naturalness with which the stage is set.³

Everything in fact seems ordered to give these introductory pages a particularly powerful charm. G. Charlier remarks on the sentiment:

Ces regrets accordés à l'ami disparu, ce rappel mélancolique, en quelques phrases si simples, mais si attristées, d'une amitié que l'on sent aussi profonde que sincère, en voilà assez déjà pour intéresser et retenir ceux qu'enchantent toujours l'expression délicate d'un sentiment vrai.⁴

When we come to the part which could be called the staging of the discussion we are captivated, won over. These pages where the description alternates so well with the conversation are really charming. Fr. Record has remarked this:

Il faut reconnaître que ce petit livre ne manque pas de charme. Il est agréable à lire. Le prologue est une des plus jolies choses de la littérature latine. Voyez comme l'auteur nous présente d'une façon charmante le bien-être de ces citadins que viennent caresser les brises marines, le plaisir qu'ils éprouvent à sentir leurs pieds s'enfoncer dans le sable qui cède...comme en quelques lignes il nous trace merveilleusement un paysage et comme il nous fait bien sentir la douceur de ce soir d'automne où sur la plage les gens sérieux se délassent à voir des enfants faire des ricochets?⁵

R. Arbesmann is touched by the setting also:

³ H. Wright, Minucius Felix, in The Encyclopedia Americana, Vol. XIX, 1958, p. 214.

⁴ G. Charlier, art. cit., p. 76.

⁵ Fr. Record, L'Octavius de Minucius Félix, Traduction et Etude, in Science et Religion, Nos. 619, 620, 1911, p. 20.

The author gives a beautiful description of nature, in some instances reminiscent of Theocritean naturalism: the mild autumn weather, the gentle breeze blowing from the sea, the beach where the sand yields to the bare feet, the twisting and turning waves, the boats drawn up on their baulks, the breakwater of piled rocks running out into the sea, the merry scene of boys eagerly engaged in the sport of skipping flat stones over the water. The setting possesses such a graceful charm that it can hardly be surpassed by any other piece of its kind in Latin literature.⁶

All this shows a sober and refined art suited to prepare minds to accept the arguments which follow. The entire prologue seems to be inspired by works of Plato:

Involontairement on songe à Platon et aux prologues exquis de maint de ses dialogues, du Phedre et du Protagoras, pour n'en pas citer d'autres. La ressemblance est même plus intime qu'elle n'apparaît à première vue. "Platon, notent MM. Croiset (Hist. de la litt. grecque. Tome IV, p. 327), ... sait découvrir entre le cadre et le sujet des convenances intimes et exquisés." On peut, ce nous semble, en dire autant de Minucius Félix.⁷

By its picturesque setting, sentimental descriptions, naturalness in staging and relationship between the setting and subject the Octavius shows the inspiration by Plato.

Despite the various merits of the introduction, it seems at first sight to be incomplete; one finds only a few details on the personality of the interlocutors. Minucius has even been reproached for this: "Il y a trois personnages

6 R. Arbesmann, Minucius Félix Octavius Translated, p. 315.

7 G. Charlier, art. cit., p. 76-77.

mais d'une psychologie bien sommaire: ce sont des rôles plutôt que des hommes".⁸ This it seems, is an exaggeration. It is true that there are no portraits in the Octavius nor even sketches of personages. However, Minucius has not failed here and there to slip into his work some traits which, in a few words, give an outline of a personality.

The character of Caecilius is painted in very few words. From the start, Minucius reveals his extreme sensitivity of self-love. His usual gaiety (4,2) suddenly changes when he understands the indirect reproach of Octavius. A simple observation of Octavius suffices to sting him to the quick, he interprets it as an indirect reproach of his ignorance, and full of spite, he remains silent, troubled and unsociable. During the walk to the seashore, his face reflects his sorrow which prevents him from enjoying or even heeding the charming play of children (4, 1-2). When Minucius succeeds in getting him to confess his trouble, Caecilius displays his pride and impulsive character. In his presumption, he even challenges Octavius to a debate (4, 3-5).

His speech also suits his character. Beginning with an apology of paganism, he abandons the calm tone of conversation, becomes indignant and speaks forcefully and with vivacity. His impassioned criticism of Christian beliefs and

⁸ P. Monceaux, Histoire Littéraire de l'Afrique Chrétienne, p. 500.

practices is followed by a tone of sincerity when, as one of those who conquered the world, he attributes the supreme power of Rome to the protection of the gods. Exulting in his argumentation, he ends his speech with a triumphant smile of contempt. (Cf. 5,4; 12,1-2; 16,1; 16,5-6).

The charges of Caecilius show that Minucius did not wish to give Octavius an easy victory. Caecilius appears as a sensible and cultivated man whose attack proceeds from honourable motives. He is worthy of becoming a Christian. He speaks with a striking vigor which is astonishing when one considers that his speech in which Christianity is so badly treated, is the work of a Christian.

The end (Chapters 39-40) is that Caecilius confesses himself vanquished by the weight of the arguments brought forth by Octavius, or rather victorius, since he gladly ranges himself on the conquering side and rejoices to be a sharer in his friend's victory which has brought himself to triumph over error. He adopts the new faith, and announces that he will need a few more clarifications, but at another time, since the sun is already sinking in the west.

The description of haughty self-love, troubling susceptibility, proud confidence in oratorical abilities are a few of the complicated psychological qualities with which Minucius pictures Caecilius. By their complexity, they certainly do not merit the severe criticism of P. Monceaux.⁹

Minucius seems to have observed very closely this character whose principal traits he describes with classical brevity of detail. With G. Charlier,¹⁰ one might even, in keeping the proportions between talent and genius, compare Caecilius to Meno of the Gorgias.

A sort of picture could also be drawn of Octavius from the reminiscence of Minucius on his departed friend (1; 2, 1-2) and from his reply to the diatribe of Caecilius (Chapter 16-38). One notices the emphatic and verbose arguments of a lawyer, the pride and dignity of an honest man, his moderation in debate despite his ardent, profound and sincere conviction.

The tone of the speeches too is modulated to correspond to the temperaments of the two debaters and in this way the character portrayal is enhanced. This imitative element of the Octavius, just as in the works of Plato, does not have for its purpose merely to dramatize the debate; it rather serves to give historical veracity to the characters. The language used and rhetorical style are well in accordance with the speeches of lawyers and educated men. Imitative speech gives an air of actuality and historical truth to the debate, a characteristic probably drawn from Plato.

9 Cf. above, p. 44.

10 G. Charlier, art. cit., p. 77.

The influence of Plato upon the character portrayal by Minucius, however, is not as evident as his influence upon the intermission. Plato's influence is generally admitted: "Aucun écrivain n'est mentionné aussi souvent par Minucius Félix que Platon".¹¹ Although Kuehn¹² tried to prove that he read and studied him, that he had a profound knowledge of him, the contrary was affirmed by Reinhold Agahd.¹³ J. P. Waltzing picks up the discussion, and arguing from the similarity of ideas and form of the transition of Octavius (Chapter 14-15) with that of Phaedo (Chapter 38-41 or Par. 89c-91c) concludes that Minucius Felix certainly knew the work of Plato and borrowed the intermission directly from him:

Minucius Félix avait besoin d'un intermède pour reposer les esprits entre les deux discours: c'est une nécessité du dialogue tel qu'il l'a conçu ... Suivant son habitude, il n'invente pas cet intermède, il le prend à Platon.¹⁴

The idea is reaffirmed by him a few years later:

Il cite souvent Platon et il lui a emprunté à coup sûr directement l'intermède qui sépare le réquisitoire de Cécilius de la réplique d'Octavius. Nous

11 J. P. Waltzing, Minucius Félix et Platon, p. 456.

12 R. Kuehn, Der Octavius des Minucius Felix, Leipzig, Teubner, 1882, p. 16-20, reported by Waltzing in Minucius Félix et Platon, p. 456.

13 R. Agahd, Quaestiones Varronianae, in Jahrbucher für Klassische Philologie, XXIVer Supplementhand, 1898, p. 54, reported by Waltzing in Minucius Félix et Platon, p. 456.

14 J. P. Waltzing, Minucius Félix et Platon, p. 456.

croysons qu'il avait lu Platon et qu'il le cite de première main dans plus d'un passage.¹⁵

Fahy too recognizes this copying:

Minucius shows a distinct acquaintance with the works of Plato. His digression on the merits of debate in Chapter 14-15, serving as a transition between the speeches of Caecilius and Octavius, is clearly after Plato's Phaedo (89c - 91c) being almost a literal translation.¹⁶

The intermission consists of Chapters 14 - 15 in which Minucius, the presiding arbiter, speaks of the allurements of fine oratory as a dangerous way of obscuring the evidence and, hence, the truth. This is a suggestion to which Caecilius objects as betraying prejudice on the part of a judge who ought to be impartial.

