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**TRAGEDY AND THEATRICALITY IN PLUTARCH**

DEPARTMENT OF GREEK AND LATIN  
UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of London

LONDON

2007



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**For my parents**

## **Abstract**

The present thesis focuses on the role of tragedy and on the multiple versions of theatricality in selected Essays and Lives of Plutarch. Most interestingly the ‘tragic’ does not emerge exclusively from the many quotations from the tragedians which are dispersed in the whole of the Plutarchan corpus, especially in his Essays; it also emerges from distinctive suggestions of tragedy, tragic imagery, tragic parallels and texturing. Plutarch acknowledges the importance of tragedy in literary education, but is still very ready to criticise what the poets say. Even so, he does not treat tragedy negatively in itself, but figures it as a possibly bad and corrupting thing when it is wrongly transferred to real-life contexts. In this way he requires from his readers thoughtfulness and reflection on that relation between tragedy and real life, while he also makes them reflect on whether there is a distinctive ‘tragic stance of life’, and if so whether a philosophical viewpoint would cope with real life more constructively.

In the Lives there may be less explicit thematic hints of tragedy, yet there is a strong theatricality and dramatisation, including self-dramatisation, in the description of characters, such as Pompey and Caesar, particularly at crucial points of their career and life. By developing the idea that the ‘tragic’ aspects may relate to the ways in which characters are morally or philosophically deficient or cause them to falter – but if so, in a way that is itself familiar from tragedy – they also relate extremely closely to the characteristics which make the people great.

The tragic mindset (this idea will be illustrated from Plutarch’s direct references to tragedy as well as his allusions to the theatrical world) offers a fresh angle in reading Plutarch’s work and makes the reader engage more in thinking how both ‘tragic’ and theatre can be used as a tool to explore a hero’s distinctiveness in addressing the issues of his world.

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## **Preface**

To the casual reader, a doctoral dissertation may appear to be solitary work. However, any undertaking of this nature requires a network of support and incurs many debts. And it is, as everyone knows, a pleasant duty to acknowledge much help and friendly advice, although not all the people to whom I am grateful can be mentioned here.

To begin with, I must thank the Onassis Foundation and the A. G. Leventis Foundation for funds which allowed me the luxury of research. I am grateful to both for supporting financially this project.

I owe a special debt to my supervisors, Prof. Chris Pelling and Prof. Chris Carey, who both directed my work and continuously offered their wise advice. Prof. Pelling's passion for, and knowledge of, Plutarch has always been an inspiration to me. His constant encouragement and critical remarks, both challenging and insightful, constitute an intellectual debt which is impossible to quantify. Prof. Carey showed me new ways of thinking about or interpreting texts which will always inform my research. I never ceased to be amazed at the large amount of work which they both put into reading, and commenting on, various drafts. Their acute and patient criticisms saved me from intellectual vagueness and incomplete references; the greatest number of improvements, large and small, came at the price of their long effort.

I am also grateful to Mr. Alan Griffiths and Prof. Ewen Bowie who supported the early stages of my work by generously commenting and correcting various parts of the early drafts. I have often imposed myself especially heavily on the patience of Dr. Stephen Instone, who has readily responded to assist me greatly in matters of language and structure. I would also like to acknowledge here the kind support and help I received from Dr. Federico Muccioli for bibliographic work and reference-checking, and for assistance in matters not confined to his speciality. I am also thankful to Rhiannon Ash for her help on several occasions. For any errors that may remain, I alone am responsible.

I would also like to thank friends in London and elsewhere for their interest and friendship. Above all, my thanks are as ever due for the support shown to me by my parents and sister, Stella. I am immensely grateful to my parents for the guidance, strength and love I received from them. I dedicate this book to them.

London  
30 June 2007

## **Introduction**

Ἀλέξανδρος δ' ὁ Φεραίων τύραννος (...), θεώμενος τραγωδὸν ἐμπαθέστερον ὑφ' ἡδονῆς διετέθη πρὸς τὸν οἶκτον. ἀναπηδήσας οὖν ἐκ τοῦ θεάτρου θάπτον ἢ βάδην ἀπῆει, δεινὸν εἶναι λέγων, εἰ τοσούτους ἀποσφάττων πολίτας ὀφθήσεται τοῖς Ἑκάβης καὶ Πολυξένης πάθεσιν ἐπιδακρύων. οὗτος μὲν οὖν μικροῦ καὶ δίκην ἐπράξατο τὸν τραγωδόν, ὅτι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ καθάπερ σίδηρον ἐμάλαξεν.

