Between grammar and rhetoric : Dionysius of Halicarnassus on language, linguistics, and literature

Jonge, C.C. de

CHAPTER 6. *THE INITIATION RITES OF STYLE*. DIONYSIUS ON PROSE, POETRY, AND POETIC PROSE

6.1. Introduction

'My next subject is like the Mysteries: it cannot be divulged to people in large numbers. I should not, therefore, be guilty of rudeness, if I invited only "those with a sacred right" to approach the initiation rites of style, while telling the "profane" to "close the gates over their ears". Some people reduce the most serious subject to ridicule through their own callowness, and no doubt there is nothing unnatural in their attitude.'[1]

It is with these mystical formulas that Dionysius of Halicarnassus introduces the final chapters of his work *On Composition* (25-26). In these chapters, he tries to answer the question of how prose can be made to resemble a beautiful poem, and in what way a poem can be made similar to beautiful prose.[2] The 'initiation rites of style' (τὰς τελετὰς τοῦ λόγου) constitute the climax of Dionysius' composition theory, namely the writing of prose with poetic beauty.[3] Although word choice plays a role (thus, Plato in particular used poetic vocabulary), Dionysius focuses on rhythm, since the subject of his work is composition.[4] His views on prose rhythm reflect Aristotle's views to a certain extent, but Dionysius goes much further than Aristotle in tracing metrical elements in prose writing. His metrical analyses of passages from the speeches *Against Aristocrates* and *On the Crown* serve to present Demosthenes as the champion of poetic prose.

In this way, Dionysius of Halicarnassus blurs the boundaries between prose and poetry more than any other ancient rhetorician seems to have done. In his analysis of Demosthenes' prose, he detects almost complete lines of poetry. Thus, according to Dionysius, the opening of Demosthenes' speech *Against Aristocrates* consists of an

---

[1] *Comp.* 25.124,2-8: μυστηρίοις μὲν οὖν ἔοικεν ἤδη ταῦτα καὶ οὐκ εἰς πολλοὺς οἷά τε ἐστὶν ἐκφέρεσθαι, ὥστ' οὐκ ἂν εἴην φορτικός, εἰ παρακαλοίην "οἷς θέμις ἐστὶν" ἥκειν ἐπὶ τὰς τελετὰς τοῦ λόγου, "θύρας δ' ἐπιθέσθαι" λέγοιμι ταῖς ἀκοαῖς τοὺς "βεβήλους". εἰς γέλωτα γὰρ ἔνιοι λαμβάνουσι τὰ σπουδαιότατα δι' ἀπειρίαν, καὶ ἴσως οὐδὲν ἄτοπον πάσχουσιν. On the mystical formulas in this text, see section 6.2.

[2] *Comp.* 25.122,13-16: see section 6.5.

[3] Although λόγος is 'text' or 'discourse' rather than 'style', I translate τὰς τελετὰς τοῦ λόγου as 'the initiation rites of style', following Rhys Roberts ('the rites of style') and Usher ('the initiation rituals of style'). Dionysius will initiate his audience into the secrets of composing a discourse (λόγος) that resembles good poetry. Since it is the use of stylistic means (in particular rhythm, but also word choice) that leads to such λόγος, I think that we are justified in rendering τὰς τελετὰς τοῦ λόγου as 'the initiation rites of style'. Aujac & Lebel (1981) 176 translate the words as 'ces rites de langage'.

[4] *Comp.* 25.124,12-21.

incomplete anapaestic tetrameter, an elegiac pentameter, a combination of a Sapphic line and the last part of a comic tetrameter, two slightly irregular iambic trimeters, an anapaestic line, and another iambic trimeter.[5] Dionysius tells us that, in order to obscure the metre, Demosthenes has removed one or two feet from each verse; further, he is claimed to have included three clauses *without* metre. The reason for this is that, as Dionysius states, 'it is not appropriate for prose to appear to be *in metre* (ἔμμετρον) or *in rhythm* (ἔρρυθμον); for in that case it will be a poem and a lyric, and will absolutely abandon its proper character; it is enough that it should simply appear rhythmical (εὔρυθμον) and metrical (εὔμετρον): in this way, prose may be poetic, though not actually a poem, and lyrical, without being a lyric.'[6] Now, in the first instance, the latter words might remind us of Aristotle's warnings that 'prose must be rhythmical, but not metrical', since it would otherwise be a poem.[7] And indeed Dionysius explicitly refers to the views on prose rhythm that Aristotle presented in the third book of his *Rhetoric*.[8] However, Aristotle would probably not have approved of Dionysius' analysis of Demosthenes' prose into almost complete verses. In any case, he would not have agreed with Dionysius' evaluation of such style. Aristotle explicitly rejects metrical prose, and he adds that even separate rhythms should only

---

[5] *Comp*. 25.126,16-131,13. Dionysius cites the full sentence in *Comp.* 25.123,7-15 as follows: Μηδεὶς ὑμῶν, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, νομίσῃ με μήτ' ἰδίας ἔχθρας μηδεμιᾶς ἕνεχ' ἥκειν Ἀριστοκράτους κατηγορήσοντα τουτουί, μήτε μικρὸν ὁρῶντά τι καὶ φαῦλον ἁμάρτημα ἑτοίμως οὕτως ἐπὶ τούτῳ προάγειν ἐμαυτὸν εἰς ἀπέχθειαν, ἀλλ' εἴπερ ἄρ' ὀρθῶς ἐγὼ λογίζομαι καὶ σκοπῶ, περὶ τοῦ Χερρόνησον ἔχειν ὑμᾶς ἀσφαλῶς καὶ μὴ παρακρουσθέντας ἀποστερηθῆναι πάλιν αὐτῆς, περὶ τούτου μοί ἐστιν ἅπασα ἡ σπουδή. 'Let none of you, people of Athens, suppose that I come here before you, led by a wish to indulge a personal hate of my own, to accuse the defendant Aristocrates here; or that it is because I have my eye on a minute misdemeanour of the man that now I am so keen to attack and expose myself to his hostility. But if I calculate and consider indeed correctly, my only concern is that you safely have the land of Chersonese and that you are not tricked into having it taken from you again.' Dionysius divides this period into ten units: for discussions of Dionysius' metrical analysis, see Rhys Roberts (1910) 256-261, Aujac & Lebel (1981) 178-182 and Usher (1985) 214-221.

[6] *Comp.* 25.125,2-7: οὐ μέντοι προσήκει γε ἔμμετρον οὐδ' ἔρρυθμον αὐτὴν εἶναι δοκεῖν (ποίημα γὰρ οὕτως ἔσται καὶ μέλος ἐκβήσεταί τε ἁπλῶς τὸν αὐτῆς χαρακτῆρα), ἀλλ' εὔρυθμον αὐτὴν ἀπόχρη καὶ εὔμετρον φαίνεσθαι μόνον· οὕτως γὰρ ἂν εἴη ποιητικὴ μέν, οὐ μὴν ποίημά γε, καὶ ἐμμελὴς μέν, οὐ μέλος δέ.

[7] Aristotle, *Rh.* 1408b30-32: διὸ ῥυθμὸν δεῖ ἔχειν τὸν λόγον, μέτρον δὲ μή· ποίημα γὰρ ἔσται. ῥυθμὸν δὲ μὴ ἀκριβῶς· τοῦτο δὲ ἔσται ἐὰν μέχρι του ᾖ. 'Prose, then, is to be rhythmical, but not metrical, or it will become not prose but verse. It should not even have too precise a prose rhythm, and therefore should only be rhythmical to a certain extent.' (Translation Rhys Roberts 1924.)

[8] *Comp.* 25.126,2-11: καὶ ὅτι ἀληθῆ ταῦτ' ἐστὶ καὶ οὐδὲν ἐγὼ καινοτομῶ, λάβοι μὲν ἄν τις καὶ ἐκ τῆς Ἀριστοτέλους μαρτυρίας τὴν πίστιν· εἴρηται γὰρ τῷ φιλοσόφῳ τά τε ἄλλα περὶ τῆς λέξεως τῆς πολιτικῆς ἐν τῇ τρίτῃ βύβλῳ τῶν ῥητορικῶν τεχνῶν οἵαν αὐτὴν εἶναι προσῆκεν, καὶ δὴ καὶ περὶ τῆς εὐρυθμίας ἐξ ὧν τις τοιαύτη γένοιτο· ἐν ᾗ τοὺς ἐπιτηδειοτάτους ὀνομάζει ῥυθμοὺς καὶ πῇ χρήσιμος ἕκαστος αὐτῶν καταφαίνεται, καὶ λέξεις παρατίθησί τινας αἷς πειρᾶται βεβαιοῦν τὸν λόγον. 'And that this is true, and that I am not inventing something unheard of, anyone may prove to himself by examining the testimony of Aristotle; for in the third book of his *Rhetoric* the philosopher, when describing the various requirements of political oratory, refers specifically to the good rhythm which would fulfil those requirements. In that passage he names the most suitable rhythms, indicates where each of them may be used to effect, and tries to confirm his argument by adducing some illustrative passages.'

be included to a certain extent.[9] In other words, Dionysius' reference to Aristotle in the context of prose rhythm is somewhat problematic: it seems that Dionysius uses Aristotle as an authority for his own theories, albeit the philosopher's views were actually rather different.[10]

In this chapter, I will focus on Dionysius' *theory* of poetic prose rather than on his practical analyses of rhythm in rhetorical speeches.[11] Where the preceding chapters of this study (3-5) have highlighted the connections between grammar, philosophy and rhetoric, the present chapter will concentrate on the relations between rhetorical and poetical theory, and, to a lesser extent, musical theory. The questions that will concern us are the following. First, why does Dionysius conclude his work *On Composition* with a discussion of prose resembling beautiful poetry and poetry resembling beautiful prose? Second, how can we explain that, in the final chapters of *De compositione verborum*, Dionysius takes a stand that diverges so strongly from the views of Aristotle, who, in his *Rhetoric*, emphasised the *differences* rather than the similarities between prose and poetry? Although Dionysius rejects the 'dithyrambic' style of Gorgias, we will see that his ideas on the magical effects of poetic prose echo to a certain extent the views of the famous sophist. Gorgias' views on the connection between magic, poetry and rhetoric seem to be a good starting point for our discussion of *On Composition* 25.

---

[9] Some scholars fail to recognise the differences between Aristotle's views on prose rhythm and the ideas that Dionysius presents in *Comp.* 25. Atkins (1934 II) 119 states: 'Following Aristotle, he [Dionysius] declares further that prose must be rhythmical without being metrical, and that all sorts of rhythm find a place in prose.' In fact, however, Aristotle does not think that 'all sorts of rhythm' can be used in prose. Like Atkins, Bonner (1938) 259 argues that Dionysius takes up the views of Aristotle and Theophrastus on prose rhythm, thus ignoring the fundamental differences between Aristotle, *Rh.* 1408b21-1409a21 and Dionysius, *Comp.* 25. These scholars attach more importance to Dionysius' reference to Aristotle (*Comp.* 25.126,2-11) than to his actual ideas in the rest of *Comp.* 25.

[10] Dionysius' reference to Aristotle's theory of prose rhythm is not the only problematic one: similar difficulties occur in Cicero and 'Demetrius'. In Cicero, *De oratore* 3.182, Crassus states that Aristotle recommends the use of dactyls and paeans (see section 6.4): *qua re primum ad heroum nos invitat*, 'for this reason he urges us, in the first place, to use dactyls.' (Translation May & Wisse [2001].) However, Aristotle's treatment of the heroic foot (*Rh.* 1408b32-33) does not seem to support Crassus' claim. Besides, Cicero interprets Aristotle's view on the heroic foot in *Orator* 192 as a negative judgement: 'Aristotle thinks the heroic measure too dignified for prose' (*iudicat heroum numerum grandiorem quam desideret soluta oratio*). Cf. Cope (1867) 304, Cope (1877 III) 86, and Hendrickson (1904) 130; on Cicero's reference, see Wisse (1989) 121-126 and Fortenbaugh (2005) 324, who concludes that Cicero is using an intermediate source or summary of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. A similar problem occurs in 'Demetrius', *Eloc.* 38, who seems to suggest that Aristotle recommended the use of the paean only in the grand style: σύνθεσις δὲ μεγαλοπρεπής, ὡς φησιν Ἀριστοτέλης, ἡ παιωνική. 'Paeonic composition is grand, as Aristotle says.' In fact, Aristotle does not know a system of different styles. We may conclude that in their wish to speak on the authority of Aristotle, rhetoricians were sometimes perhaps too eager to drop his name; in any case, they were not always careful in quoting the exact words of the master (cf. Cope [1877 III] 83).

[11] On the more technical aspects of Dionysius' theory of rhythm and metre, see Gentili (1990a = 1990b).

6.2. The magic of poetic speech: Gorgias, Dionysius and 'Longinus'

When Dionysius invites his readers to undergo the initiation rites of style, he quotes some words (οἷς θέμις ἐστίν ... θύρας δ' ἐπιθέσθαι ... βεβήλους) from a hexameter that we know from the so-called Orphic texts.[12] The second half of this hexameter is also preserved in the proem of the Orphic poem in the Derveni papyrus. The complete verse is as follows:[13]

φθέγξομαι οἷς θέμις ἐστί· θύρας δ' ἐπίθεσθε βέβηλοι.
'I will speak for those with a sacred right: but you, ye profane, close your doors!'

Different versions of this formula are found in many writers from Plato onwards.[14] Why does Dionysius choose these cryptic words to introduce the subject of poetic prose? In my view, the answer to this question must start from two observations. First of all, it should be pointed out that initiation rites seem to be a *topos* in ancient discussions of the didactic process.[15] I have already drawn attention to the pedagogical character of the work *On Composition* as a whole (sections 1.3 and 1.6).[16] In the final chapters of this treatise, Dionysius arrives at the climax of his instructions in composition. Now that the student has been introduced to the aims, means and types of σύνθεσις, he is ready to enter the final subject of composition theory. Only those readers who have sufficiently been trained in the rules of the game will be allowed to learn the secrets of poetic prose, which crown and complete Dionysius' supervision and guidance.[17] I will return to this didactic aspect at the end of this chapter (section 6.5).