Besides the picturesque introduction, character portrayal and digression on the merits of argumentation, there are several other minor disconnected characteristics which find a precedent in Plato's works. Dialogue form itself, although not exactly invented by Plato, was given such impetus by him that he may be rightly considered the pioneer of the literary form. Narrative speech combined with narration may be related to the Lysis, Charmides, Protagoras, Cratylus and Parmenides. The same works precede the Octavius in the use of a proemium. Dedication of the work to a friend was already

15 J. P. Waltzing, Octavius de M. Minucius Félix, Edition A., 1909, p. xix.

16 T. Fahy, Marcus Minucius Felix, "Octavius", p. 20.

practised in Theaetetus. Use of a person's name for the title of the work is seen in Crito, Lysis, Charmides, Phaedo and many others. By the fortuitous manner in which the discussion begins, it follows a Platonic form too.

Like Plato's dialogues which contain several theses, an element which distinguishes them from the development of a general proposition, the Octavius seems to contain several theses. J. G. Lindneri lists four of them.¹⁷ Other authors also, in giving a general introduction to the Octavius, enumerate many arguments developed, but none of them has presented the arguments as a single thesis.

In its manner of continuing a conversation from beginning to end, the Octavius would resemble Plato's Socratic dialogues. The scene of the Octavius is static. Once the characters are placed in a group on the seashore the conversation continues to its end without interruption or change of scenery. This static element could have been borrowed from Plato in whose scenes nothing extraordinary happens. The brevity of the dialogue, however, does not warrant a change, and even Cicero's dialogues, which are considered as dynamic, contain

¹⁷ J. G. Lindneri, Analysis Logica Dialogi, in P.L., 3, Col. 225-332.

Another minor study has been done on the arguments of the Octavius by Mlle. M. P. Desaulle: La Valeur et les Procédés de l'Argumentation dans l'Octavius de Minucius Félix, Mémoire de Diplôme d'Etudes Supérieures, Faculté des Lettres de Paris, à la Sorbonne, 1945, but this work was not left in the Library and therefore could not be obtained.

longer conversations without interruption. His De Natura Deorum will provide examples of this. Hence, the static character of the Octavius is not unusual when the brevity of the conversation is taken into consideration.

Lengthy speeches could also have been influenced by Plato. The practice of having the protagonists speak at length without interruption was started by Plato in his last dialogues - Sophist, Politicus, Philebus, Timaeus, and Laws, in which a single dogmatic speech is dominant. It was continued by Aristotle who broke completely with the Socratic method which did not record the opinion of every interlocutor but opposed one speech to another. After Aristotle, Philo of Larissa and Antiochus of Ascalon exposed their ideas by alternating the thesis and antithesis, representatives of different schools successively taking their stand. Cicero imitated this method, and speeches in his De Natura Deorum could well have served as models for those of the Octavius. In the final analysis, then, it is difficult to determine for sure which influence was predominant.

Most conspicuously in the descriptive introduction, character portrayal and intermission, and less so in a number of other minor ways is Plato's influence felt upon the Octavius. Although it cannot be stated for sure that Minucius was inspired by Plato in the minor characteristics of his dialogue form, the influence is possible. As to the descriptive

tive introduction and intermission, the influence is quite certain. Much less certain is the influence exerted by Aristotle upon the literary form of Octavius.

CHAPTER VI

ARISTOTLE'S INFLUENCE

Influences of Aristotle are seen mainly in the rhetorical form of exposition, the scientific form of discussion consisting of thesis and antithesis, and the entry of the author himself into the scene.

The Octavius differs from the Socratic form of dialogue by its rhetorical rather than conversational tone. This rhetorical form originated with the last works of Plato but received a great impetus from Aristotle's protreptics and Cicero's works. Speeches of the Octavius resemble those delivered in the law courts.

Quant aux discours, ce n'est plus la conversation familière de Socrate qui se poursuit lente, mais dramatique, et qui conduit les interlocuteurs au but, à travers milles dédales, mais sûrement. Ce sont deux avocats qui plaident devant un juge.¹

Commentators generally link up the rhetorical form of exposition with a Ciceronian pattern and the relationship is sometimes quite evident. However, it must be remembered that rhetorical speeches received their greatest development in Aristotle's dialogues. The form seemed as well adapted to his

¹ J. P. Waltzing, Octavius de M. Minucius Félix, Edition A, 1909, p. xiv.

subject matter and his mentality as it was to that of Minucius.

Two reasons for Minucius' use of a rhetorical form of exposition are given by G. Charlier,² the first stemming from the subject itself, the second in the particular mentality of the Latin race.

The subject is not simply a single point of philosophy or morals, but the encounter of two antithetical conceptions of the universe. It would have been out of the question to discuss point by point and slowly advance towards certitude. The ensemble would have been lost in the details, leaving only a confused impression. Minucius Felix realized this and preferred to unite all the arguments in two speeches thereby gaining in demonstration and general interest what it loses in historical probability.

The second reason given by G. Charlier lies in the particular mentality of the Latin people. Whereas the Greeks, desiring liberty in everything, could enjoy the abandoning of spirit in the flowered paths of a charming discussion, the Latins preferred a forceful exposition. Minucius is an orator above all, and when he must chose a literary form, it is in a discourse solidly constructed and not in a lively dialogue that he will express his thought.

² G. Charlier, Le Dialogue dans l'Octavius de Minucius Félix, p. 80-82.

Rhetorical speeches seem to be historically improbable, but the improbability is only partial. It exists only in the disposition of arguments grouped and united for the pagan and then the Christian thesis. Nothing, however, prevents us from believing the arguments were really produced during a real discussion. This is the opinion of most of those who have studied the Octavius. That is why, according to G. Charlier, the work of Minucius Felix cannot be ranked with the artificial dialogues in a class opposed to those of Plato:

Il n'a certes rien de ces froids entretiens philosophiques où des personnages sans vie réelle, créations artificielles et froides n'apparaissent que pour présenter l'un après l'autre les arguments de thèses opposées.³

Opposing arguments combined with a rhetorical form of exposition captivate the lector's interest:

Déjà séduit par les pages du début, le lecteur ne tarde pas être conquis par l'intérêt passionnant d'un débat qui présente, en une sorte de dyptique, deux conceptions antithétiques de la vie et de l'univers.⁴

Minucius is not to be upbraided for adopting an oratorical form. It permitted the arguments of Octavius to obtain a probability which justified the conclusion of this

3 Id., ibid., p. 82.

4 Id., ibid., p. 82.

apologetic dialogue, the conversion of Caecilius. Having foreseen the conclusion, the author chose a form to render it perfectly probable in all its details. Even the silence in admiration of Octavius' speech demonstrates the profound impression it made upon the auditors. Understandable also is the attitude of Caecilius who retains his impulsiveness and self-love as seen in the beginning: he desires further explanations the following day but considers himself already as a conqueror over error.

Minucius Felix entered into the most lively and troublesome controversy. He chose the richest and most beautiful of topics imaginable, the duel of two religions in the midst of an ancient, complex and cultured civilization. He displayed the conflict between the official religion almost identified with the state and supposed cause of its glory on the one hand, and a new religion, still mysterious, animated with some still unknown spirit, powerful in its beginnings as in its hopes and which holds the rights of conscience until it conquers the world and state itself.

The division of the dialogue is very simple. It consists simply of an attack on Christianity by Caecilius and a defense of it by Octavius. To this is added a four-chapter introduction (1-4), two chapters presenting a few reflexions by Minucius Felix to separate the two speeches (14-15), and a short epilogue (39-40).

Caecilius' speech presenting the pagan's case occupies approximately fourteen of the sixty-one pages in the work,⁵ while Octavius' speech presenting the Christian side takes almost forty-one pages. The remaining six pages are occupied by the introduction (three and one-half pages), intermission (one and one-half pages), and conclusion (one page). The bulk of the work, fifty-five out of sixty-one pages, consequently, is comprised of two speeches, that of Octavius being almost three times as long as that of Caecilius.

