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MOTIF OF COMPARISON — ORATORY AND MUSIC IN RHETORICAL WORKS OF CICERO AND QUINTILIAN

The ancients noticed a strong connection between oratory and music, which, as they concluded, was rooted in poetry. The link was made owing to the fact that, originally, music was an element of poetry, since verses were sung to the sound of a string instrument. As for eloquence, although it belonged to prose, it made wide use of poetical language. It is my objective to present and analyse the comparisons that Cicero draws between oratory and music in his rhetoric treatises. He based his texts on the works of the most prominent Greek authors, therefore it is essential to refer to Greek rhetoric thought as well and present their attitude to the role of music in writing about eloquence. The parallels drawn by Cicero between the art of music and the art of rhetoric have been grouped according to their subject matter and it is pointed out what elements of oratory and music were deemed corresponding and to what end.

Keywords: Cicero, Music, *officia oratoris*, Oratory, Quintilian, Rhetoric, *topos*

1. *Comparison in the theory of rhetoric*

In the ancient art of eloquence comparison was considered a rhetoric trope derived from poetry. Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* taught how to use it (Arist. *Rhet.* 3,4,2):

χρησιμον δὲ ἢ εἰκῶν καὶ ἐν λόγῳ, ὀλιγάκις δέ: ποιητικὸν γάρ. οἰστέαι δὲ ὥσπερ αἱ μεταφοραὶ: μεταφοραὶ γὰρ εἰσι, διαφέρονσαι τῷ εἰρημένῳ.

“Similes are useful in prose as well as in verse; but not often, since they are of the nature of poetry. They are to be employed just as metaphors are employed, since they are really the same thing except for the difference mentioned.”¹

¹ Trans. W. Rhys Roberts.

A brief history of the simile in the rhetoric treatises follows below. In the Hellenistic era it was classified as a figure of thought under the name of *synkrisis*.² Quintilian (*Inst.* 9,2,101) mentioned it among the figures of thought as well, although he hesitated, debating whether it should be rather placed among the figures of speech as other authors of his time tended to classify it. In Cicero's *Topica* (8–11) it played a crucial role in the *locus ex comparatione*.

Although simile was intended to be employed by an orator during a delivery of a speech, the figure very often appeared in the treatises on eloquence. There are, however, no explicit theoretical remarks on the use of it in the rhetoric works. Among various comparisons these, which parallel the art of oratory to music, are especially intriguing for they point out the similarities between the seemingly distant arts. It should be stated here that it was quite a common practice of rhetoricians to juxtapose oratory and other fields, such as poetry, philosophy and plastic arts; the best example of which can be found in Cicero's *Orator* (4–6).³ Yet, comparisons to music are not mentioned in theory, despite the fact that they were quite often used. Nevertheless, it was observed by the ancient Greeks at the very early stage of the development of both arts that oratory and music possessed a number of similar features.

2. Music and oratory in ancient Greece

The art of rhetoric originated from poetry in the 5th century BC, when Gorgias of Leontinoi began to write his theory on eloquence, hence making use of poetical language by employing such figures as metaphor, parison or isocolon.⁴ Initially, lyric poetry was sung to sounds of the string instruments. Although throughout the following ages it was gradually deprived of its musical element, the union of music and poetry echoed in the literary works of following centuries until the end of antiquity.⁵ As a result, the early oratory bore many traits of its provenance in the form of musical and poetical derivatives.⁶

² Dominik, William — Hall, Jon [eds.]. 2007. *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 58.

³ W. Dominik — J. Hall (2007: 260).

⁴ Worthington, Ian [ed.]. 2007. *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 38, 66.

⁵ Lausberg, Heinrich — Orton, David E. — Anderson, R. Dean. 1998. *Handbook of literary rhetoric: a foundation for literary study*. Leiden: Brill, 507.

⁶ Madyda, Władysław. 1953. *Trzy stylistyki greckie*. Wrocław: Ossolineum, VI.

There is yet another reason why the ancients considered the comparison relevant: their acoustic theory applied to the sound of human voice as well and, what follows, to the elocution. Moreover, a delivery of an oration in front of a crowd bore much resemblance to a musical performance. Owing to the connection between the two arts, numerous comparisons and references to music were employed by the rhetoricians.