However, there seems to be a second dimension to Dionysius' reference to initiation rites, which we should not ignore. In my view, it is very appropriate that Dionysius introduces his account of poetic prose by quoting a verse that was associated with Orpheus, the mythical singer who was known for the enchanting effect of his voice

[12] For Dionysius' words (*Comp.* 25.124,2-8) see section 6.1 above.
[13] Orphic fragments nr. 1 Bernabé, see also fr. 245-247 Kern.
[14] Plato, *Smp.* 218b5-7. See West (1983) 82-84. In his article 'Die Mysterien der Rhetorik', Kirchner (2005) discusses the references to Mysteries and initiation in ancient rhetorical texts, in particular in Cicero, *De oratore* 1.206, *Tusc.* 4.55, Quintilian, *Inst. orat.* 5.13.59-60, and some later texts. He also discusses our passage (*Comp.* 25.124,2-8): see below.
[15] Sluiter (2000b) 188 points out that some ancient commentators argue that their source-text is unclear because the author wanted to exclude the uninitiated.
[16] Goudriaan (1989) 161-165 analyses the structure of *De compositione verborum* and concludes that the work can be considered to be a systematic τέχνη (as analysed by Fuhrmann [1960]). Dionysius does not intend to write an overly technical treatise with detailed discussions of technical problems, but a practical handbook that accompanies the intensive training of students.
[17] Cf. Kirchner (2005) 175.

and music.[18] Since Dionysius thinks that oratory and music differ from each other only in degree, and not in kind, it might be significant that he evokes the figure of Orpheus at this point in his treatise.[19] Orators can achieve musical effects in particular by writing prose that makes good use of rhythm and melody. In many cases, Dionysius describes this kind of prose as 'enchanting' or 'bewitching'. Thus, Dionysius tells us that 'good melody and rhythm are conducive to pleasure, and we are all enchanted (κηλούμεθα) by them'.[20] He also argues that 'rhythm is the most potent device of all for bewitching (γοητεύειν) and beguiling (κηλεῖν) the ear.'[21] Now, it seems that it is exactly this enchanting effect of speech that Dionysius is aiming at in *Comp.* 25. Demosthenes, the author whose poetic prose Dionysius analyses in this chapter, is in other passages characterised as the most effective magician of all orators, who bewitched the Athenians with his composition technique.[22] I suggest that Dionysius' reference to an Orphic poem on initiation rites implicitly announces the magical kind of speech that is going to be the subject of the last part of the treatise *On Composition*.[23] Kirchner has recently distinguished two functions of Dionysius' reference to the Mysteries. On the one hand, it arouses the (advanced) reader's interest in the discussion of poetic prose. On the other hand, it anticipates Dionysius' reaction to critical opponents of his theory by presenting them as uninitiated in the secrets of poetic prose.[24] Further, Kirchner rightly suggests that the metaphor of mysteries announces a certain 'Rezeptionserlebnis' of Demosthenes' prose rhythm, which can be associated with ἐνθουσιασμός and μανία.[25] I agree with Kirchner on these points, but I would add that the reference to Mysteries more

---

[18] Most ancient sources merely associate the phrase with mysteries in general, without naming Orpheus. Some writers, however, do assign the words to Orpheus, in particular Tatian, *Ad Graecos* 8 (see further Bernabé [2004] 1-7). The second half of the line also occurs in the Jewish *Testament of Orpheus* that was written in the early Hellenistic period. Cf. West (1983) 34 and 82 and Kirchner (2005) 174. It seems plausible that the words were associated with Orpheus even if they were not explicitly assigned to him.

[19] For Dionysius' comparison between oratory and music, see *Comp.* 11.40,11-16: see section 6.5. A general discussion of Greek views on speech and music can be found in Stanford (1967) 27-48.

[20] *Comp.* 11.39,17-19.

[21] *Dem.* 39.212,3-10. See also *Comp.* 11.38,17-20: 'For who is there that is not stirred and bewitched (γοητεύεται) by one melody but has no such feeling on hearing another'. *Comp.* 3.11,5-6 (on Homer, *Od.*16.1-16): Ταῦθ' ὅτι μὲν ἐπάγεται καὶ κηλεῖ τὰς ἀκοὰς ποιημάτων τε τῶν πάνυ ἡδίστων οὐδενὸς ἥττω μοῖραν ἔχει, πάντες ἂν εὖ οἶδ' ὅτι μαρτυρήσειαν. 'I am sure that everyone would testify that these lines allure and enchant the ears, and rank second to no poetry whatsoever, even the most attractive of all.'

[22] See esp. *Dem.* 22.176,15-20 and *Dem.* 35.207,14-16.

[23] Even if one does not assume that Dionysius associated the mystic formula with Orpheus, one must admit that the words do evoke the idea of mystery and magic.

[24] Kirchner (2005) 175. For Dionysius' (fictional?) opponents, who do not believe that Demosthenes was so helpless that he consciously took care of the exact length of his syllables etc., see *Comp.* 25.131,14-135,19. According to Leo (1889) 286, these opponents are 'ohne Zweifel Asianer', but it is presumably wrong to regard 'Asianists' as a group of rhetoricians who presented themselves as a school: see section 1.2.

[25] Kirchner (2005) 176 refers to *Dem.* 22.176,15-22.

particularly evokes the idea of (Orphic) magic, which Dionysius associates with the effects of good poetic prose.

The relation between rhetoric and magic deserves some more attention. There are various terms that Dionysius uses to describe the enchanting effect of texts, such as κολακεύειν, γοητεύειν, κηλεῖν and θέλγειν (the verb that describes the singing of the Sirens in the *Odyssey*).[26] These terms remind us that Dionysius' ideas on the enchanting effect of poetic prose can ultimately be traced back to the views of the fifth century sophist Gorgias. In the *Encomium of Helen*, Gorgias states that poetry and magic produce very powerful effects on the listener.[27] He claims that similar emotional effects can be the result of persuasive speech in general: 'Just as different drugs expel different humours from the body, and some stop it from being ill but others stop it from living, so too some speeches cause sorrow, some cause pleasure, some cause fear, some give the hearers confidence, some drug and bewitch the mind with an evil persuasion.'[28] Apart from γοητεύειν (γοητεία) and θέλγειν, which we also found in Dionysius' works, Gorgias uses φαρμακεύειν and μαγεία when referring to the 'enchanting' power of words.[29] The connection between magic and poetry in ancient thought becomes especially apparent from the use of another term, namely ψυχαγωγία: this word was borrowed from the context of magic ritual and came to be used as the general term for the enchanting effects of speech, in particular poetry, and later also rhetoric.[30] Thus, Isocrates regretfully acknowledges that orators, unlike poets, cannot make use of metre and rhythm, poetic devices that have so much

---

[26] Κολακεύειν: *Comp.* 23.113,15; *Dem.* 45.230,2. Γοητεύειν: *Comp.* 12.46,8; *Thuc.* 6.333,4; 7.334,2; *Dem.* 35.207,15; 39.212,9. Γοητεία: *Is.* 4.96,16; *Thuc.* 6.333,4; *Thuc.* 7.334,2. Κηλεῖν: *Comp.* 3.11,5; *Dem.* 36.209,6; 39.212,9. In *Dem.* 20.171,7-8, Dionysius criticises Isocrates' style because 'it seeks to enchant and delight the ear' (θέλγειν γέ τοι καὶ ἡδύνειν ζητοῦσα τὴν ἀκοήν). For the Sirens, see Homer, *Od.* 12.40. For an analysis of Dionysius' views on the effects of τὸ καλόν and ἡ ἡδονή on the audience, see Goudriaan (1989) 180-193. On γοητεία in Dionysius, see also Lockwood (1937) 196.

[27] Gorgias, *Hel.* 9-10. Cf. Segal (1962) 99-155, De Romilly (1975) 3-22 and Macdowell (1982) 37. For Gorgias' 'definition' of poetry as 'speech with metre' (λόγον ἔχοντα μέτρον, *Hel.* 9), see Graff (2005) 307, who states that 'Gorgias set little store in the distinction between prose and poetry'. However, I agree with MacDowell (1982) 37 that Gorgias is not so much interested in a 'definition' of poetry, but rather in the simple fact that poetry uses words (i.e. that it is a form of λόγος), an observation that he needs for his argument. Poetry and magic spells are just two examples of λόγος producing emotional effects; since poetry belongs to λόγος, Gorgias can use *poetic* effects as illustrative of the effects of λόγος in general. See also Russell (1981) 23 and Ford (2002) 178.

[28] Gorgias, *Hel.* 14: ὥσπερ γὰρ τῶν φαρμάκων ἄλλους ἄλλα χυμοὺς ἐκ τοῦ σώματος ἐξάγει, καὶ τὰ μὲν νόσου τὰ δὲ βίου παύει, οὕτω καὶ τῶν λόγων οἱ μὲν ἐλύπησαν, οἱ δὲ ἔτερψαν, οἱ δὲ ἐφόβησαν, οἱ δὲ εἰς θάρσος κατέστησαν τοὺς ἀκούοντας, οἱ δὲ πειθοῖ τινι κακῇ τὴν ψυχὴν ἐφαρμάκευσαν καὶ ἐξεγοήτευσαν. The translation is by MacDowell (1982). For the enchanting effect of speech, see also Ford (2002) 172-182, who shows that Gorgias was influenced by the discourse of medicine and natural philosophy.

[29] Φαρμακεύειν: *Hel.* 14. θέλγειν: *Hel.* 10. Γοητεία and γοητεύειν: *Hel.* 10 and 14. Μαγεία: *Hel.* 10.

[30] E.g. Aristotle, *Po.* 1450a33 on tragedy. Cf. De Romilly (1975) 15 and Meijering (1987) 6-12.

charm that they 'enchant the audience' (ψυχαγωγοῦσιν τοὺς ἀκούοντας).[31] It is well known that Plato characterises rhetoric as ψυχαγωγία τις διὰ λόγων.[32] In later theory, the term ψυχαγωγία played a central role in discussions on the function of poetry: according to the Alexandrian scholar Eratosthenes of Cyrene (3rd centrury BC), every poet aims at 'enchantment' (ψυχαγωγία), not at 'instruction' (διδασκαλία).[33] Although Dionysius does not use the word ψυχαγωγία in the context of poetry, he, too, employs the term when distinguishing between 'entertainment' and 'benefit' (ὠφελεία).[34]

Gorgias' views on the enchanting effect of speech are reflected in his own style, which ancient and modern critics regard to be particularly poetic.[35] When Aristotle observes that the first prose style was influenced by poetry, he mentions Gorgias as its most important representative.[36] But neither Gorgias' style nor his preference for a magical type of rhetoric were taken over by later rhetoricians of the fifth and fourth century: Isocrates and Aristotle do not only object to the use of (too many) poetic devices in prose, but they also reject the idea of magical speech in prose texts.[37] For Aristotle, as we will see, clarity is the most important quality of prose style, which he considers incompatible with the enchanting effects of Gorgias' type of speeches. Isocrates distinguishes his artistic prose style from the style of poetry when he states that only poets are allowed to employ many 'ornaments' (κόσμοι) and to use rhythm and metre.[38] It is revealing that Isocrates never uses terms like γοητεία, μαγεία or κηλεῖν.[39]

---

[31] Isocrates, *Evagoras* 10. In the subsequent passage, Isocrates proves the power of rhythm and metre by way of a theoretical metathesis (see section 7.3.1): 'if you destroy the metre of the most popular poetry, leaving words and ideas as they are, the poems will appear much inferior to their present renown.' (Translation Grube [1965] 43).

[32] Plato, *Phdr.* 261a8; see Meijering (1987) 11.

[33] Strabo 1.1.10. Many Greek and Roman critics disagreed with Eratosthenes' extreme view, notably Neoptolemus, Philodemus, Strabo and Horace. Cf. Grube (1968) 128, Pfeiffer (1968) 166-167, Meijering (1987) 5 and 58-59, Kennedy (1989) 206 and Janko (2000) 147-148.

[34] In *Dem.* 44.228,8-14, Dionysius claims that Demosthenes uses the 'mixed composition' (μικτὴ σύνθεσις) in order to address two different groups in his audience at the same time: on the one hand, there are listeners who long for 'attraction' (ἀπάτης) and 'entertainment' (ψυχαγωγίας); on the other hand, there are listeners who desire 'instruction' (διδαχῆς) and 'benefit' (ὠφελείας). In *Pomp.* 6.245,15-17, Dionysius tells us that the historian Theompompus deals with a great variety of subjects, not merely for 'entertainment' (ψυχαγωγία), but for 'practical benefit' (ὠφέλεια).

[35] Cf. Blass *DAB* I (1979[3] [1868]) 63, Norden (1915[3]) 63-75, MacDowell (1982) 17, Kennedy (1994) 20.

[36] Aristotle, *Rh.* 1404a20-39 (see below).

[37] For Aristotle and Isocrates on prose style, see section 6.4 and Graff (2005) 306-317. De Romilly (1975) 47-66 points out that fourth century rhetoricians do not follow Gorgias' views on the connection between rhetoric and magic.

[38] Isocrates, *Evagoras* 8. In *Antidosis* 46-47, Isocrates seems to take a different stand: see section 6.4 and cf. Graff (2005) 319-321.

[39] Cf. De Romilly (1975) 55.

