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ABSTRACT
TESI DI DOTTORATO

Saggio di commento al *De audiendis poetis* di Plutarco

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The text is divided in two sections. The first includes an introduction to the essay concerning an hypothesis of its datation; an analysis of the objectives of the essay, a review of studies regarding its structure, with reference to the introducing formulas of each paragraph in which it has been subdivided by modern researcher; an in-depth analysis on esthetical ideas and on philosophical sources present within the essay and on the reading methods proposed by Plutarco; a brief review on citations use; an accurate analysis on the lexicon utilized by the Cheronese with a focus on the value of the term τὸ μῦθῶδες.

De Audiendis poetis is a work of pedagogic nature and falls within the treaties of philosophical-popular characteristics and ethical-moral matrix. As the plutarcean essays of pedagogic characteristics also within the *De Audiendis poetis* is present a pragmatic approach: in the work, not classifiable as esthetical nor literary critic treaty, rather of moral philosophy, to poetry it is attributed a pedagogic task, by a series of suggestions of specious character that can be of health in the approach to poetic readings, and poetry becomes an educational instrument preparatory to the learning of philosophical truth, if read correctly, but, due to the presence within its intimate of both useful and dangerous elements, it will be necessary to worry that the soul of young readers would not be damaged. A fundamental issue of the treaty is the poetry joins “tau to tau”.....:the conciliation of the edonistic with the moral element is achieved according to a precise finality, that is not to teach young rules on how poetry is written, rather is to furnish them with some instruments for reading poetic passages with the right awareness and the necessary criticism, learning how to defend themselves from the hidden dangers. Cheronese’s interest is not addressed to the general concept of poetry, rather to its fruitful utilization to derive moral teaching; it is therefore possible to differentiate in Plutarch way of thinking two levels, one aesthetic and another moral: the ethical-moral element permeates each field of Cheronese’s thought, and leads him to consider poetry as an instrument functional and propedeutic to philosophy due indeed to its practical value. The recognition of the mendacious character of poetry does not constitute however a reason to keep young away from it, since even the formal adornment of poets could be utilized for pedagogic tasks: they indeed constitute the first step towards philosophy. Poetry is intended by Plutarch: a) as a fictitious creation, therefore as a lie; b) as mimesis. For poetry as ψεῦδος, the risk is that, by reading poets’ passages, the young, fascinated by invention, may believe as true false concepts; for the poetry intended as μίμησις, the danger is that the reader, instead of judging the art, may be captivated by contents which, reflecting the variety of reality, can be morally censurable. To this aim, Plutarch devotes a section of his treaty to the analysis of the means through which it is possible to lead young Poetry reading positive from a moral point of view.

As far as structure, Plutarch discusses first whether poetry may constitute a valid educational teaching instrument and if it is right to pleasantly put in contact young people with poetry (chapter 1), despite the false and the mimesis within it (chapters 2-3). Once clarified which are the fundamentals of poetry, a series of instruments is provided useful to move within its traps (particularly not letting themselves be misled by wrong concepts of poets and despicable actions represented), through the analysis of behaviours and actions of single characters, isolatedly considered or confronted with others, to the aim of obtaining immediately utilizable moral paradigms. According to Plutarch, in some cases poets themselves offer elements useful to counterbalance negative elements encountered in the reading of their texts; in some other cases the statement of other poets on the same topic can help comprehension (chapter 4) to derive morally positive elements from the context of the passage under scrutiny (chapter 5), or, in addition, to retrieve what is positive through the knowledge of the modality by which poets use the names of divinities, of goods and pains, of fortune or fate (chapter 6). It is again discussed the theme of mimesis, underlying how truth and variety represent two essential elements of poetry (chapter 7). In this regard Plutarch remarks that, since good and bad are mixed within the same person, and since poetry is mimesis of reality, necessarily it will reproduce such reality; following such concept, Plutarch concludes that the young reader will have to get used to accept virtuous examples and reject dissolute ones (chapter 8). It is thus necessary that the young maintains a critical thinking: he will not have to accept passively any moral statement present in a poetry, rather through critical thinking he will have to be able to accept it or disregard it (chapter 9). Plutarch then proposes to young readers to observe differences in character and behavior among persons and people described in poetry, in order to individuate morally positive elements (chapter 10). The treatise assumes then more philosophical tones, initiating to discuss the acquisition of virtuous behaviours and of the superiority of external over internal goods (chapters 11; 13). Among various behaviours by which approaching poetry reading, Plutarch prefers that researching ethical aspects. To this regards, the possibilities to learn virtues and the opportunities to individuate these virtues in poets' passages are underscored (chapter 11). Plutarch then takes into consideration the opportunity to derive the hidden teaching through apposite corrections to poetic text (chapter 12). The Cheronese meditates on the opportunity of applying the value of a concept expressed by the poet to similar cases, and in this context he deals with the theme of superiority of internal over external goods (chapter 13). After having underlined the importance of *μετριότης* and of *μεγαλοφροσύνη*, the text ends according to a climax with the resumption of the initial theme: philosophical readings will be more easily available to young readers if these will be accustomed to read poetry with no prejudice, with care, and over all accompanied by a good guide, corresponding to the figure of a pedagogue. Plutarch concludes the treatise resuming and repeating the initial theme