Caecilius first of all speaks as a sceptic of the New Academy or as a probabilist. He starts from the principle that truth cannot be attained and he is infuriated against the Christians, ignorant illiterates, who pretend to resolve the insoluble problem of our origin and destination. This he does in three successive theses:

1 - The puzzling origin of the universe can be explained without a Creator, and disorder in the world both physically and morally prevent us from believing in Providence. Blind chance rules all.

2 - As a consequence - it seems illogical and contradictory - the best attitude is to maintain the traditional

5 The length of the pages is calculated according to the Loeb edition.

religion which has been proven by time and produced the greatness of Rome.

3 - The Christian religion is immoral and absurd. Christians are accused of many abominable practices which he enumerates, and stupid beliefs among which he attacks especially the belief in a unique God, the resurrection of the body and reward or punishment after death.

Octavius refutes the ideas, one by one, with strict logic. His tone is sarcastic at times but he is calm in contrast to his lively opponent; at times he becomes very eloquent as when he describes the life of Christians and their heroism before their executioners. His arguments fall into three theses:

1 - There exists a unique God, Creator and Providence of the universe.

2 - The pagan religion is only a mass of absurd, degrading fables, and it certainly did not produce the greatness of Rome.

3 - The charges against Christians are only calumnies, and their beliefs are justified by the light of reason and philosophy.

This opposition of thesis and antithesis is a development of philosophical reflexion and as such, its origin may be traced back to the dialectics of Zeno of Elea (460 B.C.). Its use in discussion, however, was inaugurated by Aristotle.

(Cf. De Oratore, 3, 80; Orator, 67; Academica Priora, 2, 59).

An Aristotelian influence is also seen in the author's entry upon the scene. Aristotle differed from his master's desire to avoid subjectivism, and his participation in the dialogue as interlocutor lends historical probability to the work. The presence of Minucius in the dialogue also guarantees its historical probability. However, to avoid subjectivism, the debate is carried on by two other persons and the author's role as moderator is minimized by the surrender of Caecilius.

Minucius simply acts as narrator of the conversation. While contemplating and refreshing in his mind the memory of an intimate friend and companion, Octavius, Minucius recalls in particular the conversation in which his pagan friend Caecilius was converted from the folly of superstitions to the true religion by the arguments of Octavius. During the intermission, he exhorts the debaters not to lose sight of the value of arguments clothed by rhetoric and at the end he rapidly summarizes the results of the debate.

These characteristics, the rhetorical form of exposition, scientific discussion of thesis and antithesis and the author's participation in the conversation, are traits of Aristotle's dialogues which differ from those of Plato. Aristotle's influence on Minucius may be only indirect, however, since these characteristics as well as many others may

have been borrowed by Minucius directly from Cicero.

From what we may conjecture about the characteristics of dialogues by authors between Aristotle and Cicero, it would seem that these authors contributed nothing to the literary style of the Octavius.

CHAPTER VII

CICERO'S INFLUENCE

Cicero's dialogues had the greatest influence upon the Octavius. Many authors have remarked a general Ciceronian influence. Others have found that the De Natura Deorum seems to have served as a model for the general plan, character portrayal and religious content. Besides these, many other characteristics of the introduction and body follow general Ciceronian patterns.

The Octavius is said to be modelled on the lines of philosophical works of Cicero:

We find it to be a dialogue modelled on the type of the philosophical works of Cicero, whose writings, and in particular the De Natura Deorum and the De Divinatione, Minucius has evidently carefully studied.¹

It also follows a classic Latin tradition: "A classic tradition is seen in the Octavius by Minucius who continued the literary preference of Quintilian for Ciceronian standards."² This tradition was concerned with the grouping of

1 W. Smith and H. Wace (editors), A Dictionary of Christian Biography, London, John Murray, Vol. 3, 1882, p.920.

2 J. Wight Duff, A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age, From Tiberius to Hadrian, edited by A. M. Duff, London, Ernest Benn Limited, 2nd ed., 1960, p. 524.

arguments:

En condensant en discours les arguments des deux thèses rivales, Minucius Félix nous paraît donc être resté dans la vraie tradition latine, celle du De Natura Deorum, où Cicéron abandonne maintes fois le procédé dialogique pour faire prendre à ses personnages le ton de l'orateur, ou mieux - que l'on nous passe l'anachronisme - le ton d'un moderne conférencier.³

Grouping of arguments into a rhetorical form of exposition is far from Plato's usual form: "pour l'art du dialogue l'Octavius est loin de Platon et se rapproche plus de Cicéron".⁴ Freese,⁵ Fahy,⁶ and Hagendahl⁷ also typify the work like Baylis⁸ as "Ciceronian and rhetorical rather than Platonic and conversational in form."

Use is also made of the Ciceronian type of phrase: "un style extrêmement nuancé et souple, où l'élégance de la période cicéronienne est relevée par la verdeur d'expressions

3 G. Charlier, Le Dialogue dans l'Octavius de Minucius Félix, p. 81.

4 J. P. Waltzing, Octavius de M. Minucius Félix, Edition A, 1909, p. xiv.

5 J. H. Freese, Marcus Minucius Felix, Octavius, London, S. P. C. K., New York, Macmillan, 1919, p. xix.

6 T. Fahy, Marcus Minucius Felix "Octavius", p. 1.

7 H. Hagendahl, Latin Fathers and the Classics, A Study on the Apologists, Jerome and Other Christian Writers, Gothenburg, Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1958, p. 348.

8 H. J. Baylis, Minucius Felix and His Place Among the Early Fathers of the Latin Church, p. 1.

rapides et pittoresques."⁹ J. Quasten remarks this Ciceronian style too, especially in "its finished style, its carefully balanced periods, its close attention to the classic norms of prose rhythm."¹⁰

The Ciceronian period, however, is united with the concision of Seneca:

Sa langue est un composé harmonieux de la période de Cicéron et de la phrase hachée de Sénèque; ses idées sont puisées un peu partout, mais c'est encore à Sénèque qu'il doit une grande partie d'elles.¹¹

In general then, the subject matter, grouping of arguments, rhetorical form of exposition; elegant phrase and style are attributes of the Octavius which follow a general Ciceronian pattern.

One work in particular of Cicero which certainly served as a model for the Octavius is the De Natura Deorum. From it Minucius drew the general plan¹² and chapter 19.¹³

9 Pierre de Labriolle, Histoire de la Littérature Latine Chrétienne, Paris, Les Belles-Lettres, 3rd ed., reviewed and augmented by Gustave Bardy, Vol. I, 1947, p. 172.

10 J. Quasten, Patrology, Utrecht Antwerp, Spectrum Publishers, Vol. II, 1953, p. 158.

11 J. P. Waltzing, Minucius Félix et Platon, p. 455.

12 Harold Hagendahl, Latin Fathers and the Classics: A Study on the Apologists, Jerome and Other Christian Writers, Gothenburg, Elanders Boktryckeri Aktiebolag, 1958, p. 348 (Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia, Vol. VI).

13 J. Quasten, Op. Cit., p. 158.

With regard to the framework, the philosophical debate of the Octavius has a counterpart in Cicero's work. A close relationship exists between the discussion of the Octavius and the oratorical practice of altercatio, a debate between lawyers of opposing parties. The Romans were masters of this popular art and the term altercatio may be applied to the Octavius in the same manner as it is applied to the long philosophical debate in the De Natura Deorum (1, 15). That the Octavius is really a debate is affirmed by Arbesmann:¹⁴

The main body of the work, the dialogue itself... is not in the form of a conversational dialogue, but resembles much more a forensic debate: the plea of the public prosecutor, and the answer of the defending attorney, both addressed to the presiding arbiter.

For Fahy,¹⁵ it is a "trial where two advocates plead before a lay judge, the cause being the rival merits of two religious systems, the old Paganism and the new religion of Christianity."

Book I of De Natura Deorum opens with an introduction (1-17) in which the work is dedicated to Brutus (1), an introductory narrative is given (1-14), the scene is laid and characters described (15) followed by the preliminary conversation (15-17). Two opposing speeches are then presented, that of Velleius (18-56) exposing Epicurean theology and the answer

¹⁴ R. Arbesmann, Minucius Felix Octavius Translated, p. 315.

¹⁵ T. Fahy, Op. Cit., p. 1.

by Cotta (57 to end) the Academician.

This is in general, the plan of the Octavius. It opens with an introduction (Ch. 1-4) in which the work is dedicated to Octavius (Ch. 1). Introductory narration relates the circumstances (Ch. 2) and a preliminary conversation linked with descriptive narration gives an outline of the characters (Ch. 3-4). Two opposing speeches are then presented, separated by an intermission. The speech of Caecilius presents the pagan viewpoint (Ch. 5-13) followed by the intermission (Ch. 14-15) discussing the value of arguments and the long speech of Octavius (Ch. 16-38) presenting the Christian reply. A short conclusion is then added as a solution to the discussion (Ch. 39-40).