However, the idea of magical rhetoric, often combined with an appreciation of rhythmical prose, returns in later times. De Romilly points to writers of the first and second centuries AD, in particular Aelius Aristides and 'Longinus'.[40] For our purpose it is interesting to see that the latter critic thinks that composition (σύνθεσις), which he lists as one of the five sources of the sublime, 'casts a spell (κηλεῖν) on us and always turns our thoughts towards what is majestic and dignified and sublime and all else that it embraces, winning a complete mastery over our minds'.[41] The comparison between music and literary composition that precedes this remark is very much in the tradition of Dionysius of Halicarnassus. 'Longinus' tells us that the music of the flute forces even the unmusical hearer to move in rhythm and to conform to the tone; likewise, the sounds of the harp exercise a marvellous 'spell' (θέλγητρον).[42] Like Dionysius, 'Longinus' devotes much attention to the role of rhythm in the aesthetical effect of composition.[43] It seems, then, that in Hellenistic and Roman times, there is a tradition of rhetoricians who focus on σύνθεσις and revert in a sense to Gorgias' magic; at the same time, they allow more licence in the use of poetic devices. These rhetoricians suppose that the effects of music and σύνθεσις are related in the way they respond to a natural human inclination towards good melody and rhythm. The idea of a φυσικὴ οἰκειότης that connects human beings to good rhythm and melody is a 'Grundmotiv' of the theory of composition:[44] it is not only found in Dionysius and 'Longinus', but also in Cicero and Quintilian. The latter states that *compositio* is effective not only for pleasure (*ad delectationem*), but also for 'the moving of the soul', *ad motum animorum*, a Latin equivalent of the Greek ψυχαγωγία.[45] For, Quintilian adds, everything that penetrates the emotions has to go through the ear, and 'we are naturally attracted by harmony' (*natura ducimur ad modos*).[46] It is interesting to note that, in order to prove that human beings have an instinctive feeling for rhythm and melody, both Cicero and Dionysius point to the example of a musician who is booed by the public when striking a false note:[47] the judgement of melody and rhythm is a 'matter of feeling, which nature has given to all men.'[48]

---

[40] De Romilly (1975) 75-88.

[41] 'Longinus', *Subl.* 39.3: (...) κηλεῖν τε ὁμοῦ καὶ πρὸς ὄγκον τε καὶ ἀξίωμα καὶ ὕψος καὶ πᾶν ὃ ἐν αὐτῇ περιλαμβάνει καὶ ἡμᾶς ἑκάστοτε συνδιατιθέναι, παντοίως ἡμῶν τῆς διανοίας ἐπικρατοῦσαν. The translation is by W.H. Fyfe / Donald Russell (1995). The MSS have καλεῖν, but the correction κηλεῖν is definitely right. In the same passage, 'Longinus' says that composition 'brings the speaker's actual emotion into the souls of the bystanders' (τὸ παρεστὼς τῷ λέγοντι πάθος εἰς τὰς ψυχὰς τῶν πέλας παρεισάγουσαν), which again reminds us of the term ψυχαγωγία.

[42] 'Longinus', *Subl.* 39.2-3.

[43] 'Longinus', *Subl.* 39.4-41.

[44] Pohl (1968) 91. See *Comp.* 11.38,23-39,2: φυσική τις ἁπάντων ἐστὶν ἡμῶν οἰκειότης πρὸς ἐμμέλειάν τε καὶ εὐρυθμίαν. 'All of us feel naturally at home with tuneful melody and good rhythm.'

[45] Cicero, *De oratore* 3.197. Quintilian, *Inst. orat.* 9.4.9.

[46] Quintilian, *Inst. orat.* 9.4.10.

[47] *Comp.* 11.39,2-17. Cicero, *De oratore* 3.195-197; *Orator* 173. Cf. Nassal (1910) 41.

[48] *Comp.* 11.39,12-13: πάθος ὃ πᾶσιν ἀπέδωκεν ἡ φύσις.

It appears, then, that Dionysius' appreciation of the enchanting effect of poetic prose is closely related to his treatment of σύνθεσις as a kind of music. It seems reasonable to suppose that these ideas were influenced by the critics of poetry rather than by the rhetorical tradition. The rhetorician 'Demetrius', the author of the treatise *On Style*, does not use the terms γοητεύειν, κηλεῖν and θέλγειν, nor does he discuss the connection between music and composition as we find it in the works of later rhetoricians.[49] However, he does report that musicians speak of words as 'smooth, rough, well-proportioned and weighty.'[50] Pohl has suggested that the ideas on musical σύνθεσις can be traced back to Theophrastus, who may have adopted views from Peripatetic musical theory, such as developed by Aristoxenus.[51] Another possibility is that Cicero and Dionysius, and later Quintilian and 'Longinus', were influenced by the Hellenistic *kritikoi*, who in their turn built on views developed in musical theory. This would correspond to the great influence of musical theory on Hellenistic poetics as we find it in Philodemus' *On Poems*.[52] Both the vocabulary of magic and the comparison between music and σύνθεσις are prominent in the fragments of the Hellenistic critics of poetry preserved in Philodemus. The word θέλγειν, for example, which we encountered in our discussion of Gorgias and Dionysius, is also used by these critics.[53] One of them argues that poets 'enchant (θέλγειν) the soul by pleasing it', a view that is not favourably received by Philodemus, but Dionysius would probably have agreed.[54] The fragments of the *kritikoi* also contain allusions to the idea of the natural human attraction towards rhythm and melody.[55] The parallels between the *kritikoi* and Dionysius, with their focus on σύνθεσις and their views on the role of the ear in the perception of literature, are very striking. My hypothesis is that the ideas of Hellenistic critics of poetry on σύνθεσις were taken over by those rhetoricians and critics who focused on composition, in particular Dionysius, Cicero, and 'Longinus'.[56]

---

[49] 'Demetrius' uses the word κολακεύειν only in the discussion of 'flattery' in *Eloc.* 294. Cf. Pohl (1968) 91 n. 76. It is true that, as Janko (2000) 175 observes, 'Demetrius', *Eloc.* 183-186 selects his examples of elegance that depends on σύνθεσις from Plato's account of music in *Rep.* 3; but he does not make an explicit comparison between composition and music.

[50] 'Demetrius', *Eloc.* 176. See also section 4.3.2.

[51] Pohl (1968) 94. Cf. Kroll (1907) 91-101.

[52] See Janko (2000) 134 and 173-176. In his discussion of rhythm, Dionysius twice refers to the teachings of Aristoxenus 'the musical theorist': see section 1.5. He may have known Aristoxenus through the work of Theophrastus (Kroll [1907] 91-101 and Dalimier [2001] 384) or through the works of the Hellenistic *kritikoi*.

[53] See also schol. Eur. *Medea* 349: καταθελγομένου καὶ καταγοητευομένου τοῖς λόγοις.

[54] Philodemus, *On Poems* 1 fr. 164 Janko. Janko assigns this view to Andromenides. See also *On Poems* 1 fr. 37 and fr. 166, where Philodemus refutes Andromenides' view that poetry enchants (θέλγοι) the soul, a process that he describes in the same fragment as ψυχαγωγία.

[55] Philodemus, *On Poems* 5: Jensen (1923) 150. See also Janko (2000) 173-176 on the link between σύνθεσις and music.

[56] Janko (2000) 173-176 traces the connection between σύνθεσις and music back to 'the orgins of Greek thought', thus following the example of Kroll (1907) 91-101, Koller (1954) and Pohl (1968) 149-154. For my purposes, it is enough to state that musical theorists (including Aristoxenus), who

At the end of this chapter (section 6.6), I will argue that Dionysius' ideas on prose and poetry in *De compositione verborum* are indeed closely related to the views of the *kritikoi*.

This very brief sketch of ancient ideas on the connections between poetry, rhetoric, music and magic has suggested that, although Dionysius refers to Aristotle's treatment of prose style in the third book of the *Rhetoric*, his ideas on poetic style in *On Composition* have actually more in common with the views of 'Longinus' and the Hellenistic *kritikoi*. We have seen that Dionysius' approach to poetic prose is related to the concept of magical speech and that, ironically, this concept has its ultimate origin in the speeches of Gorgias, the sophist whose style Dionysius strongly disapproves of. Having paid attention to the backgrounds of Dionysius' initiation rites, we may now enter the Mysteries ourselves. In the next section I will investigate some aspects of Dionysius' scansions of Demosthenes' poetic prose, in order to cast some light on the connection between these metrical analyses and his ideas on poetic prose. Thereafter, we will return to Dionysius' theories on the styles of prose and poetry, which we will compare more closely with the views that were developed in the Aristotelian tradition (section 6.4).

6.3. Dionysius on Demosthenes' poetic prose: practice and theory

Dionysius' warnings about the mystical character of his subject at the end of *On Composition* make it clear that he expected some of his readers to ridicule his ideas on poetic prose. This expectation was correct. Dionysius' views on prose rhythm have been the target of criticism in many modern publications. In the opening section of this study, I have already cited Eduard Norden, who regards Dionysius as 'ein äußerst bornierter Kopf' (see section 1.1).[57] A century later, Dover gives a similar verdict: he thinks that, as far as prose rhythm is concerned, Dionysius is 'a blind guide', who makes 'many puerile errors in scansion', and whose 'decisions on phrasal pause and hiatus are subjective, and unashamedly so'.[58] It will not be my aim to defend

built on the work of Pythagoras, played an important role in the development of these ideas. In Hellenistic times, the critics of poetry seem to have borrowed the views from the musical critics: see also Pohl (1968) 91-92.

[57] Norden (1915[3]) 79.

[58] Dover (1997) 180. Blass (1901) 19 also gives a scathing judgement: 'Die nächste Thatsache, die wir nun zu constatiren haben, ist seltsamer Weise die, dass die rhytmische Kunst der Prosa des 4. Jahrhunderts den späteren Griechen und Römern ein vollständiges Geheimniss geblieben ist. Ich will mich zum Beweise nicht sowohl auf Cicero beziehen, (...), auch nicht auf Quintilian's Bemerkung (...), als auf Dionysios von Halikarnass, welcher die Rhythmik des Demosthenes zu erforschen gesucht hat und damit gänzlich gescheitert ist.' Bonner (1939) 74 remarks that Dionysius' analyses of Demosthenes' prose into metrical feet are problematic because of his 'disregard of the quantities of the Greek language'.

Dionysius against the complaints of Norden, Dover and others about his scansion of prose texts. Dionysius' analysis of rhythmical prose is indeed problematic: his divisions of clauses into metrical feet seem to be rather arbitrary, sometimes even inconsistent. For a good understanding of Dionysius' theory of poetic prose, however, it is important to examine the connections between that theory and his actual analysis of Demosthenes' prose rhythm. Therefore, I will discuss one illustrative case, which concerns the first sentence of Demosthenes' speech *On the Crown*:

Πρῶτον μέν, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, τοῖς θεοῖς εὔχομαι πᾶσι καὶ πάσαις, ὅσην εὔνοιαν ἔχων ἐγὼ διατελῶ τῇ τε πόλει καὶ πᾶσιν ὑμῖν τοσαύτην ὑπάρξαι μοι παρ' ὑμῶν εἰς τουτονὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα.[59]

In two different chapters of his work *De compositione verborum*, Dionysius discusses the scansion of this sentence, and the differences are remarkable. In chapter 18, which follows a long list of various rhythmical feet (four disyllabic and eight trisyllabic) in the preceding chapter, Dionysius points out that Demosthenes' sentence consists of three clauses, each of which is divided into rhythmical feet of two or three syllables.[60]

---

[59] 'First of all, men of Athens, I pray to all the gods and all the goddesses, that as much good will as I have continuously shown towards the city and all of you may be accorded to me in full measure by you in this present trial.' I have cited Dionysius' version of the text in *Comp.* 18.77,13-79,8. This text corresponds to the text of the MSS of Demosthenes 18.1. In *Comp.* 25, the text is slightly different (see below).

[60] *Comp.* 18.77,13-79,8. Kroll (1907) 97-98 argues that Aristoxenus is the source of the discussion of rhythm in *Comp.* 17, on the ground that Dionysius says 'I use foot and rhythm in the same sense' (*Comp.* 17.68,14-15: τὸ δ' αὐτὸ καλῶ πόδα καὶ ῥυθμόν). However, Aristoxenus (Fragmenta Parisina 27,22) explains these terms as follows: Λεκτέον καὶ περὶ ποδὸς τί ποτέ ἐστι. καθόλου μὲν νοητέον πόδα ᾧ σημαινόμεθα τὸν ῥυθμὸν καὶ γνώριμον ποιοῦμεν τῇ αἰσθήσει. 'Concerning a foot we also have to explain what it is. In general a foot should be understood as that by which we indicate the rhythm and make it known to perception.' In *Elementa Rhythmica* 2.16, we find a similar definition. Ὧι δὲ σημαινόμεθα τὸν ῥυθμὸν καὶ γνώριμον ποιοῦμεν τῇ αἰσθήσει, πούς ἐστιν εἷς ἢ πλείους ἑνός. 'That by which we indicate the rhythm and make it known to perception is a foot, either one foot or more than one.' (Cf. Barker [1989] 187 and Gibson [2005] 93-95.) I find it rather difficult to agree with Kroll (1907) 97-98 on the basis of these texts. I also doubt that Dionysius' view that a single foot consists of either two or three syllables while longer foots are 'composite' (*Comp.* 17.73,5-8) is directly related to Aristoxenus, as Kroll (1907) 97 argues: for Aristoxenus, rhythm is not built from syllables, but from 'durations' (χρόνοι, a term that Dionysius does not mention in *Comp.* 17). In *Elementa Rhythmica* 2.13, a duration embraced by one single syllable is called 'incomposite'. Some feet are constituted from two durations, some from three and some from four. For Aristoxenus' theory of rhythm, see Gibson (2005) 82-98. Much more convincing is the view that Dionysius borrows ideas from 'metricians' (cf. *Comp.* 17.73,2). In antiquity, there seem to have been two different metrical systems. The first one, to which Hephaestion (2nd century AD) belongs, distinguishes ca. eight *metra prototypa*. The second one, which we know from Varro, derives all metres via *adiectio*, *detractio*, *concinnatio* and *permutatio* (see section 4.3.1) from the dactylic hexameter and the iambic trimeter, and does not deal with metrical feet that are larger than three syllables. Leonhardt (1989), correcting Leo (1889), discusses these two systems and points out that Dionysius' account of prose rhythm corresponds to the second approach, typical of which is also the name *bacchius* for ––⏑. In his *On Music* (book 1), Aristides Quintilianus (2nd, 3rd or 4th century AD) first deals with rhythmics (chapters 13-19) and then with metrics (chapters 20-29): the latter subject, unlike rhythm, is inextricably bound up with strings of words. Whereas