Alexander, the tyrant of Pherae (...), as he watched a tragic actor, felt himself much more moved to pity through enjoyment of the acting. He jumped up, therefore, and left the theatre at a rapid pace, exclaiming that it would be a dreadful thing, if, when he was slaughtering so many citizens, he should be seen to weep over the sufferings of Hecuba and Polyxena. And he came near visiting punishment upon the actor because the man had softened his heart, as iron in the fire. (*On the fortune or virtue of Alexander*, 334A-B)<sup>1</sup>

This arresting passage – so Aristotelian in many ways – raises a number of interesting points of central importance to this dissertation. First of all it shows the enduring panhellenic appeal of Athenian tragedy. Though the incident dates to the early fourth century, the appeal is still visible in the Hellenistic and Roman eras in a range of contexts. The passage also testifies to the complex emotional and intellectual pleasure effected by tragedy and its capacity to stir audiences. Its various aspects and effects and its continuing cultural importance make tragedy an important theme in Plutarch, and the main theme discussed in the present thesis. In the wide range of topics and characters which Plutarch discusses in his highly diverse work, tragedy is an area which Plutarch can always exploit for its wisdom and authority, for the powerful vocabulary and imagery and, no less, for extracting significant moral lessons.

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<sup>1</sup> All translations in the present thesis are based on the (various) Loeb editions unless otherwise noted.



The powerful theatrical performance and the excellent skills of the actor led Alexander to take pleasure (ἡδονή) in the acting, and moved him to pity.<sup>2</sup> The effect of the acting and the emotions it stirred were violent enough to make a tyrant as savage and ruthless as Alexander of Pherae leave the theatre.<sup>3</sup> Yet there is more to this passage than just the power of tragedy in rousing emotions like pity and compassion, or the value of Euripides' poetry. Theatrical performance here raises awkward questions about the relationship between the real world and the fictive world of tragedy. For Alexander in this anecdote tragedy presents a disturbing and even threatening paradox in the way it subverts his emotional control and makes him question both his self- and his public perception. One of the main aims of the present thesis is to show how theatre may be transposed into real life and how Plutarch questions the effects of this kind of transposition. True, tragedy has an unquestionable educative and entertaining value, but when the great men who interest Plutarch in his biographies display features which resemble the attitude of actors or of tragic characters, we shall see that there is a certain danger lurking. And again, this danger is not restricted only to the great men's careers and fate, but it also involves the reader who might well regard Plutarch's – or, even tragic – characters as examples of behaviour to imitate.<sup>4</sup>

However, in the passage cited above this danger is travestied: the tyrant should indeed learn a lesson from tragedy, which would be to show pity to people and cease to cause further misfortunes to them or inflict cruel punishment. Yet, Alexander seems to be afraid either to acknowledge such a lesson or to be seen displaying the humane side of his character which he never showed in his real life as a harsh ruler, and therefore leaves the

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Heath (1987), 8-11, 32-36 – on pleasure (also on the pleasure of emotional response) and *mimesis* see also Aristotle's *Poetics* (1447a 8-1448b 38, 1450a 19-21, 1452b 29, 1453a 35-36, 1453b 10-13, 1459a 21, 1462b 13-14). For a detailed analysis of *hedone* in Plutarch's perception of poetry see Valgiglio (1967), 328-335.

<sup>3</sup> The variation of the same incident which Plutarch gives at *Pelop.* 29.9-10 is telling. There, the story goes along different lines: upon leaving the theatre, Alexander sent a message to the actor telling him to take courage and not be affected in his acting by his departure, for it was not out of contempt for his acting that he was going away, but because he was moved to pity and he was ashamed to be seen by citizens who knew that he never had taken pity on anyone. Yet, this version, too, shows the importance of image for Alexander, both the image he has of himself and his public image. It also (incidentally) illustrates Plutarch's flexible use of his source material.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Bucher-Isler (1972), 72-73, on the function of examples and their importance for both writers and readers. On the parallel use of *exempla* by Livy for practical matters and moral concepts, and by Seneca see Chaplin (2000), and Roller ((2001), 88-97), respectively.