3. Music in ancient treatises on oratory

Amongst the similar elements of the two arts, rhythm was the most frequent ground for parallels. It was introduced to orations (written and spoken) by Gorgias of Leontinoi⁷ and then widely applied by his followers.⁸ The Atticists implored for moderation in this respect, and reduced the rhythmical speech to a medium between metrical poetry and detached prose.⁹ Isocrates was the first among them to oppose Gorgias' ideas concerning the rhythm. He also developed the concept of so called 'period', a rhythmical and musical unit, and introduced the term: 'euphony',¹⁰ a way vowels and consonants were combined in order to produce a smooth sound of speech.¹¹ These aesthetic ideas were reflected in Theophrastus'¹² *On style*, in which the author pondered over the beauty of words,¹³ as well as in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' treatise *The arrangement of words*.¹⁴

As a result of the above-mentioned thoughts on music and eloquence an idea of a close connection between the two arts became very widespread and ground for comparisons was formed. The similes paralleling oratory to music appeared in most of the Greek rhetoric treatises extant.¹⁵ In the

⁷ W. Madyda (1953: VII).

⁸ Waterfield, Robin. 2000. *The first philosophers: the presocratics and sophists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 222.

⁹ W. Dominik — J. Hall (2007: 67).

¹⁰ Wifstrand, Albert — Rydbeck, Lars — Porter, Stanley E. 2005. *Epochs and styles: selected writings on the New Testament, Greek language and Greek culture in the post-classical era*. Tuebingen: Mohr Siebeck, 85.

¹¹ W. Madyda (1953: XIII).

¹² Fortenbaugh, William W. — Mirhady, David C. 1994. *Peripatetic rhetoric after Aristotle*. New Brunswick, N.J., U.S.A.: Transaction Publishers, 15.

¹³ W. Madyda (1953: XXX).

¹⁴ Jonge, Casper Constantijn de. 2008. *Between grammar and rhetoric: Dionysius of Halicarnassus on language, linguistics and literature*. Leiden: Brill, 55.

¹⁵ E.g. Dionysius of Halicarnassus: *The arrangement of words* (*Περὶ συνθέσεως*

works of Latin rhetoricians the largest number of comparisons to music can be found in Cicero's writings. Quintilian, who often quoted similes of his predecessor,¹⁶ included a few of his own inventions in his *Institutio oratoria*. His interest in music, however, was more focused on the musical education of future orators.

4. Similar aspects of music and oratory

In order to throw light on a certain issue in front of his audience, an author had to refer to their knowledge and experience. Since the accomplishment in music enjoyed a great popularity among the elites, it was possible to draw such comparisons. In the classical era, during which the comparison emerged, a literate member of society would most likely play a lyre or a cithara and attend the theatre therefore he would easily comprehend the substance of the parallel. Although the Romans had quite a different attitude to musical education, the Greek motif of comparison was preserved in their literature nonetheless. Since the range of education had shrunk to studies of eloquence and basic philosophy,¹⁷ only a few Roman aristocrats received musical tuition. In *De oratore* (1,11) Cicero argued that a skillful orator should possess a wide knowledge of science (theory of music being one of its most crucial elements). The author himself must have been well acquainted with Greek musical thought, which he hinted on, referring to Aristoxenus¹⁸ as *musicus idemque philosophus* (Cic. *Tusc.* 1,10,19).

There are a few groups of similarities between music and oratory which Cicero used in the comparisons. First of all there is the physical aspect of both arts. The ancients noticed that the same organs were involved in the process of speaking as in the process of singing and playing musical instruments. The observation is no doubt true when it concerns wind instruments; however, it is less obvious when the strings are taken into the account. In their case the simile is slightly more metaphorical because it is based on the

ὀνομάτων, *Perì synthéseōs onomátōn*) Chapter 11, Aristotle *Rhetoric* (Τέχνη ῥητορική, *Téchne rhētorikē*) Book 3, Chapter 11 and 14.