Dionysius argues that Demosthenes used especially the most noble and most dignified feet, such as the spondee (––), the bacchius (––⏑), , the cretic (–⏑–), the hypobacchius (⏑––), and the anapaest (⏑⏑–). On the other hand, he carefully avoided mean and unimpressive feet, such as the pyrrhic foot (⏑⏑), the iambus (⏑–), the amphibrach (⏑–⏑), the choree (⏑⏑⏑) and the trochee (–⏑).[61] Thus, Dionysius arrives at the following scansion:[62]

– – ⏑, – –, ⏑ ⏑ –, – –, – ⏑ –, – ⏑ –, – ⏑ –, – –
πρῶτον μέν, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, τοῖς θεοῖς εὔχομαι πᾶσι καὶ πάσαις,
⏑ – –, – ⏒ ⏑, – ⏑ –, ⏑⏑ ⏑ –, – ⏑ ⏑ ⏑, – – ⏒, – –
ὅσην εὔνοιαν ἔχων ἐγὼ διατελῶ τῇ τε πόλει καὶ πᾶσιν ὑμῖν
⏑ – –, ⏑ – –, – ⏑ –, – –, – ⏒ ⏒, – ⏑ –, ⏑
τοσαύτην ὑπάρξαι μοι παρ' ὑμῶν εἰς τουτονὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα.[63]

The scansion of εὔνοιαν (––⏒), πόλει (⏑⏑) and τόν (–) are remarkable, to say the least. Dionysius seems to think that in the rhythm of prose, a short vowel before a single semi-vowel (-αν, -ιν, -ον) may be scanned as long:[64] his list of rhythms implies that the final syllable of εὔνοιαν (ἔχων), the final syllable of πᾶσιν (ὑμῖν), and the

rhythm is divided into durations (Aristides Quintilianus here draws on Aristoxenus), the basic unity of metre is the syllable. In his discussion of metrics, Aristides Quintilianus deals with five levels of metrical composition, namely elements (letters or sounds), syllables, metrical feet, metres and the poem as a whole (see section 4.2.1). In *On Music* 1.22, he lists four disyllabic feet (feet being understood as 'combinations of syllables'), namely the pyrrhic, spondee, iambus and trochee, and eight trisyllabic feet, namely choreios, molossus, dactyl, amphibrach, anapaest, bacchius, amphimakros and palimbacchius. Dionysius (*Comp.* 17) lists the same metrical feet, but he has 'hypobacchius' instead of 'palimbacchius' (⏑––), and 'cretic' instead of 'amphimakros' (–⏑–). Aristides Quintilianus goes on to list feet consisting of four, five and six syllables, which one produces by combining the di- and trisyllabic feet. Dionysius does not deal with feet consisting of four or more syllable, which he regards as σύνθετοι (*Comp.* 17.73,6-7). Barker (1989) 394 argues that Hephaestion and Dionysius of Halicarnassus are the sources of Aristides Quintilianus' account of metrics, whereas Aristoxenus is the source of his discussion of rhythm. On the treatment of metrical feet in Hephaestion and Aristides Quintilianus, see also Van Ophuijsen (1987) 53-57.

[61] *Comp.* 18.79,1-4. In *Comp.* 17.69,9-11, Dionysius characterises the iambus as 'not ignoble' (οὐκ ἀγεννής), the same quality that he assigns to the cretic (*Comp.* 17.72,6). In *Comp.* 18, however, the cretic is regarded as dignified, whereas the iambus does not contribute to beauty (*Comp.* 18.79,1-4). A possible explanation is that in *Comp.* 18 Dionysius prefers the use of longer rhythms: cf. Aujac & Lebel (1981) 214.

[62] Bonner (1969) 73 has criticised the arbitrariness of Dionysius' divisions. A striking example is the analysis of the first words of the funeral speech in Plato's *Menexenus* 236d4: ἔργῳ μὲν ἡμῖν οἵδε ἔχουσιν τὰ προσήκοντα σφίσιν αὐτοῖς. Dionysius (*Comp.* 18.76,6-10) states that 'the first rhythm is a bacchius (––⏑), for I should certainly not think it right to scan this clause as in iambic metre, considering that not running, swift movements, but slow and measured times are appropriate as a tribute to those for whom we mourn.' This is, of course, a remarkable case of circular reasoning: Dionysius finds what he wants to find.

[63] Dionysius names the rhythms as follows: bacchius, spondee, anapaest, spondee, three cretics, spondee; hypobacchius, bacchius *or* dactyl, cretic, two paeans, molossus *or* bacchius, spondee; two hypobacchii, cretic, spondee, bacchius *or* cretic, cretic, catalectic syllable.

[64] Cf. Rhys Roberts (1910) 183 and Aujac & Lebel (1981) 131.

article τὸν (ἀγῶνα) are all counted as long. The word τουτονί, which would normally be scanned as a cretic (–⏑–), is described as 'either a bacchius (––⏑) or a cretic (–⏑–)'. On the other hand, τῇ τε πόλει is analysed as a 'paean' (–⏑⏑⏑), which would mean that the final syllable of πόλει is short. These strange elements in Dionysius' analysis, which do not follow the rules of metricians, may reflect certain changes in the perception of the quantities of syllables.[65]

Things get even more complicated when we examine *On Composition* 25. There, Dionysius points out that the same sentence of Demosthenes' *On the Crown* consists of metrical lines: this time, he divides the sentence into a cretic line, an iambic trimeter, and a sequence of cretic lines that, he says, corresponds to a poem of Bacchylides. The result of this analysis is as follows:[66]

Πρῶτον μέν, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι,	(not scanned)
– ⏑ –, – ⏑ –, – ⏑ –, – –‖	
τοῖς θεοῖς εὔχομαι πᾶσι καὶ πάσαις,	'cretic line'[67]
⏑ – – –,⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ –, ⏑ ⏑⏑ ⏑ –‖	
ὅσην εὔνοιαν ἔχων ἐγὼ⟨γε⟩ διατελῶ	'iambic line, incomplete by one syllable'
– ⏑ – –, – ⏑ –,– ⏑ –‖	
τῇ [τε] πόλει καὶ πᾶσιν ὑμῖν τοσαύ-	'cretic lines'[68]
– ⏑ – –, – ⏑ –,– –‖	
την ὑπάρξαι μοι παρ' ὑμῶν εἰς	"
– ⏑ –, ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑‖	
τουτονὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα.[69]	"

In the third of these units, Usener reads ἔγωγε instead of ἐγώ (MSS), because Dionysius states that the addition of 'one γε' would make the iambic trimeter

[65] Cf. Aujac & Lebel (1981) 214 n. 2. It is remarkable that the quantities of syllables in the metrical analysis in *Comp.* 25 (see below) do follow the rules of the metrical system.

[66] *Comp.* 25.130,5-131,13. See also Egger (1902) 106-107 and Aujac & Lebel (1981) 182-183.

[67] Dionysius compares this clause to the line Κρησίοις ἐν ῥυθμοῖς παῖδα μέλψωμεν (fr. 118 Bergk *P.L.G.*). Like Dionysius, Blass (1901) 168-169 also points to the presence of many cretics in the prooemium of *On the Crown*: 'Sie stehen gewiss mit Wahl und Absicht als ein gesetzter und würdiger Rhythmus.'

[68] Dionysius compares the last three units to the following verses of a poem by Bacchylides (fr. 23 Bergk): Οὐχ ἕδρας ἔργον οὐδ' ἀμβολᾶς, | ἀλλὰ χρυσαιγίδος Ἰτανίας | χρὴ παρ' εὐδαίδαλον ναὸν ἐλ- | θόντας ἁβρόν τι δεῖξαι. The metrical scheme of these lines is –⏑–,–⏑–,–⏑–‖–⏑–,–⏑⏑⏑,–⏑–‖ –⏑–,–⏑–,–⏑–‖–⏑–,–⏑–,–‖. Cf. Aujac & Lebel (1981) 223.

[69] This is the scansion as interpreted by Aujac & Lebel (1981) 223. However, one might suppose that τόν is scanned as long just as in *Comp.* 18.77,13-79,8. In that case, the last line would correspond more closely to the last line of Bacchylides (fr. 23 Bergk) to which Dionysius compares it. Further, the last syllable should perhaps be scanned as long because of the verse-end (*brevis in longo*).

complete.'[70] In the fourth unit, Dionysius writes τῇ πόλει, whereas the text in *Comp.* 18 (which corresponds to our text of Demosthenes) is τῇ τε πόλει. This change makes the analysis of the words as a cretic (instead of a paean) possible. With regard to the quantities of syllables, this second analysis is more in agreement with the system of metricians than the discussion of the same sentence in *Comp.* 18: the syllables of the words εὔνοιαν, πᾶσιν, τὸν and τουτονί have their normal length here. The line ὅσην εὔνοιαν ἔχων ἐγὼ⟨γε⟩ διατελῶ, however, does not comply with the metrical rules of the iambic trimeter, unless Dionysius counts the first syllable of εὔνοιαν as short.

It is clear that these two analyses of Demosthenes' opening sentence are not compatible: the first aims to show that Demosthenes composed a sentence by putting various rhythms of two or three syllables together. The second aims to show that Demosthenes wrote entire lines of poetry, which he obscured by leaving out some syllables or by adding words that fall outside the metre of the whole. While Dionysius does not find any iambic foot (which would not contribute to beauty) in his scansion in chapter 18, he does detect an entire iambic trimeter (be it a rather irregular one) in his scansion of the same passage in chapter 25. Scholars have observed the differences between the two chapters, and they have rightly argued that the approach to poetic prose in *Comp.* 25 is probably a more original one than the division into rhythmical feet in *Comp.* 18.[71] But how can we explain the difference between the two theories?

In both passages, Dionysius suggests that the rhythmical effects that he discovered were consciously composed into the text. In *Comp.* 18, Dionysius contrasts Demosthenes, Plato and Thucydides with authors like Hegesias, who did not pay attention to the rhythmical arrangement of their sentences.[72] In *Comp.* 25, Dionysius repeats again and again that Demosthenes composed his crypto-metrical lines consciously and not spontaneously: if only the first colon was composed in rhythm, it could still be considered to be an accident; but 'are we to say that these effects are spontaneous and uncontrived when they are so many and various?' Dionysius does

[70] *Comp.* 25.131,4. Aujac & Lebel read ἐγώ in their text, but follow Usener's interpretation (i.e. that Dionysius means that γε should be added after ἔγω) in their commentary. Rhys Roberts (1910) 262 does not believe that Dionysius approved of such an irregular iambic line (with long εὖ at the place of a short element). He thinks that Dionysius meant that the words cited only constitute the 'materials' of an iambic line; the words would need to be replaced in order to form a real trimeter.

[71] See Aujac & Lebel (1981) 28. Costil (1939) thinks that Dionysius' ideas in *Comp.* 25 are influenced by Hieronymus of Rhodos.

[72] *Comp.* 18.79,9-12. Dionysius also says (*Comp.* 18.79,4-8) that Demosthenes and other authors who take care of rhythmical composition conceal the unimpressive rhythms, interweaving them with the better: this is clearly considered to be a conscious process.

not think so.[73] Since in both chapters Dionysius is convinced that Demosthenes consciously composed his prose with the rhythms that he detects, it is impossible for us to reconcile the two analyses (the one into rhythmical feet and the other into metrical lines) on the ground that the rhythmical character of a prose text can be interpreted in two (or more) alternative ways. It seems, then, that we cannot avoid drawing the conclusion that Dionysius was somewhat careless in adopting two incompatible approaches to the problem of prose rhythm within the context of one treatise, especially since he applied them both to the same sentence from Demosthenes.

However, even if we cannot argue away these inconsistencies, we can attempt to illuminate the differences between *Comp.* 18 and *Comp.* 25 by analysing the context of Dionysius' theories in both chapters. I emphasise that I will not make any claim about the 'truth' of Dionysius' analyses, which Blass and Norden have rejected as useless.[74] I will merely try to explain how his scansions of Demosthenes' prose are connected to his theories. The aims of the two different analyses within their contexts largely account for their divergent approaches to the problem of prose rhythm. In *Comp.* 18, Dionysius intends to show that rhythm contributes to greatness and grandeur: his central thesis at the beginning of the chapter is 'that it is through rhythms that are noble (γενναίων) and dignified (ἀξιωματικῶν) and contain greatness (μέγεθος ἐχόντων) that composition becomes dignified (ἀξιωματική), noble (γενναία), and splendid (μεγαλοπρεπής), while it is made paltry (ἀμεγέθης) and unimpressive (ἄσεμνος) by the use of those rhythms that are ignoble (ἀγεννῶν) and mean (ταπεινῶν) (...).'[75] The rhythmical analyses of passages from Thucydides, Plato and Demosthenes aim at making clear that these texts are characterised by dignity and grandeur. Thus, Dionysius focuses here on an elevated style, and it seems that in his view rhythm only contributes to one of the two aims of composition, namely τὸ καλόν, and not ἡ ἡδονή. He discusses three texts: the passage from the funeral speech of Thucydides (2.35.1) is composed in a dignified and impressive manner (ἀξιωματικῶς τε συγκεῖσθαι καὶ μεγαλοπρεπῶς), which is caused by the inclusion of spondees, anapaests, hypobacchii, cretics, and dactyls.[76] The passage from Plato's *Menexenus* (236d) is very dignified (ἀξιωματικήν) and beautiful (καλήν), because of its bacchii, spondees, dactyls, cretics and hypobacchii.[77] Finally, the first period of Demosthenes' *On the Crown* has a beautiful harmony (καλὴν ἁρμονίαν), because it

[73] *Comp.* 25.130,1-2: ταῦτ' ἔτι φῶμεν αὐτοσχέδια εἶναι καὶ ἀνεπιτήδευτα οὕτω ποικίλα καὶ πολλὰ ὄντα; ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ἀξιῶ.
[74] Norden (1915[3]) 79 and Blass (1901) 19.
[75] *Comp.* 18.73,13-17.
[76] *Comp.* 18.74,9-10.
[77] *Comp.* 18.75,18-21.

contains none of the more ignoble rhythms.[78] It is typical that Dionysius has chosen two of the three examples from funeral speeches (Thucydides and Plato), while the third passage (Demosthenes) is a pompous introduction that starts with a prayer to the gods.[79] That this text is shown to contain only noble and dignified rhythms (according to Dionysius' rhythmical analysis in *Comp.* 18) will not surprise us when we have taken into account the focus on τὸ μέγεθος and τὸ ἀξιωματικόν in this chapter.