theatre. He learns nothing from the juxtaposition. What is more, Alexander came near to visiting further punishment, this time on the actor himself. That would be even more absurd, since it would imply on Alexander's side a wrong mapping of reality on to poetry. True, poetry and reality have to harmonise in some ways – poetry must mirror reality to some degree if it is to appeal and affect – yet they have to be kept distinct as well. Rather than seeing acting and real life as two worlds which interact, Alexander confuses *mimesis* with reality, carried away as he is mainly by the effect that *hedone* has on him. It is the same sort of mistake as the guard in Suetonius' *Nero* makes: failing to distinguish reality from imitation, and identifying the emperor as Hercules (the tragic character he was representing in the play), he rushes on stage to save Nero and free him from his chains (*Nero* 21.3).<sup>5</sup> The mask which Nero is wearing brings confusion to the guard, who apparently sees too much of Nero in Hercules, and also too much of Hercules in Nero. Similarly, Alexander fails to distinguish between representation and reality.

### Plutarch and the classical past

In Plutarch's oeuvre we find influences from all aspects of culture, philosophy and history.<sup>6</sup> The familiarity he shows with earlier literature is remarkable, and is most clearly demonstrated in his many quotations from ancient authors.<sup>7</sup> Together with Athenaeus, Plutarch is probably the author who quotes the greatest number of ancient writers: philosophers, poets, historiographers, orators. But, unlike Athenaeus (who mostly quotes long passages to show his erudition), Plutarch does not quote merely to parade learning.<sup>8</sup> For Plutarch quoting is a way of interpreting literature. Plutarch lived in the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Bartsch ((1994), 47-49) discusses the passage pointing out that Suetonius seems particularly interested in the guard's reaction as 'the mark of an inability to remain wholly within one of the two possible interpretative frames, the reality-frame or the theater-frame' (p. 49).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. de Romilly (1988a), 219: '...on trouvait dans l'oeuvre de Plutarque tous les aspects de l'Antiquité: les grands hommes de l'histoire, les doctrines des philosophes, la religion de Delphes, et aussi, entremêlés, des citations de poètes et des mots historiques, des arguments et des anecdotes, et des hauts faits, et des curiosités'.

<sup>7</sup> See, among others, Helmbold and O'Neil (1959), Tagliasacchi (1961), 71-72, Fuhrmann (1964), 41, Di Gregorio (1979) and (1980), Brunt (1980), de Wet (1981), Mossman (1988) and (1992), Desideri (1992b), Van der Stockt (1987) and (1992), Jouan (2002), 187.

<sup>8</sup> About the reception of poets and historians by Athenaeus see Braund and Wilkins (2000) and especially in that volume: Bowie (pp. 124-135), Sidwell (pp. 136-152), Walbank (pp. 161-170), Pelling (pp. 171-190, esp. 181-184: 'Quotation as reception'), Arafat (pp. 191-202), Trapp (pp. 353-363); cf. also Ambaglio (1990).

century A.D. but he engaged in a kind of literary dialogue with the whole of Greek literature, starting from Homer.<sup>9</sup> Greek literature and philosophy are the quintessence of his *paideia*, not only a means of displaying his erudition. The tendency to revive classical authors is a popular one in Plutarch's times<sup>10</sup> – and we must keep in mind that these authors have become 'classical' already for Plutarch. Plutarch's use of their texts is not only an indication of his admiration for the classical past but also a sign of the popularity of classical authors in his times. Every *pepaideumenos* of those times had a good knowledge of Greek tragedies and was still reading the famous tragic and comic poets. If Homer was the poet *par excellence* for the education of Greek young men since archaic times, Greek plays were among the most popular pieces of literature used for the education of both Greeks and Romans. The heroes of Greek tragedies were still exemplars for learned men in Hellenistic times.

But how much of the classical tradition was also performed, so that in addition to reading, people could familiarise themselves with Greek tragedies in a visual, performative context, at theatres? The question is difficult to answer with certainty, since the evidence we have is poor, leaving much space for conjecture. Yet it is true that still in the Hellenistic era every city or town regarded a theatre as a necessary public building.<sup>11</sup> Competitions went on at different festivals until the first century B.C., and prizes were given, especially to actors who were now highly valued – indeed, higher than playwrights.<sup>12</sup> In Plutarch's times, the production of new Greek plays had practically stopped,<sup>13</sup> yet theatre continued to be very important in the Hellenistic world; it was the

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. Van der Stockt (2000b), esp. pp. 104 and 109.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Marrou (1956), Bowie (1970), Russell (1981), 112, Berry (1983), 76, Morgan (1998), Too (1998), esp. p. 208, and Cribiore (2001), 197-199. Hellenistic writers and Plutarch too, are more interested in the wisdom of classical than of their contemporary authors.