of the poetry as preparatory to philosophy (chapter 14). Modern researchers have differently evaluated the structure of the treaty, in the attempt to individuate in it a sort of a composite ratio; however, it is unlikely that at the base of the extension of the treaty there was a composite ratio, and, therefore, the attempt to individuate a rigid and schematic division of the treaty by thematic areas appears to be forced. Plutarch, used to return on already expressed or simply hinted concepts, here concludes the dissertation almost suddenly, such that we can propend for the recognition of a non-organic structure and of a continually evolving reasoning, also at the light of the importance held by concepts such as *ποικιλία* e *πολυτροπία* in the context of the Plutarch' aesthetic concept.

The treaty looks rich of referrals to Platonic and Aristothelic philosophy, but referrals to stoic discipline, more or less explicit, are present. The recognition of the presence in poetry of insidious aspects and the acknowledgement that poets say lots of lies, both voluntary that un-voluntary, constitutes a clear-cut resumption of an idea of Platonic matrix, although Plutarch' position moves away from that of his Master from the importance attributed to the role of poets in the pedagogic field, and for the different concept of myth. Also on the pedagogic field, in addition to the aesthetic, *De Audiendis Poetis* shows the influence of the Platonic and Aristothelic philosophy. The idea that virtues are acquirable *ἐκ λόγου καὶ διδασκαλίας*. Such a position induces to collocate Plutarch at middle road between the Platonic thinking, according to which virtue can also be taught, and that of Aristotle, who believed that ethical virtue can be acquired through consuetude and reasoning. Aristotelic is the concept of mimesis and the idea that young should not admire the contents expressed by poets, rather the art by which characters and actions are represented in poetry, in the respect of criteria of the necessity and of the verisimilitude, while in Plutarch the intellectualistic approach particularly in the poetic is not present. From stoics are derived, rather than theories, the themes of readings of poetic texts. Confirming the variegate culture of Plutarch, not completely similar to any philosophical trend, within the text are present also referrals, despite less numerous and relevant, to the Epicure thinking.

The reader that Plutarch is willing to form is an aware and critical reader, capable of discerning the positive from the negative aspects present in the poetry. In this context, a fundamental role is held from some metaphors present in the second part of the text, sometimes linked among themselves from the same theme. Due to these similitudes a series of instruments are furnished that can help and orient the young in the poetic readings: the evaluation of the elements hinting disapprovation by the poet for morally negative behaviours; the possibility of counterbalance morally negative statement with opposite ones of the same or other poets; the attention give to moral elements derived from the context where the passage is posed; the acknowledgement of the criterion with which poets use the names of divinities, of goods and beds, of fortune and fate; the awareness of the

presence in poetry of positive and negative aspects; the development of critical ability; the analysis of differences among individuals and relative behaviours, harbinger of virtuous or detrimental examples; the possibility of derive the teaching hidden by correction to texts; the opportunity to apply the same concept to similar cases. Plutarch takes into consideration the cardinal virtues ἀνδρεία, σωφροσύνη, φρόνησις, δικαιοσύνη, giving some examples for each of them, and concluded by bringing back all to the φρόνησις. The instrument of judging (κρίσις) and of exercise (ἄσκησις), fundamental according to Plutarch in the field of moral education, are applied also to the poetic field: in a first phase, readers will result disturbed by the emotions which they undergo, understanding the moral damage and derived shame; subsequently, once they realize that, through exercise they will get accustomed to eradicate these emotions from their souls.

Referrals to ancient Authors in *De Audiendis poetis* are mostly citations and paraphrasis of text, but also simple hints to these texts. In general, they are utilized by Plutarch in respect to their moral content, with the aim to show how poetic passages can be read to derive a positive teaching. The more numerous citations within the text are omeric, and it is significant that for any type of reading modality of poetic text Plutarch propones almost always omeric examples. By considering Homer master of morality he therefore follows the stoic tradition, utilizing it for sustain his ideas in the aesthetic field, thus providing examples of reading of poetic text. *Modus citandi* of Plutarch shows how he often attributes to poet behaviours and judgements not belonging to him, offering interpretations not considering the derivation context: it is likely that, led by moral objectives, Plutarch in some cases had voluntarily distorted or reversed the value of some verse to better adapt them to the context and its necessity. Indeed, a great part of citations present in the treaty easily can fall in both categories indicated by D'Ippolito, since they can be considered plurifunctional.