In *Comp.* 25, Dionysius' concerns are different. Here the question is how prose can borrow the beautiful effects of poetry.[80] Therefore, the focus is not so much on dignity and grandeur, but rather on the 'poetic' that charms and impresses the audience. The aims of composition of poetic prose are now formulated in terms such as ἐκμεμάχθαι (from ἐκμάσσω, 'to impress'), τὰς ποιητικὰς χάριτας ('poetic grace') and τὸ ποιητικὸν κάλλος ('poetic beauty').[81] In the preceding section, I have argued that the concept of style in *Comp.* 25 is related to the idea of the magical power of poetic speech. Instead of looking for dignity and grandeur, Dionysius is now interested in the enchanting effects of poetry, which can be borrowed by the writers of prose texts. The new perspective corresponds to a more original approach towards prose rhythm: Demosthenes' sentence is not anymore analysed into separate, dignified rhythms, but into metrical lines that correspond to the verses of poetry.[82]

Thus, the local contexts of Dionysius' two analyses of the prose rhythm in *On the Crown* 1 account for the differences between the methods in the two chapters, even if they cannot completely take away the uncomfortable feeling with which we observe the discrepancies between these passages. Having drawn attention to the connection between Dionysius' practice and theory of prose rhythm, I will now return to Dionysius' views on the styles of prose and poetry, which I will compare with the ideas of the Aristotelian tradition.

---

[78] *Comp.* 18.79,1-4.

[79] In *Comp.* 17-18, Dionysius does not answer the question (connected to the problem of *to prepon*) what rhythms should be used in passages that deal with less elevated subjects than the examples given here. When he states that 'most of the passages of Thucydides are of this character' (*Comp.* 18.75,15-16), and adds that there are countless such passages to be found in Plato (*Comp.* 18.77,1-2), he actually seems to imply that almost the entire work of these writers is dignified, and was *meant* to be dignified.

[80] *Comp.* 25.122,14-16 (see section 6.5).

[81] *Comp.* 25.122,18, *Comp.* 25,124,21 *Comp*. 25.126,13-14.

[82] Usher (1985) 12 states that the final chapters of *On Composition* 'add little to what Dionysius (and Aristotle and Cicero before him) had said earlier on the subject.' It may be clear from the preceding discussion that I disagree with Usher in two respects: Dionysius' approach to poetic prose in *Comp.* 25 is fundamentally different from his own discussion of rhythm in *Comp.* 17-18, and his views on metrical prose add a lot to Aristotle's ideas on rhythm in prose (see section 6.4).

6.4. Aristotle and Dionysius on the different styles of prose and poetry

In order to determine the originality of Dionysius' views on poetic prose, it is important to observe how his ideas are related to the theories on prose and poetry that were developed in the rhetorical tradition. I will first draw a (necessarily rough) sketch of the rhetorical views on prose and poetry from Aristotle onwards. Then I will discuss Dionysius' views: I will show that in most of his works, he is a faithful exponent of the Aristotelian tradition: his warnings against overly poetic writing closely correspond to the views of Aristotle and later rhetoricians. However, Dionysius' discussion of prose that *resembles* beautiful poems in the final chapters of *On Composition* seems to be less connected to the traditional rhetorical views.

In the third book of his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle sharply differentiates between the styles of prose and poetry.[83] In a famous passage he states: 'Let the virtue of style be defined as "to be clear" (...) and neither mean nor overly dignified, but appropriate. The poetic style is perhaps not mean, but it is not appropriate to prose.'[84] Thus, in order to retain the perspicuity that is required in speeches, prose composition should avoid the use of compound, coined and foreign words as well as the inappropriate employment of epithets and metaphors. These types of words are suitable for poetry, because poems have more elevated subjects; in prose, however, the excessive use of these 'poetic' devices will make the style appear artificial, and thereby less convincing. Prose and poetry are also different with regard to the use of rhythm and metre: prose should

[83] For Aristotle's views on the styles of prose and poetry in the *Rhetoric*, see esp. *Rh.* 3: 1404a20-39 (the first prose writers, such as Gorgias, imitated the style of the poets, but they were wrong: the styles of poetry and prose are different;); 1404b1-25 (prose style must be clear [σαφῆ] and neither mean [ταπεινὴν] nor overly dignified [ὑπὲρ τὸ ἀξίωμα]; proper words [τὰ κύρια] make style perspicuous; in prose the subject is less elevated than in poetry); 1404b26-1405a3 (prose style only uses proper and appropriate words and metaphors [τὸ δὲ κύριον καὶ τὸ οἰκεῖον καὶ μεταφορά]); 1405a3-b20 (the orator pays more attention than the poet to the use of metaphors, which gives clarity, pleasure and a foreign air [τὸ σαφὲς καὶ τὸ ἡδὺ καὶ τὸ ξενικόν]); 1406a10-b5 (epithets that are long or inappropriate or too crowded are allowed in poetry, but less so in prose; one should nevertheless use them to a certain extent, aiming at the mean [τοῦ μετρίου]); 1407b31-32 (one should use metaphors and epithets, while taking care to avoid the poetical); 1408b11-20 (compound words, a number of epithets and foreign words are appropriate to an emotional speaker [λέγοντι παθητικῶς]; this style belongs to poetry, but it may be used in prose either in enthusiastic or in ironical passages); 1408b21-1409a21 (prose must be rhythmical, but not metrical; discussion of the different rhythms; while the other rhythms should be avoided, the paean [–⏑⏑⏑ and ⏑⏑⏑–] is useful for prose: this rhythm is neither too dignified nor too colloquial; besides, it is not part of any metrical system). For Aristotle's views on prose rhythm, cf. esp. Cope (1867) 303-307 and 379-392, and Hendrickson (1904) 130-131. On the difference between the vocabulary of prose and poetry according to Aristotle, see Innes (2003) 12. For a comparison of the views on prose and poetry of Aristotle and Dionysius, see Breitenbach (1911) 173-174; for a discussion of the views of Aristotle, Isocrates and Alcidamas, see Graff (2005).

[84] *Rh.* 1404b1-4: ὡρίσθω λέξεως ἀρετὴ σαφῆ εἶναι (...), καὶ μήτε ταπεινὴν μήτε ὑπὲρ τὸ ἀξίωμα, ἀλλὰ πρέπουσαν· ἡ γὰρ ποιητικὴ ἴσως οὐ ταπεινή, ἀλλ' οὐ πρέπουσα λόγῳ.

have rhythm, but not metre, or it will be a poem.[85] Most rhythms are inappropriate to prose: the iambus is too colloquial, and the heroic foot (including the dactyl, anapaest and spondee) is too dignified. The paean, which forms the right middle between the two extremes, is the only rhythm that may be used frequently. This rhythm is also useful for the reason that, unlike other rhythms, it is not part of any metrical system. in short, Aristotle prefers a prose style that is characterised by σαφήνεια and the avoidance of both meanness and inappropriate elevation.[86]

Having mentioned Aristotle's most important ideas on the differences between the styles of prose and poetry, I should immediately point out that the contrast is not everywhere as clear as it might seem from this account. Some scholars have rightly argued that Aristotle's 'quality of style' (λέξεως ἀρετή) is not identical with σαφήνεια:[87] prose style is more elevated than the language of common conversation, for it hovers between the inartistic and the dignified.[88] For example, we should not ignore the fact that Aristotle rejects the iambus on the ground that speech 'should be solemn and move the hearer.'[89] In this particular case, Aristotle demarcates the border between the appropriate and the inartistic, but in most passages he focuses on the border with the poetic. Prose style is characterised as the right mean between the flat and the overly dignified, but in general Aristotle seems to be less afraid of risking the

[85] *Rh.* 1408b21-1409a21.

[86] Although Isocrates (*Evagoras* 8-11) clearly distinguishes the styles of prose and poetry, his position seems to be a bit more complicated than Aristotle's. In the *Evagoras*, Isocrates points out that poets are allowed to use κόσμοι ('embellishments') and that they compose their works in metre and rhythm, while the orators do not take part in these. In *Antidosis* 46-47, however, Isocrates claims that he and other orators compose speeches that are 'more similar to those made with music and rhythm than to those delivered in the court of justice'; and he adds that these speeches are written 'in a style that is more poetic and more varied' (τῇ λέξει ποιητικωτέρᾳ καὶ ποικιλωτέρᾳ). These ideas do not only foreshadow Dionysius' view that oratory is closely related to music (section 6.5 below), but also his observation that well composed speeches are like 'the best poems and lyrics' (*Comp.* 25.123,2-4.). For Isocrates' seemingly ambiguous attitude towards poetic prose, see Graff (2005) 309-313 and 319-322.

[87] Scholars disagree on the number and precise character of Aristotle's virtue(s) of style. Some believe that Aristotle has only one single virtue of style, which they identify as clarity (σαφήνεια): see Bonner (1939) 15, Grube (1965) 95 and Kennedy (1994) 62. Solmsen (1941) 43, however, thinks that Aristotle knows three virtues of style, namely clarity, ornament and appropriateness. Finally, there is an intermediate position: Innes (1985) 255-256, following Hendrickson (1904) 129, argues that Aristotle has only one virtue of style, which is, however, 'an interdependent package of three items — clarity, propriety, and ornamentation'. According to Innes, the theory of virtues of style thus derives from Aristotle: his single ἀρετὴ λέξεως, consisting of three elements, would have developed into the four virtues of style of Theophrastus, who separated τὸ σαφές into correct speech and clarity, and listed each 'element' of Aristotle's 'package' virtue as a separate ἀρετή.

[88] The same view is expressed in *Po.* 1458a17: Λέξεως δὲ ἀρετὴ σαφῆ καὶ μὴ ταπεινὴν εἶναι. 'Excellence of style means that it is clear and not mean.' In the subsequent passage, Aristotle explains that one should make a blend of standard terms (τὸ κύριον) on the one hand, and loan words, metaphors and ornaments etc. (ἡ γλῶττα καὶ ἡ μεταφορὰ καὶ ὁ κόσμος καὶ τἆλλα τὰ εἰρημένα εἴδη) on the other. The former will provide clarity (σαφήνεια), the latter will result in an impression that is neither ordinary nor banal (τὸ μὴ ἰδιωτικὸν (...) μηδὲ ταπεινόν).

[89] *Rh.* 1408b35-36: δεῖ δὲ σεμνότητα γενέσθαι καὶ ἐκστῆσαι.

former than the latter.[90] Thus, having defined the quality of style as 'neither mean nor overly dignified', he directly concentrates on the dangers of the poetic instead of making it clear how one can avoid the λέξις to be ταπεινή.[91] His focus on the borderline between the appropriate and the poetic rather than on the borderline between the appropriate and everyday language is best explained as a reaction to the style of Gorgias and his contemporaries. Aristotle's warnings against the excessive use of poetic devices in prose seem to be largely based on his observation that the first prose writers, especially Gorgias, were too much influenced by the style of poetry.[92] Thus, although it is not true that Aristotle's single virtue of style is nothing more than clarity (as Grube and Kennedy claim), his discussion of prose style and prose rhythm in particular is indeed determined by his emphasis on σαφήνεια.[93]

The views that Aristotle expressed in his *Rhetoric* on the difference between prose and poetry were very influential in the rhetorical tradition. Although later rhetoricians were less restrictive on the use of more rhythms than the paean alone, they usually emphasised the differences between the styles of prose and poetry. Theophrastus seems to have allowed more freedom in the use of prose rhythm than Aristotle did: he recommended the paean but may have regarded other rhythms as useful too.[94]

---

[90] On the 'Peripatetic mean of style' and its influence on Dionysius' preference for the mixed composition type (*Comp.* 24), see Hendrickson (1904) and Bonner (1938).

[91] *Rh.* 1404b1-4.

[92] See *Rh.* 1404a24-29.

[93] Grube (1965) 95 and Kennedy (1994) 62. This brief sketch of Aristotle's views on prose and poetry is based on his ideas in the *Rhetoric*. It should be noted, however, that this picture is complicated by the fact that the opening of the *Poetics* gives a different picture of the borderlines between prose and poetry than the third book of the *Rhetoric*. In *Poetics* 1447a18-b13, Aristotle argues that what all poetical genres have in common is that they produce μίμησις ('representation'). Metre, however, is irrelevant to poetry. Therefore, the mimes of Sophron and the Socratic dialogues are in fact poetry, because they 'represent'. Aristotle objects to the usual practice of people who employ the verb ποιεῖν with regard to the writing of verses: 'Homer and Empedocles have nothing in common except their metre; so one should call the former a poet, the other a natural scientist.' (Translation Halliwell.) The irrelevance of metre is also made clear in *Poetics* 1451b1-2: the writings of Herodotus could be put into verse, but they would still be history (notice that this passage offers an early instance of 'metathesis', be it a theoretical one; cf. section 7.1). In *On Poets* fr. 1-2 Janko, Aristotle presents similar views: the form of Plato's dialogues is between prose and poetry. For an analysis of Aristotle's views on the differentia of poetry in the *Poetics*, see esp. Else (1957) 39-57, Gantar (1964), Gallavotti (1969), Russell (1981) 13 and Halliwell (1986) 57.