<sup>11</sup> Baldry (1971), 129. He also attests that the theatre of Dionysus was in use until the fourth century A.D.; similarly Garland (2004), 63. Cf. also Xanthakis-Karamanos (1980), 3-34.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 82, Baldry (1971), 130-133, Gebhard (1996), C. P. Jones (2001), and Garland (2004), 49. The actors' growing importance is testified by the guilds which they formed – Baldry (1971), 131-133; cf. also Sifakis (1967), 99-103, and Garland (2004), 63-67. On the actors' standing in the Greek and Roman society see also Hugoniot, *et al.* (2004).

<sup>13</sup> See again Pickard-Cambridge (1968), 82: 'By the time of Dio Chrysostom (about A.D. 100) most, though apparently not all, of the plays performed were old, but in Lucian's day (late in the second century) the compositions of new plays had ceased'; cf. Kokolakis (1960b), and Baldry (1971), 131.

most popular form of dramatic entertainment, and continued to attract large audiences.<sup>14</sup> Plutarch and his contemporaries must have had the opportunity to see some reproductions of old plays, in their original or revised form, but it is more probable that in this period of decline of theatrical productions plays were staged in an excerpted form. Some important or popular parts from well-known plays were singled out and were still being performed in the first centuries A.D.<sup>15</sup> Thus a new kind of art form started to flourish, the pantomime, and emphasis was now laid more on music and dance than on the traditional kind of dramatic performance.<sup>16</sup>

Given all these particular traits of theatre in the Hellenistic era, we can assume that Plutarch's contact with poetry was achieved largely through reading and not through performances, but the character of this 'performance culture' is still relevant in a broader sense.<sup>17</sup> For in this world of fragmentary reproductions, there is a tendency by writers (e.g. Plutarch) and actors to take passages out of their context, and audiences are consequently expected to value and understand passages out of context. The declamatory character of Hellenistic drama, which is inherent both in the practice of selecting well-known tragic lines and in their recitation by a single actor on stage, doubtless also affected the evaluation of tragedy by intellectuals in Hellenistic times, suggesting a link between drama and artificiality. In the *Table Talk*, more than anywhere else, we can see both the declamatory aspect of tragedy – different speakers at the symposium recite tragic lines as an *epideixis* of their erudition and rhetorical skills<sup>18</sup> – and its fragmentary use, as tragic lines are used in the discussion of a range of various questions, and often lose the significance they had in their original context.

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<sup>14</sup> Thus Garland (2004), esp. pp. 48-50; cf. Baldry (1971), 130.

<sup>15</sup> See Pickard-Cambridge (1968), Bartsch (1994), 71, Barnes (1996), 167 ff., Easterling and Hall (2002), C. P. Jones (2001).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. here Bartsch (1994), 71, C. P. Jones (2001), 206, Hunter (2002), 190-191, Jouan (2002), 188-189, and Garland (2004), 63.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Hunter (2002), 190-191; cf. Westaway (1922), 185.

<sup>18</sup> For more on *epideixis* as display in oratory see now Carey (2007), esp. pp. 237-240.

Plutarch is unparalleled in antiquity for the extent of his use of theatrical vocabulary and imagery, or of quotations from tragedies.<sup>19</sup> His reading in the tragic corpus is very wide. Significantly, Plutarch is the only *testimonium* for quite a large number of lost plays (mainly of the three tragedians), which would have otherwise remained unknown to us.<sup>20</sup> One may say that tragedy is a fundamental part of the cultural universe of Plutarch. Tragedy is important for Plutarch, both for practical purposes of argument and persuasion but also from a theoretical point of view with reference to the nature of education and the role of literature within that process (cf. below, pp. 9-11). It can be of equal importance with philosophy, or, at least, it can serve as a preparation to understand philosophical truths and help men to internalise philosophy in their way of living (cf. the conclusion of *How a young man...*, 35F-37B); at the same time tragedy has a role to play in Plutarch's style and narrative technique.