16 Quintilian repeated a lot of similes after Cicero, e.g. in the Book 7 of *Institutio oratoria* (7,1,51) a passage from Cicero's *Pro Murena* is quoted, where arguments are compared to a 'flute-player' accompanying actors in theatre (Cic. *Mur.* 12,26).

17 Both Cicero and Quintilian were apprehensive of that process; which they expressed, respectively in *De oratore* (3,142–3) and in *Institutio oratoria* (1,10).

18 Aristoxenus was a peripatic philosopher, whose work *Peri Harmonion Stotheion* seems to be the oldest Greek treatise on music extant.

parallel between the vocal cords and strings of a lyre or cithara. The most remarkable example of such a comparison is to be found in the second book of Quintilian's *Institutio oratoria* (2,8,15): *Nam sicut cithara, ita oratio perfecta non est nisi ab imo ad summum omnibus intenta neruis consentiat.*

The second field of parallels concerns the performance which constituted a vital element of both oratory and music. It is obvious that the most significant moment for a musician or an orator was a public presentation of their art. The interaction between performers and listeners would have been equally important. Both, musicians and orators, had a common objective, which was *captatio benevolentiae*¹⁹ of the audience: a guarantee of successful performance. It could be attained by *movere* (to sway the emotions) — one of the three *officia oratoris*.²⁰

The third group of similes includes rhythm and tone which were considered a crucial element of *elocutio*. Cicero especially paid attention to this aspect of an oration because in his opinion rhythm was a great advantage of eloquence.

It is necessary to begin with quoting Quintilian, since no other author provided a more complete account on similarities between music and oratory. In the first book of *Institutio oratoria*, chapter ten Quintilian explained the importance of musical education in general. Then he went on to discuss *quid ex ea proprie petat futurus orator* (Quint. *Inst.* 1,10,22). He also noticed that music, the same as oratory, had two modes of expression: voice and body. He justified the simile in the following way (1,10,24–27):

Atqui in orando quoque intentio uocis, remissio, flexus pertinet ad mouendos audientium adfectus, aliaque et conlocationis et uocis, ut eodem utar uerbo, modulatione concitationem iudicis, misericordiam petimus, cum etiam organis, quibus sermo exprimi non potest, adfici animos in diuersum habitum sentiamus. Corporis quoque aptus et decens motus, qui dicitur εἰσθημία, et est necessarius nec aliunde peti potest: in quo pars actionis non minima consistit, qua de re sepositus nobis est locus. Age, non habebit in primis curam uocis orator? Quid tam musices proprium?

- Physical aspect of music and oratory

Although in the comparison Quintilian concentrated mainly on the physical aspect of performing music and oration such as the motion of the body

¹⁹ Abramowska, Janina. 1997. "Topos i niektóre miejsca wspólne badań literackich." In Kubale, A. — Nawrocka, E. [eds.]. *Poetyka, wybór materialów*, Gdańsk: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Gdańskiego, 1997, 96–120.

²⁰ I. Worthington (2007: 261).

and fluctuations of voice, he also mentioned emotional impact of both arts, the so called *movere*, an ability to influence the emotions of the audience. The term was introduced by Cicero and, according to him, belonged to the group of the most important objectives of oratory.²¹ Adopting his predecessors view, Quintilian instructed the future orators that the best example of *movere* would be observed during a musical performance. Moreover, he claimed that the physical aspect of speech, such as movements of the body, swaying of voice, played subservient role in stirring the emotions, since an orator should take an advantage of his voice organs' capability in order to inspire and govern the reaction of his audience. In the third book of *De oratore*, Cicero paid a credit to the enormous potential of human voice in the passage 3,57, where he paralleled a musical instrument to a human body. As the criteria of similitude he took the sensitivity and responsiveness of both respectively: human body to the passions of mind and the musical instrument to the fingers that touch it. Then he went on to compare human voice to the sound of a musical instrument, emphasizing that both are technically capable of the same amplitude of sound, contrast and expression, provided that they are managed with art and discretion.²²

In this passage Cicero pointed also to *varietas*: the variety of tones and sounds that can be produced both, by the vocal cords and the strings of the *fides*²³. The parallel suggests that in every art the variety serves as the means of evoking emotions. And since the oratory is no less art than drama or music, it needs variation in order to arrest the attention of the public for the entire performance. This statement is even more emphasized in the third book of *De oratore* chapter 25, where Cicero chose as an example the differences in musical styles. He observed that although half tones were more exciting than diatonic, overloading a piece with chromatics made it as monotonous as an oration adorned with too many rhetoric figures. He also

²¹ I. Worthington (2007: 261).