[94] For Theophrastus on prose-rhythm, see fr. 698-704 Fortenbaugh (the main sources are 'Demetrius', *Eloc.* 41, Cicero, *Orator* 172 and 218 and *De oratore* 3.184-187). Theophrastus discussed prose rhythm 'in greater detail' (*accuratius*) than Aristotle (fr. 700 Fortenbaugh), but it is not clear in what way (cf. Fortenbaugh [2005] 322). Like Aristotle, Theophrastus recommended the use of the paean (fr. 702, 703, 704 Fortenbaugh); in *De oratore* 3.185 (fr. 701 Fortenbaugh), however, Crassus seems to imply that Theophrastus also allowed the use of other rhythms: Theophrastus thought that out of the 'commonly used verse type' (*istis modis, quibus hic usitatus versus efficitur*) the anapaest (⏑⏑–) arose, from which in its turn the 'dithyramb' (see below) originated; 'and it is the members and feet of the dithyramb, as he also writes, that are found everywhere in rich prose.' (Translation May & Wisse.) Besides, 'Demetrius', *Eloc.* 41 (fr. 703 Fortenbaugh), reports that Theophrastus praised a colon that was not composed of paeans, but which had a general 'paeonic' quality: οὐ γὰρ ἐκ παιώνων ἀκριβῶς,

'Demetrius' (the author of the treatise *On Style*) and Cicero followed Theophrastus in this respect. However, they both emphasised the *differences* between the styles of prose and poetry. 'Demetrius' states that one can use rhythmical units in the elegant style, but 'the actual metres must not obtrude in the general flow of the sentence'.[95] Cicero (or rather Crassus, in *De oratore*) warns that the orator should avoid 'lapsing into verse or into something resembling verse'.[96] In the *Orator*, Cicero remarks that, unlike orators, poets pay more attention to sound (*vocibus*) than to sense (*rebus*).[97] Quintilian too focuses on the differences rather than on the similarities between prose and poetry.[98]

Cicero's views on prose rhythm deserve some closer attention. Nassal compares the discussions of prose rhythm in Dionysius and Cicero and rightly concludes that there are interesting similarities between these accounts, even if Cicero emphasises the

---

ἀλλὰ παιωνικόν τί ἐστι. This would mean that Theophrastus favoured the use of a general kind of prose rhythm rather than the use of specific metrical feet. Cf. Grube (1965) 105. Usher (1974) xiii-xiv and Fortenbaugh (2005) 16 consider the possibility that Dionysius' treatment of prose rhythm partly depends on Theophrastus, but Dionysius does not mention him in the context of his discussions of poetic prose.

[95] 'Demetrius', *Eloc.* 180-181: Τάχα γὰρ δὴ ἔσται τις ἡδονὴ καὶ χάρις, ἐὰν ἁρμόζωμεν ἐκ μέτρων τὴν σύνθεσιν ἢ ὅλων ἢ ἡμίσεων· οὐ μὴν ὥστε φαίνεσθαι αὐτὰ μέτρα ἐν τῷ συνειρμῷ τῶν λόγων, ἀλλ', εἰ διαχωρίζοι τις καθ' ἓν ἕκαστον καὶ διακρίνοι, τότε δὴ ὑφ' ἡμῶν αὐτῶν φωρᾶσθαι μέτρα ὄντα. (181) Κἂν μετροειδῆ δὲ ᾖ, τὴν αὐτὴν ποιήσει χάριν. λανθανόντως δέ τοι παραδύεται ἡ ἐκ τῆς τοιαύτης ἡδονῆς χάρις (...). 'There will, perhaps, be a pleasing charm if we integrate metrical units into our composition, whole lines or half-lines; yet the actual metres must not obtrude in the general flow of the sentence, but only if it is divided and analysed in minute detail, then and only then should we detect that they are metres, (181) and even an approximation to metre will produce the same effect. The charm of this pleasing device steals over us before we are aware (...).' (Translation Innes.) Elsewhere (*Eloc.* 41), 'Demetrius' recommends a 'roughly paeonic' composition, and he refers to Aristotle and Theophrastus. As Innes (unpublished commentary) observes, 'Demetrius' largely builds on Aristotle's views on prose rhythm; but the idea of a generally paeonic rhythm cannot be attributed to Aristotle. The same thing can be said about the composition out of metrical lines or half-lines (ἐκ μέτρων τὴν σύνθεσιν ἢ ὅλων ἢ ἡμίσεων). This idea is not Aristotelian, but it rather corresponds to Dionysius' views in *Comp.* 25.

[96] Cicero, *De oratore* 3.182: *in quo impune progredi licet duo dumtaxat pedes aut paulo plus, ne plane in versum aut similitudinem versus incidamus*. 'In this rhythm [i.e. the dactyl] we may safely continue, but only for two feet or a little more, to avoid clearly lapsing into verse or into something resembling verse.' (Translation May & Wisse.)

[97] Cicero, *Orator* 68: *Ego autem, etiamsi quorundam grandis et ornata vox est poetarum, tamen in ea cum licentiam statuo maiorem esse quam in nobis faciendorum iungendorumque verborum, tum etiam nonnullorum voluntate vocibus magis quam rebus interveniunt. Nec vero, si quid es unum inter eos simile — id autem est iudicium electioque verborum — propterea ceterarum rerum dissimilitudo intellegi non potest.* 'As for my own opinion, although some poets use grand and figurative language, I recognise that they have a greater freedom in the formation and arrangement of words than we orators have, and also that, with the approval of some critics, they pay more attention to sound than to sense. And indeed if they have one point in common — this is discernment in selection of subject matter and choice of words — we cannot for that reason pass over their dissimilarity in other things.' (Translation Hubbell.)

[98] Quintilian, *Inst. orat.* 10.1.27-29.

differences and Dionysius the similarities between poetry and rhythmical prose.[99] However, I do not believe Nassal's explanation for the resemblances between the accounts of Dionysius and Cicero, namely that they both based their views on the work of Caecilius of Caleacte.[100] As I have mentioned earlier (sections 1.5 and 4.4), Nassal follows Wilamowitz in assigning Caecilius to an earlier period than Dionysius; but even if Caecilius was slightly older than Dionysius (which is uncertain), it is not very probable that he influenced Cicero. More convincing than Nassal's explanation is the suggestion of Janko, who argues that Cicero's views on euphony and prose rhythm are indebted to the so-called *kritikoi*.[101] I will return to the connections between Dionysius, Cicero and the critics of poetry in section 6.6.

When we sketch the rhetorical ideas on prose and poetry in broad outlines, we might say that, according to the traditional view of ancient rhetoricians, poetry has two characteristics in particular.[102] First, it makes use of verse. Second, it has a certain 'licence' (ἐξουσία, *licentia*) for the use of metaphors, figures and grammatical constructions. In these respects, poetry differs from oratory: orators are to a certain extent allowed to transgress the borderline between the genres as long as they do not violate the rule of propriety.

Now, how do Dionysius' ideas on the styles of prose and poetry fit into this rhetorical tradition? In most of his rhetorical works, Dionysius carefully preserves the Aristotelian distinction between prose and poetry. Like Aristotle, Dionysius condemns the use of obscure and archaic words in prose. Thus, Lysias and Isocrates are praised for their use of only the commonest and the most familiar words, and Thucydides is criticised for his 'poetic language', which is 'unsuitable for practical oratory'.[103] In particular, Dionysius objects to the use of periphrasis, which he calls at one instance 'poetic substitution' (ποιητικῇ μεταλήψει).[104] Not only in matters of vocabulary,

---

[99] Nassal (1910) 42-54, esp. 45: 'Ich möchte in der Behandlung des besprochenen Verhältnisses von Poesie und rhythmischer Prosa durch C. und DH. eine weitere Berechtigung sehen, die Kompositionstheorie beider in engeren Zusammenfassung zu bringen, auch wenn beide in der erwähnten Streitfrage nicht den gleichen Standpunkt einnehmen, indem C. mehr die Unähnlichkeit, DH. die Aehnlichkeit betont.'

[100] Cf. esp. Nassal (1910) 48.

[101] Janko (2000) 361 n. 3. Pohl (1968) 145-159 also points to the similarities between Heracleodorus and Dionysius, and argues that they are both influenced by the tradition of musical theory.

[102] Cf. Russell (1981) 149.

[103] For praise of the commonest words, see e.g. *Dem.* 4.135,5-8. For Thucydides' poetic language, see *Thuc.* 53.412,26-413,2: τὸ δὲ κατάγλωσσον τῆς λέξεως καὶ ξένον καὶ ποιητικόν.

[104] *Thuc.* 31.376,21-22. The 'poetic substitution' here concerns the words συγγενές ('kindred') and ἑταιρικόν ('partisan'), which Thucydides (3.82.4) has used 'instead of' συγγενεία ('kinship') and ἑταιρία ('party'). See also *Thuc.* 29.375,4-7, where Dionysius comments on Thuc. 3.82.3: ''Επιτέχνησις ('ingenuity') and τῶν τιμωριῶν ἀτοπία ('atrocity of their reprisals') and εἰωθυῖα τῶν ὀνομάτων ἀξίωσις ('normal meaning of words') and εἰς τὰ ἔργα ἀντηλλαγμένη δικαίωσις ('to suit

however, but also in the use of figures and grammar Dionysius regards the 'poetic' as something that is wrong: Thucydides' figures (σχηματισμοί) are too obscure even for poetry, and his use of the parts of speech betrays 'poetic license'.[105] The view that a poetic style leads to obscurity (ἀσάφεια) agrees with Aristotle's objections to the poetic. Dionysius especially objects to the poetic styles of Gorgias and Thucydides, and he thinks that Plato makes the same mistakes as these writers whenever he tries to express himself in a grand and extraordinary manner.[106] The term by which Dionysius often expresses his distaste for 'poetic' prose is διθύραμβος, a word that we find in his descriptions of the styles of Gorgias, Thucydides and Plato.[107] His discussion of the dithyrambic poets (Philoxenus, Timotheus, Telestes) makes it clear that he

---

their actions as they thought fit') are more suited to poetic circumlocution (περιφράσεως ποιητικῆς). See also *Thuc.* 46.402,18-24: the text of Thuc. 2.62.3 is more puzzling than the dark sayings of Heraclitus, and Thucydides 'uses circumlocutions of a rather poetical character' (ποιητικώτερον περιπέφρασται).

[105] *Thuc.* 52.412,14-17: (...) οὐδ' ἐν ἁπάσῃ ποιητικῇ χώραν ἔχοντας σχηματισμούς, ἐξ ὧν ἡ πάντα λυμαινομένη τὰ καλὰ καὶ σκότον παρέχουσα ταῖς ἀρεταῖς ἀσάφεια παρῆλθεν εἰς τοὺς λόγους. '(...) and his figures, which would not even find a place in any kind of poetry, features as a result of which obscurity, which ruins all his beautiful aspects and overshadows his qualities, has come over his discourses.' *Thuc.* 24.362,12: ποιητοῦ τρόπον ἐνεξουσιάζων ('allowing himself poetic licence').

[106] For Gorgias, see esp. *Lys.* 3.10,21-11,8: 'he wrote his speeches in a quite vulgar, inflated style, using language which was sometimes "not far removed from dithyrambic verse".' The latter words (οὐ πόρρω διθυράμβων τινῶν) are borrowed from Plato, *Phdr*. 238d (see below). Dionysius' views on Gorgias' poetic style and its influence on prose style correspond to Aristotle, *Rh.* 1404a20-39. For Plato's poetic style, see esp. *Dem.* 6-7: Dionysius' discussion of Plato's *Phdr.* 237-238 with its inappropriate circumlocution and imagery (ἄκαιρος ἀλληγορία), which makes the Platonic passage similar to a Pindaric poem, seems to build on Socrates' own remarks on his supposedly poetic ecstasy (238d, 241e2, cf. *Dem.* 6.139,6-8). On Dionysius' evaluation of Plato's style, see Walsdorff (1927) 9-24. Walsdorff has pointed out that ancient evaluations of Plato's style are closely related to theories on the styles of prose and poetry.

[107] *Lys.* 3.11,1, *Thuc.* 29.374,18-19, *Dem.* 6.139,7, *Dem.* 7.140,12, *Dem.* 29.192,6. The dithyramb (διθύραμβος) was a choral song performed in honour of Dionysus, which was at a later stage of its development (especially in the fifth century BC) characterised by a lot of freedom in the use of rhythms and harmonies. On the term 'dithyramb' and its association with Dionysus, see Pickard-Cambridge (1962^2) esp. 5-9, Aujac & Lebel (1981) 215 n. 3, Zimmermann (1997) and May & Wisse (2001) 282 n. 255. Plato already used the terms διθύραμβος and διθυραμβῶδες in the field of stylistic analysis of prose and language in general: in the *Cratylus*, Hermogenes calls the invented name σελαενονεοάεια (which would be the most correct name for the moon according to Socrates) 'dithyrambic' (*Cra.* 409b12-c3). In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates remarks, after having interrupted his first speech, that he has started speaking ἔπη and not 'dithyrambs' anymore, i.e. he has gone into poetic ecstasy (*Phdr.* 241e2; see also *Phaedr.* 238d above). For the term *dithyrambos* in connection with a free use of prose rhythm, see Cicero, *De oratore* 3.184-185 (Theophrastus fr. 701 Fortenbaugh): 'For I agree with Theophrastus, who believes that speeches, at least those that are in any way shaped and polished, should be rhythmical, not rigidly, but somewhat loosely. For on the one hand, he was right to suspect that, out of the measures that are the consituents of the commonly used verse type, ther arose, later on, the anapaest (⏑⏑–), a longer rhythm; and that from this the dithyramb originated, with its freer and more opulent structure (*inde ille licentior et divitior fluxit dithyrambus*). And it is the members and feet of the dithyramb, as he also writes, that are found everywhere in rich prose.' (Translation May & Wisse.) Theophrastus and other rhetoricians seem to have thought that the dithyramb with its free form influenced the style of prose texts.

considered the dithyramb as a genre that allowed great licence (cf. ἐνεξουσιάζοντες) in the variation of modes, melodies and rhythms.[108]

All these ideas closely correspond to Aristotle's ideas on the difference between the styles of prose and poetry. In some cases, however, Dionysius seems to express a quite different opinion. Aristotle would probably not have approved of Dionysius' ideal of 'a style that is entirely composed of the finest rhythms' (see also section 2.5.4):[109]

'Now if it proves possible for us to compose in a style which consists entirely of the finest rhythms (ἐξ ἁπάντων κρατίστων ῥυθμῶν συνθεῖναι τὴν λέξιν), our ideal may be realised; but if it should be necessary to mix the worse with the better, as happens in many cases (for it cannot be helped that things have the names that they have), we must manage our subject-matter artistically and disguise the constraint under which we are working by the elegance of our composition; and we can cultivate this elegance the more effectively because here we have great freedom, since no rhythm is excluded from non-metrical language, as some are from metrical language.'