#### Plutarch's readership; the author-reader dynamic and writer authority

Plutarch is an author who interacts both with ancient authors and with his own audience. His readers often belong to the circle of his friends, and are always, or almost always, the so-called *pepaideumenoi*, both Greek and Roman men belonging to the élite of the cities of the Roman empire, sometimes holding high ranking offices and roles in the Roman *imperium*.<sup>21</sup> They are people who are part of the same *intelligentsia* as Plutarch. In other words, they share with Plutarch the same *paideia*; they received the same or similar education in their youth, they read the same books and saw the same spectacles in theatres. Against this cultural background Plutarch can be called a *pepaideumenos* in action, to use an expression by Anderson concerning the Second Sophistic.<sup>22</sup> Plutarch's

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Tagliacchi (1960), Calero Secall (1990) – see also p. 3 n. 7. D'Ippolito ((2000a), 548), by using various criteria, furnishes a theoretical classification of the Plutarchan quotations (direct or indirect; verbatim or paraphrased; apologetic or polemic, etc.).

<sup>20</sup> Jouan (2002) gives a rough estimate: sixty references to lost plays of the three tragedians, and some fifteen fragments of minor tragedians and *adespota* (p. 187). Cf. Helmbold and O'Neil (1959), Di Gregorio (1980), and Cannatà Fera (1996), 420.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. C. P. Jones (1971), G. Anderson (1993), 8-11, Stadter (2000), 494-498 and (2002), and Pelling (2002c). About *paideia* and the role of the *pepaideumenoi* in Roman Greece see Whitmarsh (1998) and (2001), esp. pp. 1-26, and 96-130 – cf. Quet (1978).

<sup>22</sup> G. Anderson (1989). See Swain (1996) for a detailed discussion of the characteristics of the first centuries A.D. concerning the historical and educational background. To this cultural phenomenon and

readers may not – or do not need to – have the same impressive culture as the author from Chaironeia; it suffices that they (especially the Greek élite, of course) have a similar cultural background. That shared background is something that Plutarch exploits in quite subtle ways, as we will see.

In the Plutarchan corpus there is an impressive variety of topics, yet all his works share a common objective which focuses on the ethical-educational aspect. The topics he discusses and the ancient authors he brings into those discussions are a matter of personal choice, and as such they are indicative of his personal preferences for certain authors, in contrast to others who are less used. The choice of authors is important both for the bonding between author and readers and for the building of the author's own authority, and it is partly reader-conditioned and partly author-conditioned – or, perhaps it is more accurate to say, author-and-reader-conditioned, for what is most relevant on the reader-side is the picture of and relationship with the author that such quotations encourage the reader to build.<sup>23</sup> Plutarch chooses the authors from whom he quotes according to the authors he knows his readers are familiar with, thus effecting a bond with his readers, as he projects confidence that writer and reader are moving in the same intellectual world. The strategy concerning quotations is not the same in all his writings, and the use of authors clearly varies according to each topic and its specific focus and purpose. When quoting, Plutarch does not always feel the need to give full details about the source of the quotation.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, he may adapt the original passage, or use it in a condensed form, or quote from memory – with all the effects this could have on the accuracy and truth of

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generally to this era belonged, for example, Dio of Prusa, Seneca the Younger, Quintilian, Lucian of Samosata, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Marcus Aurelius and other writers of the Early Empire (cf. G. Anderson (1990), 9-10). In using the term 'Second Sophistic' I am well aware of the ambiguity it has concerning its nature and its representatives – one notices the awkwardness with which it is used by some scholars. G. Anderson (1990), 91-110, for example, clearly questions the ('artificial'?) term of the 'Second Sophistic' itself (its origins, its limits, etc.) and detects some true problems in tracing its starting-point. He also discusses the problem of who were called, or, rather, who had the right to be called 'sophists' in antiquity, during the movements of the First and Second Sophistic; cf. also id. (1993), esp. pp. 236-246. For a fuller discussion of the issue see Bowersock (1969) and (1974), Bowie (1970) and (1982), and Brunt (1994); Reardon (1971) sees the term ('Second Sophistic') as conventional and recognises that its convenience may often be misleading.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Hinds (1998), esp. pp. 10, 49-50, 103 and 144.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Heirman (1972), 34: 'Some of the authors are always quoted anonymously. Their words seem to have become part of the collective cultural memory, and to have acquired a status comparable to that of proverbs' (e.g. *How a young man...* 15B, 16A, 17F); cf. also Ziegler (1949), 280, Van der Stockt (1987), 288-289, and de Wet (1988), 13-14.