Since the conflict is the greatest of all times, the encounter of pagan and Christian philosophies, it surpasses in moment the conflicts Cicero had in his heart and exteriorized in his dialogues. At the same time it imitates Cicero's talent for staging a proposition well by opposing it.¹⁶

The parallel goes even further. In both dialogues the author acts more or less as an impartial and unprejudiced listener. Both dialogues also take place with a single day

¹⁶ Cicero's talent for confronting ideas was not his own creation. As Ruch (Le Préambule dans les Oeuvres Philosophiques de Cicéron, p. 40) says, Cicero's form of antithetical discussion was imitated from Philo of Larissa and Antiochus of Ascalon who in turn copied from Aristotle.

ending at nightfall.¹⁷ Speeches are rhetorical in both dialogues and the relative lengths of the first ones to their replies are comparable. Use of narration and narrative speech are also similar in the two dialogues so that it seems very probable that Minucius followed the general plan of Book I of De Natura Deorum.

Besides the similarity in these two works with regard to general framework - philosophical debate, proportions allotted to the dedication, introductory narrative, description of circumstances, preliminary conversation and speeches - there is a close resemblance between the characters involved.

Characters of the Octavius resemble those of De Natura Deorum. According to G. Boissier,¹⁸ Caecilius "est une reproduction fidèle de cet Aurelius Cotta qui tient une si grande place dans les dialogues de Cicéron Sur la Nature des Dieux."

After affirming the incertitude in the universe (Ch. 5) the sudden turn about of the sceptic Caecilius, who now becomes a believer and advocate of the Roman religion because

17 ~~Cicero's~~ dialogue as it stands is one continuous conversation, ending at nightfall (3, 94), but traces remain suggesting that it was first cast into three conversations held on three successive days, each book containing one; see 2, 73, "As you said yesterday"; 3, 2, "I hope you have come well prepared"; 3, 18, "All that you said the day before yesterday to prove the existence of the gods." The comparison here is made with only the first book of Cicero's work.

18 G. Boissier, L'Octavius de Minucius Félix in Journal des Savants, 1883, p. 440.

it is a national institution (6,1) recalls the attitude of Aurelius Cotta, pontiff, in De Natura Deorum (3,5). Cotta also is an Academician and probabilist; he denies the existence of the gods, but, as pontiff and Roman, he declares that one must respect the Roman religion which is an institution of the Roman state.

Freese finds even more resemblances. After stating that the treatise is certainly cast upon the model of De Natura Deorum, he says that Caecilius takes "the part of Cotta and Velleius, and Octavius that of Balbus."¹⁹

Even by its philosophical or religious content the Octavius has been inspired by De Natura Deorum. The commentary by J. P. Waltzing²⁰ lists so many similarities in subject matter that they are too numerous to mention here. From this work Minucius borrowed a number of ideas which he almost literally reproduced²¹ or cleverly adapted to the subject. Arguments against polytheism were also borrowed.²²

19 J. H. Freese, Marcus Minucius Felix, "Octavius", London, S. P. C. K., New York, The Macmillan Company, 1919, p. xix.

20 J. P. Waltzing, Octavius de M. Minucius Félix, Edition A., 1909, p. 45-183.

21 Chapter 19 of the Octavius reproduced Book I, 25-42, of the De Natura Deorum.

22 J. Wight Duff, The Literary History of Rome, From the Origins to the Close of the Golden Age, edited by A. M. Duff, London, Ernest Benn Limited, 3rd ed., 1953, p. 285.

Cicero's De Natura Deorum, however, cannot serve as a complete model for the Octavius. Cicero's work was composed in 45 B.C. but reported the dialogue of 76 B.C. when the author was too young to participate in the discussion. The work also sets out the theological tenets of the three principal Greek schools of philosophy of the day whereas the Octavius opposes only two philosophies. Furthermore, the works are dedicated to a living person and a deceased one.

The Octavius thus possesses some characteristics which may have been drawn from other works of Cicero. These characteristics are considered in their relationship to the introduction and body of the dialogue.

Elements of the introduction to Octavius resembling those of Cicero are: its obedience to three norms, dedication, author narration, description of circumstances, symbolical relationship of subject and place, and the purpose of reassurance.

Just as the prooemia of Cicero's dialogues follow definite norms as Ruch demonstrates: "oratoires (par l'épître dédicatoire), dramatiques (par la mise en scène), historiques (par l'entretien préliminaire)"²³ it may also be stated that the introduction of the Octavius follows the same norms. Four chapters of introduction are composed in a way so that Chapter

²³ M. Ruch, Le Préambule dans les Oeuvres Philosophiques de Cicéron, p. 9.

1 contains the dedication; the scene is described in 2, 1-4; 3, 2 - 4,2 and 4,6; the preliminary conversation is presented in 3,1; 4,2 - 4,5.²⁴

Dedication was practiced in Plato's Theaetetus (to Euclide) as well as Cicero's De Natura Deorum (to Brutus), but the Octavius differs from these works in that it is dedicated to a deceased, not a living person. Minucius writes in memory of his good and most faithful companion, Octavius. His death caused an immense feeling of longing for him, since he and Minucius were such intimate friends they shared the same amusements and serious occupations. They had been together in the errors of paganism and when Minucius decided to become a Christian, Octavius did not reject him but led the way. It is in pondering over the entire period of their intimate association that Minucius Felix's attention settled upon the remarkable discourse in which Octavius, by sheer weight of his reasoning, converted to the true religion Caecilius, who was still clinging to the folly of superstitions. These are the thoughts expressed in Chapter one, in which the work is dedicated.

Dedication of a dialogue to the memory of a deceased friend finds a precedent in a few of Cicero's works. His first book of De Finibus is written in memory of his Epicurean

24 One notices in the Octavius, however, that the staging and preliminary conversation are not separated as they occur in Cicero's De Natura Deorum, Book I.

friend Torquatus. Cicero also commemorates the oratorical ability of Hortensius, military genius of Lucullus, and Cato's faith in the grandeur of Rome.

Dedication of the Octavius as well as the description of circumstances is done through the narration of the author. The practice of Minucius to present the dialogue by means of his own narration finds a precedent in many works of Cicero who probably copied the idea from Heraclides. Evidently, then, Arbesmann's statement²⁵ that "the Octavius begins in the manner of a Platonic dialogue, with the introductory narrative of one who is recounting the whole," is very misleading. The introduction to the Octavius is unlike those of Plato because in it the author himself does the relating whereas Plato never assumed the role of narrator in his dialogues. Arbesmann thus fails to take into account an important element, that of author participation.

Cicero participates in his dialogues in varying degrees. In his first, De Oratore, and last two dialogues, De Senectute and De Amicitia, the author appears in the prooemia to lend it a certain air of probability and to indicate how the work is to be interpreted. In others, by necessity of actuality, he chose as participants friends of recent memory and entered the scene himself as interlocutor to ensure probability. Works

25 R. Arbesmann, Op. Cit., p. 314.

that show an author participation similar to that of the Octavius would be those in which the author is narrator but participated in the discussion only to a very limited extent. These would be De Oratore, De Natura Deorum, and De Republica.

Another aspect of the introduction linking the Octavius to Ciceronian dialogues is the description of circumstances in which the discussion took place. This is in contrast to Plato's dialogues in which the introductions never related circumstances but were concerned with the argumentum.

The occasion of the debate is a visit of Octavius to Rome. Minucius and he spend a day or so renewing their intimate friendship and relating news of their families. The couple is joined by the heathen Caecilius and the group journeys to Ostia, a delightful villa of baths and pleasures during the vintage holidays. At daybreak the three friends walk along the seashore taking air. As they pass an image of Serapis, Caecilius saluted it, as was customary, by throwing a kiss. Octavius then charges Minucius with culpable negligence in having allowed his friend to continue such degrading superstition, a remark which Caecilius interprets as striking his own blind state of ignorance. In his headstrong manner he challenges Octavius to a formal debate on religion. The adversaries then choose a seat facing the sea with Minucius between them acting as arbiter.

Cicero needed leisure time for philosophical speculations and his conception of otium appears as the sine qua non condition of his dialogues in general. By having the conversation take place during the vintage holidays, Minucius has followed Cicero and achieved an element of probability.