Where Aristotle recommends the paean as the right mean between the colloquial iambus and the solemn heroic foot, Dionysius argues that 'no rhythm' is excluded from prose. The difference between Aristotle and Dionysius becomes particularly evident in the final chapters of his work *On Composition*. It seems odd that Dionysius, who objects so frequently to the 'poetic' style of Gorgias and Plato, finally undertakes to show how prose can be made to *resemble* a beautiful poem. In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will try to solve this problem.

6.5. Blurring the boundaries: Dionysius' views on poetic prose

Why does Dionysius, who is so critical of the poetic styles of Gorgias and Thucydides, conclude his work *On Composition* with the relations between prose and poetry? Part of the answer to this question seems to lie in Dionysius' formulation of the central question in the 25th chapter of his treatise:[110]

---

[108] *Comp.* 19.85,18-86,7: 'The dithyrambic poets actually used to change the modes also, composing in the Dorian, Phrygian and Lydian modes in the same song; and they varied the melodies, making them now enharmonic, now chromatic, now diatonic; and in the rhythms they continually assumed great licence — I mean men like Philoxenus, Timotheus and Telestes — when one considers the strict rules to which the dithyramb had been subject at the hands of the earlier poets.'
[109] *Comp.* 18.73,19-74,6. For the Greek text, see section 2.5.4
[110] *Comp.* 25.122,13-16.

Τούτων δή μοι τέλος ἐχόντων, ἐκεῖνά σε οἴομαι ποθεῖν ἔτι ἀκοῦσαι, πῶς γίνεται λέξις ἄμετρος ὁμοία καλῷ ποιήματι ἢ μέλει, καὶ πῶς ποίημα ἢ μέλος πεζῇ λέξει καλῇ παραπλήσιον.

'Now that my discussion of these matters is at an end, I think that you are eager to hear next how language without metre is made to resemble a beautiful poem or lyric, and how a poem or song is made similar to beautiful prose.'

Dionysius' question is how prose is made to resemble *a beautiful poem* (καλῷ ποιήματι ἢ μέλει) and how a poem is made similar to *beautiful* prose (πεζῇ λέξει καλῇ).[111] In other words, the issue is not how prose in general can be like poetry; rather, Dionysius wants to bring *good* prose and *good* poetry together: in the final chapters of his work, he concludes his theory of composition by focusing once more on the aims of composition, which are the central concerns of the treatise as a whole, namely charm and beauty. Thus, the focus is on the aesthetic quality of literature in general; now, of course, Dionysius does not have a word for 'literature'; therefore, he has to start from the two traditional main groups, namely prose and poetry. By emphasising the similarities between the two groups, Dionysius aims to show that the distinction between beautiful and bad literature is more important than the formal difference between prose and poetry. In this way, we can also explain the fact that Dionysius, in the final chapter of his work (26), includes a discussion of poetry that resembles prose. This subject has of course no *direct* relevance to his audience, which consists of students who wish to become orators, not poets. But since Dionysius wants to bring good poetry and good prose together, he must not only deal with poetic prose, but also with poetry that bears a resemblance to prose. Thus, in the final chapter of *On Composition*, Dionysius makes it very clear that he is only interested in prose that imitates *beautiful* prose, just as in the preceding chapter he was only interested in prose that borrows the effects of *beautiful* poetry: he rejects the argument that poets who imitate prose style will automatically write bad, 'prosaic' poems. It is only the best prose that poetry should resemble: 'one cannot be wrong to regard as beautiful those poems that resemble beautiful prose'.[112]

I will try to illuminate my interpretation of Dionysius' views on poetic prose by pointing to another passage from Dionysius' work. In the treatise *On Thucydides*, Dionysius remarks that Herodotus 'made his prose style resemble the finest poetry':[113]

---

[111] On the ancient Greek terminology for 'prose' and 'poetry', see Dover (1997) 182-186.
[112] *Comp.* 26.138,3-5: οὐκ ἂν ἁμαρτάνοι τις τὰ μὲν ἐοικότα τῷ καλῷ λόγῳ ποιήματα καλὰ ἡγούμενος.
[113] *Thuc.* 23.360,12-17.

οὗτος δὲ κατά ⟨τε⟩ τὴν ἐκλογὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων καὶ κατὰ τὴν σύνθεσιν καὶ κατὰ τὴν τῶν σχηματισμῶν ποικιλίαν μακρῷ δή τινι τοὺς ἄλλους ὑπερεβάλετο, καὶ παρεσκεύασε τῇ κρατίστῃ ποιήσει τὴν πεζὴν φράσιν ὁμοίαν γενέσθαι πειθοῦς τε καὶ χαρίτων καὶ τῆς εἰς ἄκρον ἡκούσης ἡδονῆς ἕνεκα·

'This historian [Herodotus] was far superior to the rest in his choice of words, his composition and his varied use of figures of speech; and he made his prose style resemble the finest poetry by its persuasiveness, its charm and its utterly delightful effect.'

Just as in *Comp.* 25, the subject of this passage is prose that resembles 'the *best* poetry' (τῇ κρατίστῃ ποιήσει). Whereas in many other passages Dionysius considers the 'poetic' as something negative, the comment on Herodotus' poetic prose is clearly positive. How should we interpret this passage? To begin with, we should observe that the three qualities of Herodotus that Dionysius praises here are πειθώ (persuasiveness), χάριτες (elegance) and ἡδονή (charm). These qualities are not restricted to poetic writing; what they have in common is that they all seem to refer to the effects that a text has on its *audience*. Further, we should pay attention to the context of Dionysius' remarks on Herodotus. Before he comments on the superiority of Herodotus, Dionysius discusses the predecessors of this historian. He points out that the stylistic writing of the earlier historians contains all the so-called *essential virtues* (ἀναγκαῖαι ἀρεταί) of style, namely purity of language, clarity, and brevity. The *ancillary* or *additional virtues* (ἐπίθετοι ἀρεταί), however, such as sublimity, dignity, intensity, charm, persuasiveness, and the ability to arouse emotion (πάθος) are sparsely found in the works of early historians.[114] Herodotus stands out precisely because he adopts not only the essential, but also the additional qualities.

Dionysius' system of essential and additional virtues was a rather late development in the history of rhetoric. Aristotle had recognised only one real ἀρετὴ λέξεως (virtue of style), which consisted first and foremost in perspicuity (τὸ σαφές), by which the orator can make his meaning clear.[115] It is highly probable that his successor Theophrastus listed four virtues, namely purity of language, lucidity, appropriateness and ornament, while the Stoic philosophers added a fifth virtue, brevity (συντομία).[116] Dionysius' system, which distinguishes between a group of essential and a group of

[114] For the system of essential and additional virtues, see esp. *Pomp.* 3.239,5-240,16 and *Thuc.* 22.358,19-23. For an analysis of Dionysius' system, see Meerwaldt (1920) and Bonner (1939) 16-19. For ancient texts, see also Cicero, *Part.* 31, *Brutus* 261, *De oratore* 3.52.

[115] See section 6.4: Aristotle claims that virtue of style is 'to be clear (...) and neither mean nor overly dignified, but appropriate.'

[116] For the history of the virtues of style, see Innes (1985) 255-263.

additional virtues, may or may not have been his own invention.[117] In any case, it clearly illustrates the differences between him and Aristotle. Dionysius' essential virtues more or less correspond to Aristotle's demand for lucidity: their aim is to give a clear and intelligible presentation of ideas. The additional virtues, however, aim to produce more artistic effects, which may move or delight the audience: thus, an author like Herodotus does not only write in a clear style, but he also pleases his audience with his elegance and charm. And this is exactly the reason that his prose 'resembles the finest poetry'.[118]

A similar case is found in the *Letter to Pompeius*, where Dionysius remarks that he would not be ashamed to call the works of Herodotus and Thucydides ποιήσεις.[119] Fornaro offers a very complicated explanation of this passage, which I do not accept.[120] She thinks that Dionysius here uses the term ποίησις in the way that the Hellenistic scholar Neoptolemus of Parium used it, namely in the sense of a poem *qua* 'thematic unity' as opposed to ποίημα (the poem *qua* form and style).[121] According to this interpretation, Dionysius would have used the word ποιήσεις in order to make clear that Herodotus and Thucydides composed works that were organised like the *Iliad*, in which the unifying plot holds a complex structure together. However, I do not see how Dionysius could be speaking of the unity of narrative: in the context of the passage, Dionysius explicitly discusses the expression (ὁ λεκτικὸς τόπος), not the subject matter (ὁ πραγματικὸς τόπος) of the two historians.[122] Further, Dionysius nowhere else follows Neoptolemus' distinctions of ποίημα and ποίησις.[123] Instead, I

[117] Cf. Bonner (1939) 19.
[118] In his introduction to the Loeb translation of 'Longinus', Russell (1995) 153 compares 'the sublime' (τὸ ὕψος) to Dionysius' 'additional virtues': both add a certain 'tone of writing' to the necessary requirements of style that are already present.
[119] *Pomp.* 3.240,17.
[120] Fornaro (1997a) 228-229.
[121] Fornaro (1997a) 228-229: 'Dionisio ha presente, credo, la distinzione tra ποίημα e ποίησις, che troviamo in Neottolemo di Pario secondo la testimonianza del V libro della *Poetica* filodemea. (...) Nel dire che le opere di Erodoto e Tucidide sono due ποιήσεις Dionisio vuole appunto sottolineare la loro complessità narrativa, per la quale, come l'*Iliade*, varie unità tematiche vengono fuse in un'unica opera.' Neoptolemus distinguished between ποίημα, which includes only the σύνθεσις τῆς λέξεως, and ποίησις, which covers the 'theme' (ὑπόθεσις). On this distinction, which very roughly corresponds to the difference between 'form' and 'plot', see Greenberg (1961), Asmis (1992b) and Porter (1995b).
[122] *Pomp.* 3.239,1-240,22.
[123] See Porter (1995b) 146: 'Dionysius of Halicarnassus is innocent of Neoptolemus' jargon. He favors *poema* over *poesis*, in the sense of "poem" or "work," most likely for the same reasons that the term *poema* received preferred status in Neoptolemus, namely its proximity to *poema* as "verse of poetry" and as concrete workmanship, the standard meaning of *poema* in criticism. By contrast, *poesis* (singular) in Dionysius usually stands for "poetry" generally. Dionysius, in other words, reverts to the standard meaning of Neoptolemus' terms, even if he shares his biases (at least in his *De compositione verborum*).' See also Greenberg (1961) 267: 'Horace, and the critics after him, Dionysius, Demetrius [sic], Pseudo-Longinus, Plutarch, all knew the work of the three centuries after Aristotle, but did not employ these terms in their technical sense.'

would suggest another interpretation. I think that we can explain Dionysius' qualification of the works of Herodotus and Thucydides as ποιήσεις in the same way as the characterisation of Herodotus' poetic prose style in *Thuc.* 23: in the context of both passages, Dionysius discusses the virtues of style. In the letter to Pompeius, he states that Thucydides is more successful in the qualities whose effects include force (ἰσχύν) and intensity (τόνον), while Herodotus is better in applying the qualities that excite pleasure (ἡδονήν), persuasion (πειθώ) and delight (τέρψιν).[124] The latter list strikingly corresponds to Dionysius' characterisation of Herodotus' poetic prose in *Thuc.* 23: the only difference is that τέρψις has now taken the place of χάριτες. Having listed the stylistic qualities of Herodotus and Thucydides, Dionysius decides that 'the poetic works of both are beautiful'.[125] We may conclude that it is again the aesthetic effects of stylistic writing that make the historical works similar to 'poems'.

It seems that we are now in a better position to understand Dionysius' ambiguous attitude towards poetic prose. On the one hand, there are those passages where Dionysius focuses on the clarity and lucidity of prose texts: in these passages, he agrees with Aristotle and objects to the 'poetic' use of obscure words, figures of speech, obscure constructions, and excessive prose rhythm. On the other hand, there are passages where Dionysius concentrates on the artistic effects of texts. In these passages, Dionysius suggests that prose texts should be *like* good poems: that is, they should aim at producing an aesthetic impact on the reader or listener.[126]

The latter attitude, which emphasises the aesthetic rather than the intellectual aspects of texts, particularly characterises the treatise *On Composition*. I think that the scope of this treatise explains to a large extent why Dionysius focuses on the similarities rather than on the differences between prose and poetry. Clarity and lucidity, which are important virtues for Dionysius in the treatises *On the Ancient Orators*, are pushed into the background, because σύνθεσις is, at least for Dionysius, mainly concerned with the achievement of pleasing and powerful effects.[127] For Dionysius, the two aims of composition are beauty (τὸ καλόν) and attractiveness (ἡ ἡδονή). In discussing the four means of composition, he emphasises that 'the ear (ἀκοή) delights' in melody, rhythm, variety and appropriateness. These sources of successful

[124] *Pomp.* 3.240,3-8.
[125] *Pomp.* 3.240,16-17.
[126] Cf. Breitenbach (1911).
[127] Besides, it should be pointed out that, according to Dionysius, composition (σύνθεσις) is only one part in the field of expression (λέξις), which, in its turn, is only one aspect of discourse (λόγος). Therefore, in his treatise *On Composition*, Dionysius does not deal with the arrangement of thoughts (νοήματα), nor does he give an independent discussion of the selection of words (ἐκλογὴ ὀνομάτων). This limitation of the subject of *On Composition* partly explains the differences between this work and Aristotle's *Rhetoric*.

composition excite pleasure, and we are all enchanted (κηλούμεθα) by them: this can also clearly be seen in the performance of *music*, which, Dionysius tells us, differs from public oratory 'only in degree, not in kind'.[128]

Where Aristotle's orator aims to persuade by presenting his meaning in a clear and lucid style, Dionysius' orator (at least in *On Composition*) is like a musician: he aims to enchant his audience by the beauty and charm of his σύνθεσις. These differences explain the fact that Aristotle focuses on the *dissimilarities* between prose and poetry, while Dionysius (in this work) emphasises the *similarities* between prose and poetry. The focus on aesthetic quality as the central aim of all literature makes the formal differences between prose and poetry less interesting.[129] But it is only at a later stage of the education process that a student may be allowed to experiment with the composition of poetic prose. Like Aristotle, Dionysius warns his students against the dangers of poetic diction and composition: the risks of prose rhythm and poetic periphrasis are highlighted in most of his works, as we have seen. At the end of his work *On Composition*, however, Dionysius has sufficiently prepared his pupils, who have now finally reached the level that is required for the composition of poetic prose. Beginning students should be careful to avoid poetic language, since prose style should — in Aristotelian terms — be clear (σαφῆ) and neither mean (ταπεινήν) nor overly dignified (ὑπὲρ τὸ ἀξίωμα). Only students who reach the final chapters of *On Composition* are ready to follow the good example of Demosthenes: they can be initiated into the mysteries of poetic prose.