²² *Omnis enim motus animi suum quandam a natura habet vultum et sonum et gestum; corpusque totum hominis et eius omnis vultus omnesque voces, ut nervi in fidibus, ita sonant, ut a motu animi quoque sunt pulsae. Nam voces ut chordae sunt intentae, quae ad quemque tactum respondeant, acuta gravis, cita tarda, magna parva; quas tamen inter omnis est suo quoque in genere mediocris, atque etiam illa sunt ab his delapsa plura genera, leve asperum, contractum diffusum, continenti spiritu intermisso, fractu scissum, flexo sono extenuatum inflatum; nullum est enim horum generum, quod non arte ac moderatione tractetur. Hi sunt actori, ut pictori, expositi ad variandum colores.*

²³ *Fides* — a stringed instrument, lyre, lute, cithern. (Lewis, Charlton T. [ed.]. 1879. *A latin dictionary*, by C.T. Lewis & C. Short. 1969 reprint. Oxford: Clarendon Press. s.v. *fides*).

stated that the differentiation could be achieved by lowering and rising of voice. What is even more interesting, in the text it is hinted that the ancient audience was sensitive to music, as well perhaps as to the art of oratory, to quite a considerable extent, for, as it is testified, if the rule of variety wasn't observed in a musical piece, it was loudly criticized.²⁴

- Performance and audience

The relationship between a performer and his listeners is the second field for comparisons of eloquence to music. (The obvious similarities between performance of orators and musician provided ground for numerous parallels.) In a passage from the second book of *De oratore*, chapter 83, the indispensability of an audience and its unique power are brought out by stating that neither music nor oratory existed without a public performance. Additionally, Cicero stressed the stimulating quality of a large audience by paralleling it to *tibiae*, for as music won't sound without an instrument, the listeners are necessary for an oration and encourage an orator to reach perfection.²⁵ The parallel between *tibiae* and audience is based on the double meaning of *cantare*, denoting both playing the instrument and singing.

Similar thoughts on performance are expressed in the chapter 54 of *Brutus*, where Cicero introduced a comparison between a successful orator and a skillful musician (*Brut.* 54,199).²⁶ In this passage Cicero made a point that the success of a public appearance depended on the ability to inspire the audience. Venturing to present the degree of skillfulness in managing one's voice, he produced an example of a proficient musician playing his instrument. Accordingly, a skillful orator could be easily recognized by an emotional impact of eloquence on his listeners, just as a virtuoso musician by the single sound of his instrument's string.

A corresponding comparison, presenting a musician and an orator during a performance, comes from the chapter 51 of *Brutus*. The object of paral-

²⁴ *Ut porro conspersa sit quasi verborum sententiarumque floribus, id non debet esse fusum aequabiliter per omnem orationem, sed ita distinctum, ut sint quasi in ornatu disposita quaed insignia et lumina. Quanto molliores sunt et delicatiores in cantu flexiones et falsae voculae quam certae et severae! Quibus tamen non modo austeri, sed, si saepius fiunt, multitudo ipsa reclamant.*

²⁵ *Fit autem ut, quia maxima quasi oratoris scaena videatur contentio esse, natura ipsa ad ornatus dicendi genus excitetur; habet enim multitudo vim quandam talem ut, quemadmodum tibicen sine tibiis canere, sic orator sine multitudine audiente eloquens esse non possit.*