While days of leisure might be devoted to philosophical discussion, the particular topic of conversation in Cicero's dialogues is often left to chance. This is also true of Plato's dialogues perhaps even to a greater extent. The fortuitous opening of the Octavius, then, follows both the Platonic and Ciceronian pattern. The discussion is not planned in advance; it begins in a very accidental manner, when Caecilius happens to notice and salute a statue of Serapis. Philosophic discussion during holidays, however, seems to be more a Latin trait than a Greek one. It is not surprising then that a pleasure trip should lead to deep discussion.

The fortuitous choice of topic linked with a promenade may be considered further. By drawing the subject of the dialogue from an object seen on the way the Octavius resembles the De Legibus. In the beginning of Book I of this dialogue, the three interlocutors probably setting out from Cicero's villa, walk toward the oak of Marius (1,14), symbolical of the countryside and foundation of rights upon which are based laws. A little farther they arrive at the edge of

a river (per ripam 1, 14; in viridi opacaque ripa, 1, 15) which branches in two, the Liris, and the Fibrenus, most certainly a promenade with seats prepared in advance (ad sedes pergimus). The preliminary conversation ends with the promenade. Probably also, the dialogue is completed in a single day (umbra... opaca ripa) which was a feast day (quonian vacuisumus). Mythological and historical significations attached to objects seen serves as the topic of the dialogue.

Situating a scene in a precise setting such as Ostia is a characteristic of Cicero rather than Plato. Since Cicero's dialogues generally take place at a country villa, it is not surprising that the Octavius takes place at a country residence at Ostia. Indeed, it was a typically Roman custom to have country dwellings as places suitable to philosophic discussion.

Another parallel between Cicero's dialogues and the Octavius is seen in the symbolical relationship between the subject of the dialogue and the place chosen. In the Preface of his edition of De Oratore, K. Piderit²⁶ insists upon a symbolical relationship existing between the subject of the dialogue and the place chosen. Ruch explains that De Oratore and De Republica are the only dialogues which obey this norm. The Octavius does begin in a symbolical manner: Caecilius salutes the statue of Serapis at Ostia.

26 Reported by M. Ruch, Op. Cit., p. 335.

Ostia was not only a Roman seaport sharing the same life as Rome and fortunes of the Republic, but this favorite resort of the wealthy Romans offers a good example of the religious syncretism of the Roman Empire. Oriental cults of Cybele of Asia Minor, the Egyptian divinities Isis, Serapis, Bubastis, the Syrian Jupiter Heliopolitanus and Dolichenus, Maiumas, and the cult of Mithras have all been found there. Because of their mysterious melancholy, the cults of Isis and Serapis were widespread among the upper classes of Rome. A religious setting like this was very appropriate for the religious discussion related in the Octavius, and the relationship is probably more than one of chance.

Another symbolical relationship between subject and place is suggested by G. Charlier:

Ce n'est pas sans raison qu'il place au bord de la mer le théâtre de la discussion. Devant un horizon borné, la pensée rase le sol; comme resserrée dans de trop étroites limites, elle a peine, dirait-on, à s'élever vers les sommets de la spéculation pure. Au contraire, au spectacle de la mer, image de l'infini, l'homme a trop conscience de sa faiblesse pour ne pas faire un retour sur lui-même et se retrouver ainsi tout disposé aux méditations les plus sublimes. Sans doute, le rapprochement est bien un peu subtil, l'analogie pourra même paraître puérile à d'autres; il n'y en a pas moins là, à notre avis, sinon une intention de l'écrivain, au moins une intuition de l'artiste: il a cherché à rattacher le décor à l'action par le lien, ténu mais réel, d'une de ces harmonies délicates qui, ainsi que le remarquent encore MM. Croiset, "ne veulent pas être analysées avec trop de rigueur, mais se sentent tout d'abord."²⁷

27 G. Charlier, art. cit., p. 77.

The introduction may also serve the purpose of reassuring the lecturers about the characters or topics involved. M. Ebert²⁸ says that Minucius wished to prove that Christians were good citizens without saying it directly. When the three friends depart for Ostia during the vindemial holidays he indirectly shows that they fulfill their jobs seriously, and that lawyers depart from Rome only during the holidays from court. The method is the same as that which Cicero employs in his philosophical dialogues to reassure the critical people for whom philosophy is suspicious, to show them that it does not hinder serious affairs, that it does not encroach upon the time reserved to them, and that it is compatible with them.

These elements of the introduction - obedience to three norms, the dedication to a deceased friend, author participation as narrator, the relating of circumstances, symbolical relationship of subject and place, and the purpose of reassurance - follow the general Ciceronian introductions to dialogues.

The body of the dialogues also resembles the general Ciceronian pattern by its historical accuracy, uninterrupted speeches, important personages, courtesy in debate, promise of another work, narrative speech exclusively, and insertions

28 M. Ebert, Tertullian's Verhältniss zu Minucius Felix, quoted by Gaston Boissier, L'Octavius de Minucius Félix, in Journal des Savants, 1883, p. 447-448.

to introduce various speakers.

The dialògue appears as a conversation that really took place. Baylis says that the Octavius is "not lacking the marks of substantial reality."²⁹ Mr. Boissier affirms the same:

Rien n'empêche que les choses se soient passées à peu près comme Minucius les présente. La conversation d'un homme riche et considéré, d'un magistrat dans la petite communauté, où les puissants de la terre n'étaient pas en grand nombre, on comprend que Minucius Félix s'en soit souvenu volontiers et qu'après la mort de son ami il ait pris plaisir à la raconter.³⁰

In reproducing a conversation of the past, however, it would be impossible to relate the discussion word for word. Historical truth, then, would be analogous to that of the speeches by Thucydides, "I made each orator say in each circumstance what seemed to me the most normal by keeping in mind the general thought which really inspired them" (1, 22). Reproduction of dialogue then, is conformed to the norms of invention and probability.

Speeches too are uninterrupted like those of the De Divinatione which, incidentally, is presented as a follow up

29 H. J. Baylis, Op. Cit., p. 1.

30 G. Boissier, La Fin du Paganisme, Paris, Hachette, 1891, Vol. I, p. 264. Mr. Boissier presumes that Caecilius of the Octavius is a magistrate of Cirta known from some inscriptions bearing this name. Cf. C. I. L., VIII, 6996 and 7094-7098.

of the De Natura Deorum. The dialogue in the Octavius also continues from beginning to end in a single day.

Disputants are important characters as is the case in Cicero's dialogues:

Minucius a suivi l'exemple de Cicéron qui a souvent emprunté le fond de ses dialogues philosophiques aux stoiciens, mais s'éloigne d'eux en faisant disputer les Romains illustres, ou même des gens de sa famille et de son intimité.³¹

Only persons who have played an important role in history are admitted to Cicero's philosophical discussions. They alone have the right to devote themselves to philosophy. The ancient literary precedent and the presence of the author among the characters of the book indicate that Octavius and Caecilius are likewise real persons. There is nothing to make us doubt the historicity of the characters or the fact of a discussion .

Quite probably all three men are of African origin; Caecilius because he refers to Fronto as Cirtensis noster (9, 6), and is therefore himself assumed to be from Cirta; the other two because of the references to African cults which Minucius makes either in his own person (e.g. 2,4) or in speech of Octavius (e.g. 22,1; 22,6; 24,1; 25,9; 27,6; 28, 7-8; 30,3). Besides, the three names occur in some African inscriptions. Some authors have tried to find a relationship between these prominent officials and the characters of the

31 Id., ibid., p. 261.

dialogue, but nothing can be proved with certitude. Miss Simpson gives a resume of the arguments brought for and against the identification of these characters and then concludes:

The attempts made to identify the persons of the dialogue with the persons of the inscriptions result only in hypotheses... The evidence of the inscriptions cannot be used to defend any scheme of identifying the characters of the Octavius, or of thereby dating the dialogue; it shows only that the three characters in the dialogue bear names which are not unknown in Africa, and all may have been of African origin.³²

References in the text and similarity to inscriptions prove only the probability of an African origin and possibility that the men are important personages. They were at least lawyers, and they held their discussion at the favorite resort of wealthy Romans so it would seem quite probable that they were prominent people in Roman society. Evidence for this conjecture, however, is not conclusive.

If courtesy was the rule of Tacitus and Cicero,³³ it is also the rule of Minucius. Both of the principal speakers express their inmost thoughts in the most convincing manner possible to them. Yet, even when they attack the beliefs and practices of the opposing religion, they are careful not to

³² Adelaide Douglas Simpson, M. Minucii Felicis Octavius, Prolegomena, Text and Critical Notes, New York, Columbia University Press, 1938, p. 1-2.

