

An Analysis of Prose Rhythm in Plutarch's *De audiendis poetis*

Throughout his corpus, Plutarch's use of prose rhythm is an essential rhetorical aspect of reading and interpreting his work. As described by G. O. Hutchinson (2018: 34), "the rhythm is very far from being a mere abstract pattern, and is intimately bound up with thought and meaning." Such interactions of sound and sense appear most notable in what Hutchinson terms "dense passages," that is, passages that contain an especially large number of rhythmic closes (a certain combination of cretics, trochees, etc. coming at the end of a phrase or sentence). As Hutchinson argues, Plutarch uses dense passages throughout his corpus in moments where he especially wishes to draw the reader's attention, since these are moments of heightened importance in his narrative or philosophy (2018: 68). While Hutchinson has conducted an extensive analysis of the prose rhythm in the *Lives*, an examination of the prose rhythm in the *Moralia* has yet to be conducted. I propose using the framework Hutchinson has established to analyze Plutarch's other essays, specifically those in the *Moralia*.

The justification for applying the same type of analytical framework to a work inherently different in nature (biography vs. philosophy) is given by Sandbach (1934: 195). In his article, Sandbach sees no distinction regarding the differences in Plutarch's prose rhythm in his varied prose genres. Thus, as an initial point of departure, I analyze the concluding passage of Plutarch's essay *De audiendis poetis* to demonstrate that the prose rhythm is a critical feature in the composition of this work. In this way, I provide material evidence for the assertion Hunter and Russel (2011: 23) make in their commentary, namely that a "feature of P[lutarch]'s style to which attention must be paid is its rhythmic character."

Rhythmic clausulae are defined as endings to phrases or sentences that follow a fixed set of rhythmic rules, evoking a poetic resonance in the close (Hutchinson 2018: 11; Hunter

and Russel 2011: 24-25). In the context of Plutarch's work, Hutchinson defines a rhythmically dense passage as one with "at least twenty phrases with rhythmic closes" (2018: 68). I present a close reading and rhetorical analysis of a rhythmically dense passage in Plutarch's essay *De audiendis poetis*, specifically the final paragraph of the treatise (sections 36d-36e). To conduct my analysis, I scan by hand the entire passage, examine each of the rhythmic closes, and systematically apply Hutchinson's framework to interpret the implications of this scansion. I employ Hutchinson's arguments for why Plutarch would write rhythmically dense passages and what their usage implies for the passage in question (2018: 68). In total, I count thirty-five rhythmic closes in this passage, far above Hutchinson's required threshold of twenty. Moreover, fifteen of these closes are concentrated in the final sentence of the passage and essay, thus forming what I consider to be a "dense sentence," a further iteration of Hutchinson's initial model.

Taken together, we should consider this sentence and passage to be the most significant portion of the entire essay at a structural level. In addition to the thematic content of the passage, I use this metrical evidence to demonstrate that Plutarch employs prose rhythm to focus his reader's attention in this moment, as perhaps a grand rhetorical finale to conclude his philosophical treatise. Most noteworthy is his use of prose rhythm to draw specific attention to the final sentence of the essay, which stands out in the already rhythmically dense conclusion. Consequently, Plutarch rhetorically embodies the main thesis of the entire essay: namely, of what a young man will gain if he studies poetry properly. I hope my initial analysis presented here gives motivation for further study of the prose rhythm in various essays in Plutarch's *Moralia*, and, yet further, an investigation into rhythmically dense sentences throughout his

corpus. Such studies may have future implications for understanding how the ancient reader read, interacted, and even understood Plutarch's text.

Bibliography

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