²⁶ *Ut enim ex nervorum sono in fidibus quam scienter ei pulsus sint intellegi solet, sic ex animorum motu cernitur quid tractandis his perficiat orator.*

lel is again the sound of an instrument and the ability of an orator to evoke emotions (*Brut.* 51,192).²⁷ In the passage *tibiae* are paralleled to the ears of the public and the sound of the instrument to the skills of an orator. In that simile Cicero implied that the audience should respond to an oration the way an instrument responded to the air blown into it. The second important issue that emerged is again the indispensability of listeners. An art like oratory or music could not exist without an audience, which Cicero clearly stated in the chapter 50 of *Brutus* (*Brut.* 50,187), where he made use of a probably well-known Greek saying: ‘play on, to please me and the Muses’, inverting its meaning and teaching his disciple Brutus, to ‘play to him and to the people’, judging that the most crucial point of the art of oratory lies in the attaining the acclaim of a large number of listeners.²⁸

- Rhythm and tone

Rhythm and tone, according to Cicero, constituted another important aspect of oratory. Quintilian also asserted the significance of these two musical elements for the art of eloquence in the passage from the first book of *Institutio oratoria* (1,10,23–24), where, at the beginning, he paid attention to poetry, as the art combining harmony with rhythm and then observed that oratory likewise varies both rhythm and tone when expressing different thoughts and emotions and by those means achieves *movere* — the response of the audience.²⁹

In Ciceronian times the employment of rhythm in orations was a controversial issue. Cicero, following his Greek masters, vehemently argued in favour of rhythmical speech because he regarded keeping a steady rhythm and tone throughout the oration as a guarantee of a successful performance. Nevertheless, he appealed for the carefulness and moderation in this respect, especially, since he was convinced that even an unaccomplished audience

²⁷ *Ita se, inquam, res habet. ut, si tibiae inflatae non referant sonum, abiciendas eas sibi tibicen putet, sic oratori populi aures tamquam tibiae sunt; eae si inflatum non recipiunt aut si auditor omnino tamquam equus non facit, agitandi finis faciendus est.*

²⁸ *Id enim ipsum est summi oratoris summum oratorem populo videri. quare tibicen Antigenidas dixerit discipulo sane frigenti ad populum: “mihi cane et Musis;” ego huic Bruto dicenti, ut solet, apud multitudinem: “mihi cane et populo, mi Brute,” dixerim, ut qui audient quid efficiatur, ego etiam cur id efficiatur intellegam.*

²⁹ *Nisi forte in carminibus tantum et in canticis exigitur structura quaedam et inoffensa copulatio uocum, in agendo superuacua est, aut non compositio et sonus in oratione quoque uarie pro rerum modo adhibetur sicut in musice. Namque et uoce et modulatione grandia elate, iucunda dulciter, moderata leniter canit totaque arte consentit cum eorum quae dicuntur adfectibus.*

would hear every lapse as they did during a musical concert. His wonder at an unusual capability of common crowd to evaluate a work of an artist is expressed in the chapter 50 of the third book of *De oratore*, stating that most people didn't understand the science of numbers and measures, yet, despite their ignorance, they were able to pinpoint immediately the mistakes of an actor. He also added a remark of a cultural nature in which he observed that often single musicians equally as the whole bands were being thrown out of the theatre by the displeased audience for a slightest imperfection.³⁰

Feeling strongly that every speech kept in a certain rhythm exhibited skills of its author, Cicero seized every opportunity to prove the statement. In chapter forty-four, Book 3 of *De oratore* (*De orat.* 3,44) he presented the role of rhythm in music, poetry and prose, stressing the historical background of these fields. It is stated clearly however, that there should be a limit to introducing rhythm to an oration, so that it did not lose its prosaic character. According to Cicero, the musicians, who were also the poets in former ages, invented both verse and melody, shaping them after the modulation of speech and harmonious structure of words. Then they decided to transfer these two things from poetry to oratory. However, at the end of the passage it is noted that this process can be applied only one way, for verse cannot be formed by the composition of words in prose.³¹

Cicero observed furthermore (*De orat.* 3,49), that the power of tones and rhythm was greater in music than in oratory that is why he did not think it necessary to imitate musical rhythms in an oration. The role of rhythm is limited to keeping the flow of speech in order since mathematic and music laws are too strict to adhere to in prose. Then he went on to explain that the only objective of applying rhythm to an oration was to prevent it from rambling and to introduce an apparent structure.³² Nevertheless, an even