the quoted passage. This is the case, for instance, with many quotations from Plato but also from tragic poets: Plutarch supposes that a learned reader could easily identify the work or the author from which these were taken. Quotations from, or allusions to, ancient texts can only have an effect if readers are learned enough and therefore ready to recognise and respond to them. Yet, besides being required to identify and assess quotations and allusions, Plutarch's readers may be asked both to connect the quoted passage with its original context and to disconnect it and perceive any new implications given by its new context. Plutarch assumes that his readers are sophisticated enough to understand his quotations and allusions.<sup>25</sup> In this way one can speak of a kind of natural *sympatheia* between Plutarch and his audience.<sup>26</sup>

The bond between author and readers is double-edged: it boosts the readers' confidence concerning their knowledge of classical texts, whereas it also makes them aware that they cannot compete with Plutarch's authority, created and developed as it is through the various ways he uses his material. Yet it is by this very assumption and inclusion of his readers within his exclusive group that Plutarch tacitly invites a positive response from them. But even if the Plutarchan readers are marked out as *pepaideumenoι*, it is always the author who increases his authority by being the one who controls the game between the well-learned author and his educated readers.<sup>27</sup> In addition, there may also be a possibility that Plutarch is aware that his choices may not ultimately quite match the expectations of his readers, or at least some of them. If so, this would have other consequences too: it would assert his authorial superiority and distance from them, preserving the reader-author divide and creating his authorial persona – a persona which also depends on the selection of authors he chooses to quote. And, needless to say, the image or images of Plutarch that will emerge for the readers may be (though they need not always be) different from the historical individual Plutarch.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Pelling (2004b), 416. About Plutarch's expectations from his readers see Wardman (1974), 37-48, and about the art of poetic allusion in general see Garner (1990).

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Schmitz (1997), 171.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Schmitz (1997), 171-175, who shows (by examining different texts of Imperial times) how the *paideia* of the readers can serve as the link between author and readers.

Through his choice of quotations Plutarch is not merely assuming but constructing his readership, which includes both the true (or, actual) reader addressed by Plutarch and the imagined (but not necessarily imaginary) reader to whom he appeals. It is beyond the scope of this introduction to examine in detail the true readers of the *Lives* and of the single treatises of the *Essays*, as they are numerous, or what lies behind the choice of dedicatee. In any case, besides the true reader (i.e. the real people to whom Plutarch dedicated his works) one has also to take into account the ideal reader.<sup>28</sup> One can imagine two types of ideal reader, depending on two senses of 'ideal'. Firstly, the one whom the text affects to assume: the reader who might be learned enough to identify all Plutarch's quotations and understand all possible hints or allusions to classical texts – and indeed, the true reader will make an effort to approximate that sense of 'ideal' – and secondly, the type of ideal reader who, because he/she may not catch all the allusions but is flattered by the expectation that he/she might, falls short, but not far short, of the first type of ideal reader. This second type of ideal reader (constructed by both author and reader) also helps Plutarch maintain his authorial superiority, and we will go on to see how that authority is constructed through the way Plutarch exploits and explores those quotations – not merely *that* so many quotations are used, but also *how* they are used.

As the scope in different works varies, the use of quotations adjusts to each particular scope. Thus, Plutarch employs tragic sayings in different ways, often passing contradictory comments on the very same lines, at times accepting and at times refuting them<sup>29</sup> – always with a moral purpose which plays a significant role towards defining his attitude towards tragedy and tragic poets.<sup>30</sup> The large range and flexibility of quotations as well as their strategic use by Plutarch is well exemplified in the *Table Talk* structure, where the first book contains the greatest number of tragic quotations of all books. As I

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<sup>28</sup> See Pelling (2002c) for ways in which Plutarch constructs his own persona and his audience; cf. also Duff (2004), who sees two types of Plutarchan reader: the casual and the ideal (serious) reader (pp. 278-279).