---

[128] *Comp.* 11.39,17-40,16, esp. *Comp.* 11.40,11-16: 'In oratory, too, the words involve melody, rhythm, variety, and appropriateness; so that, in this case also, the ear delights in the melodies, is fascinated by the rhythms, welcomes the variations, and craves always what is in keeping with the occasion. The distinction between oratory and music is simply one of degree (ἡ δὲ διαλλαγὴ κατὰ τὸ μᾶλλον καὶ ἧττον).' See also section 6.2. On Dionysius' aesthetic approach to oratory and his views on the *politikos logos* as a 'kind of music', see Goudriaan (1989) 536-565, who relates these ideas to Plato's aesthetic views on music in the *Republic* and the *Nomoi*. Goudriaan (1989) 561 points out that Dionysius' four means of composition can also be found in Plato's account of the epic ῥήτωρ in *Rep.* 3.396ff. We should, however, not ignore the differences between this passage and *Comp.* 10-20: Plato is discussing a speaker in verses (not an orator), and, more importantly, he strongly objects to variations (μεταβολαί, 397b, 399c), which are so important to Dionysius. Goudriaan's view that there is a relation between Plato's epic ῥήτωρ and Dionysius' 'musical *politikos logos*' is therefore not in all respects convincing.

[129] The difference between Aristotle and Dionysius becomes also clear in the theory of styles. Aristotle (*Rh.* 1404b3-4) emphasises that style should be neither mean (ταπεινή) nor overly dignified (ὑπὲρ τὸ ἀξίωμα). Thus, he focuses on the bad aspects of the extremes. Dionysius, on the other hand, recognises the positive aspects of the two extremes, and develops a system of three types of style: see section 5.2. The middle style is still the best one, but it makes use of elements from the two extremes. Cf. Bonner (1938) 262-263: 'Aristotle had argued, "Avoid the vice"; Dionysius adds, "And select the virtue" inherent in the two extremes.'

In *Comp.* 25, rhythm is the starting point for the writing of prose that resembles beautiful poems. However, the focus on rhythm should not obscure the fact that there are also other factors that contribute to the poetic effects of a prose text.[130] The final aim of the process is not to write rhythmical (or metrical) prose as such, but to achieve the same enchanting effects that good poems have on the listener.

6.6. Prose-writers as 'poets': Dionysius and the *kritikoi*

In earlier parts of this study, I have already drawn attention to the connections between Dionysius and the Hellenistic critics who are quoted in Philodemus' *On Poems*.[131] It is now possible to add another observation to the results of previous comparisons: the aesthetic approach to the art of composition in *De compositione*, with its appreciation of poetic prose, may well be related to the views of the *kritikoi*. These critics denied the relevance of content and choice of words to the merit of poetry and argued that the only thing that matters in poetry is σύνθεσις (composition) and the *sound* that 'supervenes' upon it.[132] We recall that, like Dionysius (and Cicero), the critics stressed the role of the ear (ἀκοή) in the judgement of texts.[133] One of the most radical *kritikoi* was Heracleodorus, who claimed that 'we need not understand poetry to be enthralled by it'.[134] According to Janko's reconstruction, he expressed the view that not only content and words, but also metre is irrelevant to poetry.[135] In a badly preserved fragment, Philodemus seems to say that his intermediate source Crates of Mallos reports that Heracleodorus and the other critics called those writers 'who achieve perfection' (τοὺς ἀκριβῶντας) 'poets', so that the works of Demosthenes, Xenophon and Herodotus should actually be called poems.[136] Philodemus ridicules this suggestion, and he concludes that Crates either must have misunderstood the *kritikoi* or must have been completely mad. I doubt that Dionysius would find Heracleodorus' statement as ridiculous as Philodemus finds it: the view that *qualitative* prose is in fact 'poetry' seems to anticipate the ideas that we have encountered in some passages of Dionysius' works.

Heracleodorus' statement on the 'poetry' of Herodotus and other prose writers reminds us of Dionysius' evaluation of Herodotus in his *On Thucydides*. But it is

---

[130] See *Comp.* 25.124,12-21.
[131] See sections 1.5, 3.2, 4.3.1 and 6.2.
[132] Cf. Janko (2000) 155-156.
[133] The idea of irrational judgement through the ear is found in the fragments of the *kritikoi* and the works of Dionysius and Cicero: see section 4.3.2.
[134] Cf. Janko (2000) 361 n. 3.
[135] Janko (2000) 155-156.
[136] Philodemus, *On Poems* 1, fr. 199 Janko (Heracleodorus fr. 10).

especially in his work *On Composition* that Dionysius seems to have been influenced by the ideas of critics like Heracleodorus. Concerning the subject of poetic prose, one could say that Heracleodorus and Dionysius somehow seem to draw the same conclusion on the basis of two opposite approaches: while Dionysius extends the use of metres (be it incomplete ones) from the field of poetry to that of prose, Heracleodorus denies the relevance of metre to the merit of poetry, claiming that some prose-writers are poets, because they 'achieve perfection'. Both Heracleodorus and Dionysius focus on the pleasing and delightful effects of composition: it is these effects that make prose 'poetic', so that prose authors can be called poets. For both critics, the central concern is the aesthetic quality of literature, and in this perspective, the formal differences between prose and poetry become minor details. Earlier in this chapter (section 6.2), we have seen that Dionysius frequently speaks of the magical effect of rhythmical and musical prose. I have then suggested that, although Dionysius refers to Aristotle's treatment of prose style in the third book of the *Rhetoric*, his ideas on poetic style in *On Composition* are more indebted to the Hellenistic *kritikoi*, who claim that enchantment of the ear is the central aim of poetry. We may now conclude that our analysis of the ideas in *On Composition* 25 has confirmed that Dionysius' appreciation of prose that borrows the aesthetic effects of beautiful poetry is indeed related to the ideas of Heracleodorus and his colleagues.[137]

Now, the interesting consequence of the views of Dionysius and Heracleodorus is that ποίησις and ποίημα ('poetry') become terms that can be used in two different ways.[138] On the one hand, 'poetry' still designates a text in verses, with a certain special vocabulary and licence. On the other hand, 'poetry' gets a new meaning: it becomes the general term that covers all literature which is characterised by aesthetic quality. The latter use of the term 'poetry' explains Dionysius' characterisation of Herodotus' work, and Heracleodorus' evaluation of some prose-writers.

In his book *Criticism in Antiquity*, Donald Russell remarks that most ancient critics 'took a rather naïve view' of the differentia of poetry, since verse remained an

[137] Another interesting case is the *kritikos* Pausimachus, who is reported to have held that 'it is the task of neither poets nor prose-writers to write in accord with truth (...), one should aim to enthral the many.' (Janko [2000] 168 on Philodemus, *On Poems* 1 fr. 49 Janko.)

[138] I cannot extensively deal with the problem of the ancient technical uses of ποίημα and ποίησις. We can roughly distinguish between a traditional and a technical use of the terms. Most critics and rhetoricians use ποίησις as 'the act of composing poetry, the product of such composing, and poetry itself in almost any vague and nebulous sense' (Greenberg [1961] 267), and ποίημα as 'the product of poetic composition, again in a vague and general way' (Greenberg [1961] 267). Neoptolemus of Parium, however, claimed that ποίησις is closely related to the plot (ὑπόθεσις), while ποίημα only includes the verbal arrangement: see esp. Porter (1995b). *Pace* Fornaro (1997a) 228-229, Dionysius was not influenced by the ideas of Neoptolemus: see Porter (1995b) 146 and my section 6.5.

essential characteristic of poetry.[139] Although this analysis may be true in a general sense, it does not do justice to the more complicated views on prose and poetry of critics like Dionysius. In my view, the fact that prose-writers are called 'poets' is more than a 'hyperbole' (as Russell calls it). Although the 'poetic' is indeed traditionally associated with metre, Dionysius and other critics also use the term in a more subtle way: in the latter case, the 'poetic' refers to the aesthetic character of composition, which has an enchanting effect on the audience.

The fact that Dionysius goes much further in the appreciation of this kind of poetic prose than most rhetoricians seems to be the consequence of his focus on σύνθεσις, which he shares with the critics of poetry. However, traces of the same ideas are not entirely absent from the works of other rhetoricians. 'Demetrius' for example argues that the historian Ctesias may be called a poet, because he is a craftsman of vividness (ἐναργείας δημιουργός).[140] Vividness has, as Demetrius tells us, an emotional impact (πάθος). Thus, Ctesias' prose seems to be poetic because his texts have a compelling effect on his audience. And we may add that Dionysius includes vividness among his *additional* virtues of style.[141] As we have pointed out before, it is Cicero, more than any other rhetorician, who shares many of Dionysius' views on euphony, poetic prose and prose rhythm.[142] It has been claimed that Cicero's account of rhythm can be traced back to the views of the *kritikoi*, and this might indeed explain the agreements between the *Orator* and *De oratore* on the one hand and *De compositione verborum* on the other.[143] The idea that prose authors who write effective texts may be called 'poets' is also found in the *Orator*. There, Cicero states that, according to some people, 'the language of Plato and Democritus, which though not in verse, has a vigorous movement and uses striking stylistic ornaments, has more right to be considered poetry than has comedy, which differs from ordinary conversation only by being in some sort of verse'.[144]

---

[139] Russell (1981) 149. Dover (1997) 186 n. 73 agrees with Russell.

[140] 'Demetrius', *Eloc.* 215: Καὶ ὅλως δὲ ὁ ποιητὴς οὗτος (ποιητὴν γὰρ ⟨ἂν⟩ αὐτὸν καλοίη τις εἰκότως) ἐναργείας δημιουργός ἐστιν ἐν τῇ γραφῇ συμπάσῃ. 'Altogether, this poet (for Ctesias may reasonably be called a poet) is an artist in vividness throughout his writings.' (Translation Innes.)

[141] See *Pomp.* 3.239,14-16: ἐνάργεια is the first of the ancillary qualities. Cf. Bonner (1939) 19.

[142] See section 6.4 and cf. Nassal (1910) 43-54.

[143] Janko (2000) 361 n. 3. It should be said, however, that the fact that 'one can easily turn his [Cicero's] words back into Greek' (as Janko claims and subsequently demonstrates) is not a proof of Cicero's dependence on Greek sources.

[144] Cicero, *Orator* 67: *Itaque video visum esse nonnullis Platonis et Democriti locutionem, etsi absit a versu, tamen, quod incitatius feratur et clarissimis verborum luminibus utatur, potius poema putandum quam comicorum poetarum, apud quos, nisi quod versiculi sunt, nihil est aliud cotidiani dissimile sermonis.* (Translation Hubbell.) Again, the poetic aspect of Plato and Democritus is the artistic effect of a text, caused by prose rhythm, 'which can be measured by the ear' (*quod sub aurium mensuram aliquam cadit*). In the same work (*Orator* 162), Cicero refers to the ear as judge of sounds and rhythms: see section 4.3.2.

6.7. Conclusion

In the final chapters of his work *On Composition*, Dionysius of Halicarnassus is primarily concerned with *beautiful* prose and *beautiful* poetry. Charm (ἡδονή) and beauty (καλόν) are the two aims of composition, both in prose and in poetry. Thus, in the work *On Composition*, the aesthetic quality of literature is more important than the formal distinction between prose and poetry. Of course, Dionysius does not deny that there are differences between prose and poetry: it is not appropriate for prose to be *in metre* or *in rhythm*, but it should only appear metrical or rhythmical. Like Aristotle, Dionysius constantly warns his students that they should avoid the excesses of writers like Gorgias, who make *too much* use of poetic devices such as periphrasis, figures, and rhythm. In some cases, however, especially in *On Composition*, Dionysius focuses on the aesthetic effects of literature in general. This point of view makes it desirable to emphasise the similarities rather than the differences between prose and poetry: the central distinction between aesthetically pleasing literature on the one hand and bad literature on the other obscures the relatively unimportant differences between prose and poetry. It seems that Dionysius thought that only experienced students were ready to learn the secrets of poetic prose.

The final chapters of *On Composition* put, as it were, the crown on Dionysius' lessons in composition theory. His views on prose, poetry, and poetic prose have proven to be an interesting chapter in the history of rhetorical and poetical theory. We have seen that Dionysius combines elements from metrical, musical, poetical and rhetorical theory in order to introduce his readers to the aesthetic aims of composition and to the methods by which they will achieve these aims. Where the preceding chapters traced the grammatical and philosophical elements in Dionysius' rhetorical theory, the present chapter has clearly brought out the cooperation between the various disciplines that study the aesthetic use of language. With this conclusion, our 'initiation rites of style' have come to an end. We may now safely turn to the last chapter of this study, which will be concerned with Dionysius' most important instrument of assessing the quality and characteristics of texts written in prose and poetry, namely the method of metathesis.