³⁰ *Illud autem ne quis admiretur, quonam modo haec vulgus imperitorum in audiendo notet, cum in omni genere tum in hoc ipso magna quaedam est vis incredibilisque naturae. Itaque non solum verbis arte positae moventur omnes, verum etiam numeris ac vocibus. Quotus enim quisque est qui teneat artem numerorum ac modorum? At in eis si paulum modo offensum est, ut aut contractione brevius fieret aut productione longius, theatra tota reclamant. Quid, hoc non idem fit in vocibus, ut a multitudine et populo non modo catervae atque concertus, sed etiam ipsi sibi singuli discrepantes eiciantur?*

³¹ *Namque haec duo musici, qui erant quondam idem poetae, machinati ad voluptatem sunt, versum atque cantum, ut et verborum numero et vocum modo delectatione vincerent aurium satietatem. Haec igitur duo, vocis dico moderationem et verborum conclusionem, quoad orationis severitas pati posset, a poetica ad eloquentiam traducenda duxerunt.*

³² *Neque tamen hoc tanti laboris est, quanti videtur, nec sunt haec rhythmicorum aut*

rhythm of an oration, according to Cicero, was a merit because it kept monotony away. Therefore maintaining a steady rhythm helped to fulfill the condition of variety and renders an impression of harmony in measures (*De orat.* 3,48).³³ In a further passage of *De oratore* (*De orat.* 3,51) Cicero expounded on this notion, adding that rhythm played an important role also in *movere* and enumerating the emotions it stirred. At the end of the passage a superior status of music in Greek culture is underlined by stating that it always served to delight as no other art was able to bring into such extremely different emotional states. The existence of genuinely Roman music is also asserted and appreciated, though Cicero clearly recognized the superiority of music of the Greeks.³⁴

The passages quoted above indicate the propinquity of eloquence and music. The role of the comparisons to music in treatises on oratory can be best defined as exemplary, since the foregoing common fields to both arts were paralleled and music presented to give an idea of the substance of oratory. Due to that correlation it was possible to draw comparisons between them. Numerous references to music in treatises on rhetoric played an explanatory role, hence, the two arts were linked not only by a common history but similarities in performance. Since adepts of oratory were well acquainted with music of everyday life, they could easily comprehend the parallels. The correlation of music and oratory is apparent not only due to the comparisons in the treatises but also due to lexis: a lot of technical terms used by rhetoricians were borrowed from the language of theory of music.³⁵

musicorum acerrima norma dirigenda; efficiendum est illud modo nobis, ne fluat oratio, ne vegetetur, ne insistat interius, ne excurrat longius, ut membris distinguatur, ut conversiones habeat absolutas. Neque semper utendum est perpetuitate et quasi conversione verborum, sed saepe carpenda membris minutioribus oratio est, quae tamen ipsa membra sunt numeris vincienda.

33 *Si numerosum est in omnibus sonis atque vocibus, quod habet quasdam impressiones et quod metiri possumus intervallis aequalibus, recte genus hoc numerorum, dum modo ne continui sint, in orationis laude ponitur.*

34 *Ars enim cum a natura profecta sit, nisi natura moveat ac delectet, nihil sane egisse videatur; nihil est autem tam cognatum mentibus nostris quam numeri atque voces; quibus et excitamur et incendimur et lenimur et languescimus et ad hilaritatem et ad tristitiam saepe deducimur; quorum illa summa vis carminibus est aptior et cantibus, non neglecta, ut mihi videtur, a Numa rege doctissimo maioribusque nostris, ut epularum sollemnium fides ac tibiae Saliorumque versus indicant; maxime autem a Graecia vetere celebrata.*

35 Müller, Ulrich. 1969. "Zur musikalischen Terminologie der antiken Rhetorik: Ausdrücke für Stimmanlage und Stimmgebrauch bei Quintilian, Institutio oratoria 11,3." *Archiv für Musikwissenschaft*, 26, 29–48.