ACTA CLASSICA UNIV. SCIENT. DEBRECEN.	*XL–XLI.*	*2004–2005.*	*p. 33–36.*

THEOPHRASTUS ON THE ORIGIN OF MUSIC

BY ZSIGMOND RITOÓK

In Quaest. conv. I. 5 Plutarch sets out from the question, of how a Euripidean sentence should be understood. Eros teaches how one may be a poet, even he has never been previously touched by the Muses.[1] One of the speakers refers to Plato says, Eros is bold and ready to attempt everything,[2] and proves this on his own part by the fact that Eros makes talkative even the reticent, and careful the negligent. According to another participant of the conversation, the lover is like a drunk who says melodious and metrical words in his inebriety, and cites by way of illustration Aeschylus who drank when writing his tragedies.[3] The third quotes his grandfather, who was most inventive and eloquent when he drank. Finally, somebody points out that lovers cannot see enough of their beloved[4] and cannot grow tired of praising them. These all, they conclude, are characteristic of a poet.

Then Sosias, probably the host, takes up the word, and after having praised all of his guests, he remarks that they could have set out also from Theophrastus, whom he has recently read and who had said the following of music. (Now let us hear Plutarch quoting Theophrastus):

„Music has three origins: pain (λύπη), pleasure (ήδονή) and enthusiasm (ἐνθουσιασμός), since each of them diverts and deflects the voice from its norm. In consequence of pain, mourning and moaning slip into singing. This is why we see orators in the peroration of their speeches and actors in their lamentations to pass over at ease to a singing tone and to lengthen their voices. Vehement outbursts of the joy of the soul lift even the bodies of those who are of lighter characters and call them to rhythmic movements, so that they leap and clap[5] if they cannot dance. 'Frenzies and cries of the excited with neck-tossing flurry' as Pindar says.[5] Refined people, after reaching this state of mind utter nothing but voices: they sing and chant melodies and verses. However, it

[1] *Quaest. conv*. 622c; Eur. fr. 663 N^2, Plutarch quotes this line otherwise too (*Mor*. 405f; 762b) and also others refer to it: Ar. *Vesp*. 1074; Pl. *Smp*. 196e; Men. fr. 229 K.-T; Nicias *SH* 566.
[2] *Smp*. 203d; *Tim*. 69d.
[3] Ath. 22d, referring to Chamaeleon; 428f.
[4] Cf. Xen. *Smp*. 4, 12; Plut. *Mor*. 681ab.
[5] *Dith*. II 13–14

is enthusiasm which most of all drives one out of his senses and diverts both body and voice from the norm. This is why Bacchants use rhythms and oracles are given in metre to those who are inspired, and among those who are raging we see only few who drivel without metre and song. Since things are like this, if you are willing to see Eros in full light and to understand him, you cannot find any other passion entailing more biting pains, nor any accompanied by more vehement outbursts of joy or by greater ecstasy and folly. The soul of an amorous man is like the Sophoclean city 'full at once of incense, of paeans and of moans'[6] It is, then, not curious nor wonderful if Eros, who collects and comprises all the sources of music, pain and pleasure and enthusiasm, and is fond of talking and loquacious otherwise too, if he, I say, is prone and inclined to metres and melodies, as no other passion." (Quaest. conv. 623a–d)

The first question is how much of the text belong to Theophrastus. The editors of the fragments (Wimmer, fr. 90; Fortenbaugh 719A) attribute only the first sentence to him. This is questionable.

The beginning (first sentence) belongs to Theophrastus in any case; Plutarch's text proves it (Θ. λέγει ... φωνήν).[7] Plutarch nevertheless speaks of Theophrastus clearly as of a starting point (ὁρμηθείς), that is, he does not seem to pretend that the whole text belongs to Theophrastus. The main question is how and why love teaches one to be a poet, not the origins of music and, actually, at the end (from οὕτω δὲ τούτων ἐχόντων on) Sosias returns to this question. Consequently, this passage seems to belong to Plutarch. As for the words of Pindar, Plutarch quotes them more than once[8] and here they are perplexing rather than instructive. These, then, do not go back to Theophrastus. On the other hand, it seems improbable that Theophrastus simply established what the origins of music are without offering any reasons, and Plutarch obviously followed his reasoning, though not without embellishing it. I think, then, that this reasoning also belongs to Theophrastus.

F. Dirlmeier, however, pointed out as early as 1937 that there was a parallel-text to Plutarch, preserved among the works of Marius Victorianus, but going back to Festus Aphthonius.[9]

This author, mentioning Theophrastus by name, speaks not only of three similar – though not identical – factors as the origins of music, namely, pleasure, wrath and enthusiasm (voluptas, ira, enthusiasmus), but of some other ideas too and since in Dirlmeier's opinion they are Theophrastean or, at least, peripatetic ones, the whole text should echo Theophrastus. This again is problematic, not all of Dirlmeier's proofs is quite convincing.

---

[6] *OT* 4–5.

[7] Lydus, too, proves it: *mens*. 2, 11 p. 26, 8–10. For him, however, only the fact is important that the sources are three.

[8] *Mor*. 417c; 706e.

[9] Die Oikeiosis-Lehre Theophrasts: Philol. Suppl. 30,1, 1937, 98–101; Marius Victorinus, *Ars gramm*. 4 GL VI p. 158,1–160,20.