<sup>29</sup> Nikolaidis (1991) discusses Plutarch's contradictions, focusing on striking examples of diverse or contradictory comments on the same tragic quotations, now approving and now disapproving of them, according to the immediate requirements of the subject under discussion (esp. pp. 159-161, 174 and 177); cf. Pelling (1980)=(2002a), esp. pp. 96-102; also Babut (1969a), 172 ff., and Van der Stockt (1999b). In her paper about Plutarch's treatment of Thucydides, de Romilly argues that the adjustment and free use of quotations is a well-thought and elaborate technique of Plutarch (1988b).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. e.g. Jouan (2002), 192.

explain in the relevant chapter (chap. 4), this is not accidental; on the contrary, it is a kind of programmatic statement concerning the importance of tragedy in the symposium and at the same time a guideline for the reader to pay particular attention to tragedy not only for its edifying role but also for its entertaining value at symposia in general. Tragic poets offer Plutarch useful material, which he can manipulate according to the needs of each treatise or Life, as well as concise apophthegms on various topics. Tragic citations also serve as stylistic embellishment or illustration,<sup>31</sup> and have the effect of making Plutarch's treatises or narrative more diverse. Moreover, quoting provides both charm and utility ("χάριν καὶ χρείαν"), as stated in the *Table Talk* (736E: "ἔπειτα περὶ στίχων εὐκαιρίας ἐνέβαλεν λόγον, ὥς μὴ μόνον χάριν ἀλλὰ καὶ χρείαν ἔστιν ὅτε μεγάλην ἐχούσης"). So we can again see that, apart from aesthetic purposes, Plutarch also uses tragedy as a means of appealing to and building authority.<sup>32</sup> The appeal to poetic texts as a source of authority is a practice which can be traced back at least to the late archaic period in ancient Greece. Yet it is not a kind of straightforward authority which Plutarch seeks in the tragedians; according to his immediate rhetorical need he uses their wisdom to support his case, and yet he often challenges their authority too. He invokes the tragedians to establish the authority of individual statements, but also challenges their sayings so that he establishes his own authority as somebody who is able to refine their sayings and adapt them to real life terms. By correcting or adjusting poetic lines he takes on the role of a literary critic and at the same time asserts his authority as a moralist and educator.

It is true that Plutarch highly values the wisdom of Greek poets of the archaic and classical periods,<sup>33</sup> aligning himself with the authoritative Greek tradition of the Hellenistic era, and quotes from them. However, in Plutarch's view the truth of poetry remains to be checked – this is one of the main strands of thought in his *How a young*

<sup>31</sup> Cf. e.g. Di Gregorio (1976), 168, and de Wet (1988), 19-20.

<sup>32</sup> Hillyard (1981) aptly remarks that the use of quotations, allusions and *exempla* (see above, p. 4) is central to Plutarch's technique of persuasion. He also makes the distinction between ornamental quotations and quotations which are used to lend authority (p. xxv).

<sup>33</sup> 164D: "τῷ σοφωτάτῳ Ὀμήρῳ", 348D: "ἡ Εὐριπίδου σοφία", *Sull.* 4.4: "τὸν Εὐριπίδην σοφὸν ἄνδρα"; cf. Van der Stockt (1992), 131.

*man should listen to poetry.*<sup>34</sup> Greek tragic poets have touched upon many human concerns and emotions, and yet they are not to be fully trusted; readers should be just as ready to call poetic views ‘wrong’ and ‘improper’ as ‘right’ and ‘proper’ (26B). Greek tragedians present in their plays all types of characters and behaviour, good and bad, simple and complex. The multiple voices in their poetry make it all the more challenging for the audience/reader to discover, if at all, a kind of exemplary truth.<sup>35</sup> Plutarch warns the readers against taking poetic lines at face value; in no case must the reader believe that there is an absolute agreement between the views of the poet and those expressed by a dramatic character – poets may put fallacious statements in the mouth of characters like Eteocles or Ixion, but in doing so they do not show approval of them; they are merely matching wicked characters like these with wicked sentiments (cf. 18E ff.). Furthermore, although it is easy to be carried away by the beautiful poetic representation, the reader must not take dramatic characters as models to imitate in life.<sup>36</sup> When reading Greek tragedies, readers must always be aware that the form (poetic representation) is distinct from the content (poetic meaning) (18A-F, 28A). Plutarch makes a clear distinction between what is *aesthetically* good and what is *actually* good: for example, one is expected to be able to appreciate a painting for its beautiful and vivid representation of Medea’s murdering her children, but one is certainly not expected to admire the act, which the painting presents, as such; just the opposite (18A).<sup>37</sup>

Plutarch is a moralist and as such his tone is often didactic. There are lessons to be learned in all areas of life which he discusses; these are at times straightforward (e.g. in the direct personal advice he gives in many Essays) and at times less easy to extract – and this is the case with the Lives, where, from the biographies of great men, the reader is asked to extract lessons from both their virtues and vices. Thus in the Lives the didactic

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<sup>34</sup> On this essay, which I discuss in chapter 1, see, among others, Von Reutern (1933), Heirman (1972), Valgiglio (1973) and (1991), Schenkeveld (1982), Carrara (1988), Van der Stockt (1992), Bréchet (1999), Zadorojnyi (1999b) and (2002).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Russell (1981), 90-91.