³³ Cf. above, p. 4.

attack the opponent directly and thereby offend him.

Another trace of Cicero is seen in the promise of a later work. Cicero announces in the De Divinatione (2,3) his intention to write another treatise, De Fato. The numerous times that Minucius employed the De Divinatione lead one to believe that it is not a mere coincidence when he has Octavius promise a more complete discussion on destiny at a later time (36,2).

Besides characteristics directly attached to either the introduction or the body of the work, there is one which is closely linked with both parts, narrative speech. The exclusive use of narrative speech follows the general Ciceronian pattern in preference to the dramatic speech of Plato. Insertions used to introduce the various speakers are also of a general Ciceronian variety.

The insertions of the Octavius in their order of appearance are: Tunc Octavius ait (3,1); Cui ego (4,2); Tum ille (4,3); Tum sic Caecilius exorsus est (5,1); Sic Caecilius et renidens...ait (14,1); inquam (14,2); inquit Caecilius (15, 1); inquam (15,2); Et Octavius (16,1); Caecilius erupit (40,1); and inquam (40,3). Every change of speaker is introduced by an insertion, and nowhere are there found juxtaposed questions and answers as sometimes occur in Plato's narrative dialogues.

Insertions referring to the third person singular resemble the insertions of the De Oratore: Tum ille (I, 45);

Tum ridens Scaevola (I,74); inquit Crassus (I,101); Et Crassus ...inquit (II,40). Since the author does not take part in the discussion of the De Oratore, it lacks examples referring to the first person singular. These may be found in the De Natura Deorum: Tum ego (I,16); ...inquam (I, 16).

Some of Minucius' insertions depart from the normal pattern of the ones found in these two works of Cicero: Tunc Octavius ait (3,1); cui ego (4,2); Tum sic Caecilius exorsus est (5,1); Sic Caecilius et renidens...ait (14,1); and Caecilius erupit (40,1). Cicero supplies us with: tunc dicere exorsus est (De Finibus, I,8 end); ut ait Staius (Cato Maior 7). An example of renidens, a poetic word not frequent until after the Augustan period, is found in Appuleius, ad haec renidens Milo...inquit (Metamorphoses, 2, p. 120, 16). For erupit, the Lexicon of Forcellini provides no other than this example in the sense of "to speak", but it has been used with vox: Erumpat aliquando vera et me digna vox (Cicero, 10 Philippics, 9,19); vox in illum sonum erumpit (Quintilian, 11, 3, 51). The insertions of the Octavius show that Minucius Felix was influenced by several of Cicero's works but still retained an originality of his own by his variety of form and freshness of quality.

The main part of the dialogue displays the influences of Cicero in its historical accuracy, uninterrupted speeches, important personages, courtesy in debate, promise of another

work, exclusive use of narrative speech and the type of insertions used to introduce various speakers.

From all these considerations of Ciceronian influences one may conclude that his dialogues exerted a tremendous influence on the dialogue form of the Octavius. The De Natura Deorum served as its model with regard to the general plan, character models and religious content. Numerous other characteristics of the introduction (norms, dedication to a deceased friend, narration by author participant, relating of circumstances, symbolical relationship of subject and place, purpose) and body (as mentioned above) follow Ciceronian patterns.

CHAPTER VIII

THE OCTAVIUS AND OTHER WRITINGS

1. Relationship to Other Apologies.

Influences of Plato, Aristotle and Cicero were not the only ones which determined the dialogue form of Octavius. It shows a relationship to other apologies as well. In this field of literature, the beauty of the Octavius is without comparison. Justin's Dialogue with Trypho was its predecessor as an apology and dialogue which relates a conversation leading to a conversion of an educated man. The setting is also similar for both works. In strictly apologetical content, the Octavius shows a resemblance to many apologies but actual dependence cannot be proven. It combines the defensive and offensive characteristics of other apologies in a new form of presentation. Criticism on its silence with regard to many doctrines stems from incomprehension of its purpose. Its destination and purpose have determined the types of arguments and form of composition. All of these ideas are considered in the order mentioned.

As an apology the beauty of the Octavius has been highly praised. For Renan¹ it is "la perle de la littérature

¹ E. Renan, Marc-Aurèle, p. 389, quoted by F. Cayré, Patrologie et Histoire de la Théologie, Paris, Desclée, Vol. I, 4th ed., 1945, p. 130.

apologétique". Freese² objects to this designation but Quasten again qualifies it as "the finest of the early Christian apologies".³ Cayré too says:

L'Octavius est un chef d'oeuvre, moins sans doute par l'originalité de la pensée que par la perfection avec laquelle cette pensée s'exprime et se développe, d'une pureté et d'une harmonie dignes des plus beaux modèles. L'élégance de la forme s'y allie, d'ailleurs, à la force du sentiment et la contradiction même ne s'y affirme qu'avec tact et mesure.⁴

Of the many apologies which influences the Octavius, perhaps none has had a greater influence upon the literary form than the dialogue of Justin. It seems quite likely that Minucius knew of and had read Justin's Dialogue with Trypho. Dialogue form was not yet extensively used in Christian literature,⁵ but these apologists accepted from the ancients

2 J. H. Freese, Marcus Minucius Felix Octavius, p. xvi.

3 J. Quasten, Patrology, p. 158.

4 F. Cayré, Patrologie et Histoire de la Théologie, Paris, Desclée, Vol. I, 4th ed., 1945, p. 131.

5 H. Diller, In Sachen Tertullian - Minucius Felix, in Philologus, Zeitschrift für das Klassische Altertum, Vol. XLIV, 1935, p. 98-114 and 216-239, says that the main characteristic of the Octavius is that it is not conceived in the form of an apologetic work concerned mainly with arguments, but composed as a Ciceronian dialogue.

C. M. Buizer, in Quid Minucius Felix in Conscribendo Dialogo Octavio Sibi Proposuerit, Amstelodami, Apud A. H. Kruyt, 1915, p. 76, note 7, also states that the form differs from other apologies: "Quod ad formam operis attinet, multum ab aliis differt".

this literary genre which lends itself so well to philosophical controversy and employed it for their own purposes. It is natural, then, that "both the structure and style of the Christian apologetical dialogue are determined by the tradition of its predecessor".⁶

Similarity with Justin's dialogue is seen in the introduction. Justin begins by relating in chapters one to eight a conversation he had with an unknown old man and his conversion to Christianity. This may have been the source for Minucius' idea of relating a conversation which leads to a conversion. A similarity is also seen in the character of Trypho, an educated and fervent Jew, and Caecilius, the educated and fervent defender of paganism.

Settings for the conversations are also similar. In Part One, Section 3, Justin says that he frequented a private place near the sea where he could take solitary walks and meditate:

I delight in taking such walks as these, in which there is nothing to interrupt my thoughts, so that I can muse, meditate, and converse with myself without any disturbance. And besides, such places are very proper for the study of reason and philosophy.⁷

The two dialogues, however, have some differences too. Justin's dialogue is written in narrative speech but enlivened

6 R. Arbesmann, Op. Cit., p. xvii.

7 Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, translated by Henry Brown, London, Cambridge, 1846.

by questions and answers in dramatic speech (Part One, Section 5). The introduction too is shorter in the Dialogue with Trypho. There are only three lines to indicate a chance encounter of Justin with a company of gentlemen in the Piazza. Justin seems to follow more the Platonic form of dialogue.

In apologetical content the Octavius resembles many apologies but dependence cannot be definitely proven. It resembles strongly the Apologeticum of Tertullian, although scholars are still arguing whether Minucius Felix drew on Tertullian or vice versa. The majority of recent authors consider that the Octavius was written before Tertullian's Apologeticum and the reasons presented are principally these:⁸

1 - Lactantius⁹ in his apparently chronological enumeration of Latin apologists who preceded him places Minucius Felix before

8 A. D. Simpson, M. Min. Felicis Octavius, p. 2-22.

9 Lactantius, Divinae Institutiones, 5, I, 21-24: "Eo fit ut sapientia et veritas idoneis praeconibus indigeat. Et si qui forte litteratorum se ad eam contulerunt, defensionis eius non suffecerunt. Ex iis qui mihi noti sunt Minucius Felix non ignobilis inter causidicos loci fuit. Huius liber, cui Octavio titulus est, declarat quam idoneus veritatis adsertor esse potuisset, si se totum ad id studium contulisset. Septimius quoque Tertullianus fuit omni genere litterarum peritus, sed in eloquendo parum facilis et minus comptus et multum obscurus fuit. Ergo ne his quidem satis celebritatis invenit. Unus igitur praecipuus et clarus extitit Cyprianus, quoniam et magnam sibi gloriam ex artis oratoriae professione quaesierat et admodum multa conscripsit in suo genere miranda.