A peculiarity within the text is the disposition of citations by “opposite blocks”. In chapter 4 Plutarch sustains that an instrument useful to young in order to contrast the morally negative statements of poets is the individuation within the same passage or even in other sites of other opposite statements of the same poet, or of other known poets or philosophers. A similar scheme, despite with some variables, is repeated and developed in the conclusive Chapter, while in Chapter 4 it is functional to express the idea that a poet’s statement, presenting itself at a first reading potentially deceiving on the moral field for the young readers, can be counterbalanced from an opinion expressed by philosophers or other poets on the same theme. By this way the risk, sometime hidden in the poetry, can be corrected by the philosophical approach: in this process is the defence of poetry, that, however, is a first approach to παιδεία inspired to philosophy. In chapter 14 such a scheme has the function of exemplification the Plutarch’s concept of poetry’s reading as preparation to philosophy: Plutarch indeed utilizes only citations of philosophers (defined ἔνδοξοι)

to reinforce concepts expressed by poets. A series of examples are developed to show the frequent agreement between poet's statements and philosopher's thinking. In addition, at the end of the text, Plutarch does not cite Omero, but tragic poets, and not Plato, but Epicuro: likely in the purpose to demonstrate that positive elements could be found even in different poets, from the master poet and in philosopher such as Epicurei, to which generally his approach is negative, thus confirming and reinforcing the idea of the possibility of poetry and philosophy utilization for educational tasks.

Within *De Audiendis poetis*, Plutarch's aesthetic thinking reveals through a lexicon characterized by frequent endiadi and parallelisms, and rotated around some terms, referring to conceptual substrate of the entire treaty: μῦθος - λόγος - ψεῦδος - πλάσμα - πιθανός - μίμησις. Plutarch repeats frequently and not casually these terms, establishing significant relationship among some of them. Plutarch uses in the text term appearing also in some of his treaties of aethical philosophy. To this end, a table has been elaborated reporting the terms recurring in the text linked to the poetry, the sites where they appear, the relative significances and passages of *De Audiendo* where the same terms recur. Within the lexicon, it is possible to individuate three semantic fields particularly significant: utility, moral damage; delight, pleasantness; adequacy, verisimilitude. The semantic field utility/moral damage includes terms such as τὸ βλάπτον, τὸ τέρπον, χρήσιμος, ὠφέλιμος; the semantic field of delight includes terms such as ἡδονή, γλυκύς, ἔκπληξις, γοητεία; the semantic field of adequacy and of verisimilitude includes terms such as ὁμοιότης, πιθανότης, τὸ πρέπον.

The analysis of the value of the term μυθώδης starts from the analysis of terms μῦθος, ψεῦδος e πλάσμα: the endiadi found and cases where the same terms or their derivatives appear within the same context appear to show an indistinct use from Plutarch of terms μῦθος, ψεῦδος e πλάσμα, which therefore are likely utilized as synonymous in this text. It is perhaps to be hypothesized a subtle distinction between ψεῦδος e μῦθος, in the sense that the fiction and the myth of which Plutarch speaks in positive terms are not simple ψεῦδος, but a mixture of these with the πιθανόν. It is indeed such mixture of the untrue with the plausible that constitutes the basis of the defence of the poetry as an educational function. Within this semantic sample, the term μυθώδης deserves a detailed analysis, aimed to verify whether it, when it appears in neuter form, is a synonymous of μῦθος. The passages examined show how Plutarch describes with τὸ μυθῶδες the unlikely part of poetry, the fabulous and fantastic content present in the tales and descriptions by poets. τὸ μυθῶδες looks to have a negative characterization and to represent the insidious element present in poetry, that, in view of a propedeutic action to philosophy, should necessarily be moderated. Supporting such considerations, the analogous use of μυθώδης by Plutarch referring the mythic element of a tale or to fabulous tales that have no relation to λόγος; or that are not corresponding completely to truth, sometimes associating it with adjectives such δραματικός, ἀδύνατος, παράλογος ο ἄπιστον. While

the ψεῦδος, since it is an essential characteristics of poetry, is accepted by Plutarch, provided it be moderate and mixed to plausible, and only in this case it will be able to have an educational function, τὸ μῦθῳδες it is to be rejected for its excessive character.

The second part of the text is centered on the comment notes to the Plutarch text.