In one respect at least, nevertheless, Dirlmeier is in all probability right, namely that Theophrastus' starting point was the Platonic and Aristotelian thesis that sense for rhythm and music is innate in human beings.[10] „The emotional affections – called *pathe* in Greek – supply incentives and rather great impulses to those who wish to sing a poem and incite the talents, growing aroused by some stimuli" – says Marius/Aphthonius in a positively Theophrastean context.[11] Perhaps the same conception lies also behind the statement of Aristoxenus. He explains the different natures of speaking and singing. In song, voice proceeds in intervals (διαστηματικῶς), in speech continuously (συνεχῶς). "This is why in speech we avoid halting our voice unless because of passion we are compelled to pass over to this manner".[12]

This is not simply a problem of nature and art as Dirlmeier seems to understands it. It is a keen-sighted observation of the fact that for artistic production an intensified spiritual or mental state is necessary, – engendered either naturally by some psychic shock (positive or negative) or artificially by some incentive, – at any rate, a departure from the normal state of mind.[13] Folklorists know many cases when great psychic tension (joy, fear, grief) finds an outlet in a cry or shouting and jumping (dance). Greek ὀλολυγή seems to have arisen from such cries.[14] Plutarch, however, does not speak of this, but of the deflection of voice from its norm. This, too, is not unheard of among folklorists. The

[10] Pl. *Lg*. 653d–654a; Arist. *Po*. 1148 b 20–21; *Probl*. 920 b 29–31; Plato on leaping also *Lg*. 673d; 677b; Mar. Vict. p. 158 19 sqq. It is perhaps not without interest that he, too, speaks of wine as incentive (159, 27–31) referring to Plato (*Lg*. 666b–c; 671b; 672d) but bringing a Roman proof (Hor. *C*. 3, 21, 11–12). Did he use Plutarch and not Theophrastus, or is the whole Plutarchean chapter still of Theophrastean origin?

[11] His accedentem et consentaneam etiam Theophrasti opinionem eruditoribus litteris haud praetermiserim, adserentis incentivum et non parvos impetus his, quibus cordi est carmen per mele {metrorum numero} edere, ab adfectionibus, quas Graeci πάθη appellant, suggeri et quibusdam incalescentis ingenii stimulis incitari (p. 159, 8–12).

[12] Harm. 1 p. 14,17–19 da Rios. I think διὰ πάθος does not mean "accidalmente" as da Rios translates it. Both Theophrastus (as quoted above) and other sources prove it that in emotional passages orators (especially Asianic ones: Cic. *Or*. 56–57; Sen. *De br. vit*. 12; perhaps Plut. *Mor*. 41d, but not only they, as it seems: Longin. Rh. Gr. I p. 197, 4–12 Sp. – Hamm.) pass over to a chanting-like tone, to something which is between speech and song, as Longinus says. Concerning music cf. also Theophrastus fr. 716 Fort. = 89 W. at the end: "The nature of music is one: it is the movement of the soul, originating in the course of the release form evils due the passions (πάθη). If this movement would not be, the nature of music would not be either." (Is this a Theophrastean desciption of κάθαρσις?

[13] *K. Marót* built his theory of the origins of poetry onto this idea: Die Anfänge der griechischen Literatur. Budapest 1960, 81–98; 166–168; and briefly in his paper The Sirens (Acta Ethnographica Acad. Sc. Hung 7 [1958], 44–46).

[14] *F. Schwenn*, Gebet und Opfer. Heidelberg 1927, 36–41; *M. P. Nilsson*, Geschichte der griechischen Religion. I. München 1955, 157.

Hungarian scholar S. Solymossy sums up some cases as follows: "People crowd together at a spacious place in a village or in a forest clearing and tell the events that have occurred in the course of the day: some hunting adventure, meeting an enemy, an exchange of objects or some observation. The recollection of the event excites the teller of the story … and his excitement causes a spontaneous change in his intonation."[15] I quote only one example. It was recorded with the Estonians that if somebody began to speak devoutly or pathetically, immediately a recitative could be perceived.[16]

Even more interesting is a similar case told by G. Thomson, of an Irish peasant woman:

"One evening, strolling through this village perched high up over the Atlantic, I came to the village well. There I met a friend of mine, an old peasant woman. She had just filled her buckets and stood looking out over the sea. Her husband was dead, and her seven sons had all be 'gathered away', as she expressed it, to Springfeld, Massachusetts. A few days before a letter had arrived from one of them, urging her to follow them, so that she could end her days in comfort, and promising to send the passage money if only she would agree. All this she told me in detail, and described her life – the trudge to the turf stack in the hills, the lose of her hens, the dark, smoky cabin; then she spoke of America as she imagines it to be – an Eldorado where you can pick up gold on the pavement – and the railway journey to Cork, and the transatlantic crossing, and her longing that her bones may rest in Irish soil. As she spoke, she grew excited, her language became more fluent, more highly-coloured, rhythmical, melodious, and her body swayed in a dreaming, cradle-like accomplishment. Then she picked up her buckets with a laugh, wished me good night, and went home."[17]

Theophrastus must have had similar experiences. Or even Plato when drinking wine?

[15] *Solymossy S.*, A líra és az epika eredetéről (On the Origin of Lyric and Epic Poetry). Ethnographia 17 (1906), 6.
[16] *Solymossy S.*, Az énekes rendek keletkezéséről (On the Rise of Singing Orders). Ethnographia 18 (1907), 212.
[17] *G. Thomson*, Studies in Ancient Greek Society. The Prehistoric Aegean. London 1949, 436–437.