Tertullian and St. Cyprian. 2 - There are no arguments against its composition in the second half of the second century. 3 - The epoc described by Minucius is one in which there is no violent universal persecution, but yet the threat of tortures hangs heavily over the heads of Christians. This period could easily correspond to a time under the reign of Marcus Aurelius (161-180) or under Commodus (176-192).

4 - One may infer from two references to Fronto's violent attack against the Christians (9,6 and 31,2) given about 160 that the interval between the two is not very long because the remembrance of these attacks has not been effaced. These arguments for the priority of the Octavius are evidently not conclusive, and the question is still debated.

G. Quispel writes as late as 1949, "The much disputed problem whether the Octavius was written before or after the Apologeticum remains as yet unsolved".¹⁰ He then goes on to submit an argument in favor of the priority of Minucius:

1-- In my opinion some passages of the Octavius show that its author knew a Jewish apology, large parts of which are preserved in the so-called pseudo - Clementina;

2 - When used as a tertium comparationis this Jewish book may reveal that Minucius rendered the text of his source faithfully, whereas Tertullian

¹⁰ visilice G. Quispel, A Jewish Source of Minucius Felix, in Christianae, Vol. 3, 1949, p. 113.

misunderstood the text of the Octavius in the corresponding passage of the Ad Nationes.¹¹

Whether the Apologeticum preceded or followed the Octavius seems to have little effect upon the dialogue form. Similarities between the two reside mainly in the arguments. In the same way there are parallels between the Octavius and works of many other apologists: Quadratus, Aristides, Aristo, St. Justin, Tatian, Athenagoras, St. Theophilus and St. Irenaeus. The last three authors may have written after Minucius Felix, however. Apologists forged the weapons from Greek culture and Christian heritage with which to defend the Christian religion. They gave a currency to proofs and illustrations which Minucius naturally adopted. Fahy says that it cannot be definitely stated that he actually copied any of these authors.¹²

Waltzing in the same line of thought says that a part of the ideas of St. Justin, Tatian, Athenagoras and of St. Theophilus of Antioch are found in the Octavius, but Minucius follows none of them in particular and only a few isolated passages of his text show inspiration by them.¹³ These resemblances are not strong enough to prove actual dependence.

11 Id., ibid., p. 113.

12 T. Fahy, Marcus Minucius Felix Octavius, p. 20.

13 J. P. Waltzing, Octavius de M. Minucius Félix, Edition A., 1909, p. xxi.

The Octavius differs from other apologies by the fact that it is not simply a defense of Christian beliefs or an exposition of them to pagans, but unites the two apologetical forms described by Heinze, in a comparison of paganism with Christianity:

Heinze iure duo genera apologiarum, quae dicuntur, distinguit: veras apologias, quibus causa Christianorum defenditur, et opera ad paganos scripta, quibus, ut Minucii verbis utor (5,1), utrumque vivendi genus comparatur ita, ut alterum castigetur, alterum commendetur.

Inter eos, quos conferendos esse dixi, veras apologias scripserunt Iustinus, Athenagoras, Tertullianus.

Minucium, quamquam ad alterum apologetarum genus pertinere videtur, imprimis pendere e Tertulliano, sine dubio Iustino usum esse, in priore cuius disputationis parte vidimus. Necesse est igitur eum cum utroque apologetarum genere comparari, prius cum Tertulliano, Iustino, Athenagora, deinde cum Aristide, Tatiano, Theophilo, Clemente. Minucium hos omnes praeter Aristidem et Clementem legisse veri simillimum est.¹⁴

It is by this combination of apologetic forms that Minucius shows originality.

The main criticism of the Octavius as an apology is its lack of doctrine. Those who willingly acknowledge the literary beauty and seduction of this dialogue are astonished to find only fleeting traces of Christian doctrine. Octavius seems to set out to convert Caecilius and he succeeds, but the pagan is as ignorant of the Christian religion after his

14 Cf. C. M. Buizer, Op. Cit., p. 72-73.

conversion as he was before it.

There is no Christology; nothing is said of Christ's work of Redemption and mystical union with the believer, of the Holy Spirit, of the well-established orders of ministry and the sacraments; belief in resurrection is not grounded on the Resurrection of Christ. References to Scripture are few in number; nowhere does he explain the sacred origins of faith. He completely ignores the proof drawn from the fulfilling of prophecies; he touches the dogmas of Resurrection and future reward but he is silent upon the others. From it one can draw only an insufficient idea of the Divine plan in Christian revelation.

Various solutions are offered to explain the limitations of the treatise.¹⁵ Perhaps one of the reasons why the Christian teaching of the dialogue is surprisingly meagre is that Minucius does not wish to discourage the prospective convert with a lengthy theological treatise which might confuse him, leaving, we are led to believe (Cf. 40, 2) further elucidation to a later date. In order the better to attract the pagan, he aims to present Christianity through pagan eyes, as it were in a form which the pagan would readily comprehend.

¹⁵ Cf. P. de Labriolle, Histoire de la Littérature Latine Chrétienne, p. 180.

Not a single passage of Scripture is cited, in all likelihood because Minucius wanted principally to convince the educated pagan and such material would hardly appeal to him as evidence. For the same reason, probably, the dialogue contains very little that is characteristic of the revealed truth. The doctrine of God follows the Stoic concept. Monotheism and belief in immortality are the two poles around which the author's philosophy circles. Christianity is understood as ethics put into practice.¹⁶

As Gaston Boissier¹⁷ puts it, the work is destined to a particular class of pagans. To win the educated classes, Minucius employs a language pleasing to them; a language of his time. He copies the ancient masters in his introduction, reproducing the attitude of persons, the course of the discussion, and even certain expressions.¹⁸ By this imitation, he wishes to prove that Christians can be educated and refined, and not, as was ordinarily thought, barbarians ready to destroy the civilization which fears to accept them. On the contrary, Christianity understands them and can live in harmony with them.

16 J. Quasten, Op. Cit., p. 160.

17 L'Octavius de Minucius Félix in Journal des Savants, 1883, p. 446-447.

18 There is an echo of De Oratore (1,1) in the opening phrase: "cogitanti mihi...recensenti".

The purpose of the work may be spelled out more clearly in the last remarks of Caecilius: "De providentia fateor, et de Deo cedo, et de sectae jam nostrae sinceritate consentio (40,2)". To bring the people to believe in Providence and in the Unity of God, to destroy their prejudices against Christianity, and to dispose them to accept the beliefs, these are the objectives of Minucius.¹⁹

Fr. Record summarizes the comparison made with other apologists:

Son principal mérite est d'avoir écrit une apologie en lettré, à l'usage des lettrés. Tertullien écrivaient pour les hommes d'état, les gouverneurs ou la foule; les apologistes grecs écrivaient pour les empereurs...Minucius...s'est laissé toucher comme eux par la doctrine du Christ, mais conservait au fond de son âme les souvenirs et les admirations de la jeunesse, et, tout en lisant l'Évangile, ne pouvait entièrement oublier qu'il avait commencé par lire Homère et Cicéron.²⁰

19 J. H. Freese, Op. Cit., p. xvii-xviii, reports that: "Shanz suggests that the Octavius really contains an answer to the attack upon Christianity by Fronto as represented in the speech of Caecilius, and that the range of argument is correspondingly limited". Freese's own belief is that the religious attitude of Minucius "seems to be an attempt to reconcile reason and faith, and the religion of Octavius is an ethico-political monotheism, the kernel of which is practical morality (*religiosior est ille qui iustior*, 32). Octavius argues that there is really no fundamental disagreement between the principles of Christianity and those of the heathen philosophers (e.g. in regard to the unity of God), and that the former were in no way detrimental to the progress of culture and civilization."

20 Fr. Record, L'Octavius de Minucius Félix, p. 21-22.

As an apology of Christianity the Octavius displays a beauty without comparison. It may have been influenced by Justin's Dialogue with Trypho, a dialogue relating a conversation with a sea-shore setting, a conversation in which an educated man is converted. The apologetical content resembles that of other authors but dependence cannot be proven. It combines the characteristics of other apologies in a new presentation. Silence on certain dogmas is explained by its destination to lettered pagans, its purpose being to bring them to the doors of Christianity without explaining everything. The form of composition and arguments employed are well adapted to this end.

2. Relationship to Other Writers.

The Octavius, besides the many relationships noted above, is related to other authors. From Seneca Minucius borrowed directly many ideas on stoicism, expressions and images. The form of speeches resembles the controversiae of Seneca, the forensic debates or a development of the speeches of Thucydides, Caesar and Livy. Finally, the diatribe of Caecilius may be related to the work of Fronto.

Latin writers represented by way of reminiscence, allusion or reference, sometimes by direct quotation or adaptation, are especially Vergil, Lucretius, Ovid, Horace,

Juvenal, Martial, Sallust, Florus and Lucan.²¹

Seneca appears to Fahy²² as the chief source of inspiration after Cicero for Minucius. Many elements were common to Christian and Stoic morals and a truth enunciated in the formula of Seneca, apostle of Stoicism, should win commendation with the educated public who were mostly Stoic, without compromising the faith of Christianity. By drawing a number of expressions, images and ideas from Stoicism, Minucius fulfills his purpose without peril to his orthodoxy. De Labriolle remarks to this effect:

Remarquons d'ailleurs qu'un vocabulaire plus ou moins nuancé de stoïcisme, s'impose aux iie - iiie siècles à tous les gens de bonne éducation. Il n'y a pas lieu d'appuyer outre mesure sur la présence de ce vocabulaire dans une oeuvre chrétienne et de conclure par exemple à des influences stoïciennes caractérisées. Minucius Félix s'exprime comme ses contemporains.²³

Speeches of Caecilius and Octavius are said to be similar to the form of controversia exemplified by the elder Seneca.²⁴ Students were trained in the rhetorical schools to compose and deliver declamationes, practices in speech which took the form of suasoriae and controversiae.

21 T. Fahy, Op. Cit., p. 20.

22 Id., ibid., p. 20.

23 P. de Labriolle, Op. Cit., p. 173.

24 R. Arbesmann, Op. Cit., p. 315.

Suasoriae were speeches of advice imagined as applicable to a crisis in the career of some eminent figure in history. For their success they depended upon historical knowledge, psychological penetration and dramatic ability. Controversiae were more advanced forms of speech, imitations of real court cases except that everything was fictitious, both the cases and laws applied. Seneca's controversiae appeared under the headings: 1 - sententiae, or opinions of the rhetoricians on the general application of the law to the case in hand; 2 - divisiones, or detailed questions arising out of the subject; and 3 - colores, or "colorable" representations of the act under discussion.

Practices of the schools of rhetoric were well known to Minucius because he was a lawyer. It was natural for him, then, to present the case in the form of a forensic debate: a plea of the public prosecutor, and the answer of the defending attorney, both addressed to the presiding officer.

In its most primitive form the dialogue no doubt consisted of only the two opposing speeches. These speeches alone might be compared also with the opposing speeches of Thucydides, Caesar and Livy.

G. Boissier remarks that when one reads the speeches where the arguments are exposed so forcefully one might wonder whether the bill of indictment is not a real one formulated against the Christians by their enemies, and if Minucius

simply copied the principal grievances instead of inventing them.²⁵

This idea was held by B. Aubé²⁶ who considered the distribe of Caecilius really a work composed by Fronto. Boissier²⁷ rejects this hypothesis on grounds of style but admits that the arguments against Christians may have been taken from Fronto as well as Celsus and all the other enemies of Christianity.

From these considerations it may be stated that the Octavius shows the influence of many Latin writers by way of reminiscence, allusion or reference, but it is Seneca from whom he draws the greatest number of ideas after Cicero. The speeches also resemble the controversiae of Seneca, the forensic debates or speeches of Thucydides, Caesar and Livy. Finally, the diatribe of Caecilius could have been influenced by the work of Fronto.

25 G. Boissier, L'Octavius de Minucius Félix in Journal des Savants, 1883, p. 437-438.

26 B. Aubé, Histoire des Persécutions de l'Eglise, La Polémique Paienne à la Fin du IIe Siècle, Paris, 1878, II, p. 83, reported by G. Boissier, L'Octavius de Minucius Félix in Journal des Savants, 1883, p. 438.

27 G. Boissier, Ibid., p. 438-440.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The dialogue form of the Octavius can be evaluated only by comparing it with other dialogues of Greek and Roman antiquity.

Although the Socratic question and answer type of conversation is replaced by a more rhetorical form of exposition, the Octavius need not be excluded from the classification of dialogue. It merits this title as much as the De Natura Deorum and other dialogues of Cicero which served as models for the rhetorical speeches.

Plato's influence upon the Octavius is seen most clearly in the charming introduction, (its picturesque setting, sentimental descriptions, naturalness in staging, and relationship between the setting and subject), character portrayal, and digression on the merits of argumentation. Less certain is Plato's influence on narrative speech, dedication, title drawn from an interlocutor, several theses, continuous conversation, static scene, and lengthy speeches.

Aristotle's influence works perhaps indirectly, through Cicero. It exists mainly in the rhetorical form of exposition, the scientific form of discussion consisting of thesis and antithesis, and the entry of the author himself into the scene.

Cicero's dialogues exerted the greatest influence upon the Octavius. This is generally reflected in the subject matter, grouping of arguments, rhetorical form of exposition, elegant phrase and style. Book I of De Natura Deorum may have served as model for the general plan, Chap. 19, and for the type of characters employed. Similarities with other dialogues of Cicero are seen in the introduction (obedience to three norms, dedication, author narration, description of circumstances, symbolical relationship of subject and place, and the purpose of reassurance), in the body (by its historical accuracy, uninterrupted speeches, important personages, courtesy in debate, promise of another work), and in narrative speech used exclusively with insertions to introduce various speakers.

With Justin's Dialogue with Trypho it has in common the setting and a conversation leading to the conversion of an educated man. With other apologies (especially Tertullian's Apologeticum) it shows a resemblance in arguments, but actual dependence cannot be proven.

Finally, Minucius was influenced by the stoicism, expressions, images, and controversiae of Seneca. Numerous reminiscences, allusions, and quotations also show the influences of other classical authors.

Four conclusions may be drawn from this study:

1. The Octavius is truly a dialogue in a category with

Cicero's De Natura Deorum.

2. Its characteristics, drawn from all parts, prove it to be "mosaic" in form as well as in content.
3. Cicero and Plato were the principal influences upon its dialogue form.
4. The originality of Minucius Felix lies in his ability to unite so perfectly the various ideas and traits into a truly Latin apology of Christianity destined to the educated class of pagans.

Further research into the field might consider the content of the Octavius to determine the co-relationship in the sources for matter and form.

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APPENDIX 1

ABSTRACT OF

The Dialogue Form of the Octavius of Minucius Felix, Its Value and Originality

The Octavius is a classic in the field of ancient Christian Latin apologies. It has been the subject of numerous books and articles which deal with most problems related to textual criticism, grammar, style, and various influences of previous authors. Only a short article written in 1906, however, evaluated its dialogue form while recent commentaries are content with general and sometimes misleading statements about this topic. In the last few years there appeared some works dealing with related subjects which provide a context for and prompt the undertaking of a more exhaustive study on the dialogue form of the Octavius.

This study was undertaken by considering first the nature of dialogue in general, and its evolution in Greek and Latin literature. From this context the influences of Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, other apologists, and writers are indicated.

The Octavius appears as a dialogue in a class with the De Natura Deorum but reflects also the influences of both Greek and Roman tradition.

Plato's influence is seen mainly in the introduction, setting, sentimental description, naturalness in staging, character portrayal, and digression on the merits of argumentation. Aristotle's dialogues could have indirectly influenced the rhetorical form of exposition, scientific discussion and author participation. Cicero's influence is reflected in the subject matter, grouping of arguments, rhetorical form of exposition, elegant phrase and style, general plan, Chapter 19, introduction, body, narrative speech and insertions employed. Arguments are similar to those of other apologies and the conversation similar to that in Justin's Dialogue with Trypho. Other writers influenced the Octavius too, especially Seneca by his stoicism, expressions, images and controversiae.

Four conclusions are drawn from the study: 1. It is really a dialogue in its class; 2. It is a "mosaic" of ideas and traits; 3. Cicero and Plato were the principal influences upon its dialogue form; 4. The originality of Minucius Felix lies in his ability to unite so perfectly the various ideas and traits into a truly Latin apology of Christianity destined to the educated class of pagans.