<sup>36</sup> As happens in tragedy, in Plutarch’s Lives, too, there are no simply ‘good’ or ‘bad’ characters, no clear-cut examples to imitate and examples to avoid; things are more complex than that – cf. Duff (1999a).

<sup>37</sup> As Westaway puts it, ‘the young reader must be trained to discriminate between artistic and ethical values’ ((1922), 85).

tone and moralising are more complex:<sup>38</sup> it is about other people teaching us, although this kind of procedure needs the active involvement of the reader/audience. Through the *specific* lessons that the stories of Plutarch's great men suggest – perhaps even the ones the great men learned themselves – the reader is supposed to internalise some *general* characteristics or patterns of human character and behaviour, and then deliberate on how these can improve his/her life, on a *personal* level.<sup>39</sup> So there is a kind of double move here, from the specific/personal to the general, and then back again to the specific. Plutarch's moralism has both an inward and an outward aspect. Duff says that the Parallel Lives, like the best tragedies, invite the reader to challenge, to consider and ponder.<sup>40</sup>

### The scope of the present thesis

The present thesis is an attempt to define and describe the 'theatrical' and the 'tragic' as important aspects of, or even as a way of reading, Plutarch's work. The different uses of tragedy and theatre in his Lives and Essays reveal Plutarch's dynamic relationship to them. Although he neither develops a theoretical framework of what poetry is nor does he treat poetry in a single, coherent way<sup>41</sup> – as opposed to the more systematic analyses by Aristotle and Plato<sup>42</sup> – through his individual comments on tragic passages and through his use of theatre, the reader collects pieces which contribute to an understanding of Plutarch's views on poetry and tragedy in particular. His goals remain highly practical and his approach pragmatic, with an underlying coherence in his views on poetry. Even if he does not develop a general theoretical background for his view on poetry, especially in the essay *How a young man...* he creates a kind of norm for how readers should respond

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Duff (1999a), esp. pp. 52-71, and Pelling (1988b), who distinguishes two versions of moralism, the protreptic and the descriptive (p. 15).

<sup>39</sup> Stadter (2000), however, following Plutarch's statement in the prologue of *Aemilius* (1.1), sees a more immediate link between Plutarch's characters in the Lives and the readers' lives; he regards the image of the mirror as a key-tool which helps the readers apply directly the moral function of the Lives to their own lives (esp. pp. 503-505). For some examples of Plutarch's use of the image of the mirror see Fuhrmann (1964), 98, n. 2, and Duff (1999a), 32-34. Cf. also *On listening to lectures* 42B, and *How to recognise that one is making progress in virtue* 85A-B.

<sup>40</sup> Duff (1999a), 9 and 309.

<sup>41</sup> D'Ippolito (1996a) underlines the fact that it is difficult to trace Plutarch's views on poetry (as well as on oratory), mainly because the relevant works are lost: e.g. "Περὶ ποιητικῆς" (Cat. Lam. 60), "Περὶ ποιημάτων τῆς ἑαυτῶν ἐπιμέλειαν" (Cat. Lam. 220); cf. Van der Stockt (1992), 12.

<sup>42</sup> See Aristotle's *Poetics*, and Plato's *Rep.* II, III, X. Jouan (2002), 191, remarks that Plutarch does not want to write his own *Ars Poetica*.

to and understand poetry, and most importantly, for how to use poetry in their lives.<sup>43</sup> Ideally, above all poetry should appeal to both ‘pleasure’ and ‘utility’.<sup>44</sup> So, the readers are guided towards a path of learning how and what to value in poetry. Among other things, they learn to accept falsehood and fiction not as things consciously chosen by the poets in order to mislead but as necessary poetic devices for the purposes of pleasure, allurements and diversity (16A-17A, 25B-D); to give some credit to poets for their views on human and divine matters but not to treat them as law-givers (28B; cf. 17B-17F, 20E-21A, 22D, 23A-24C); to accept that poetry is an imitative art and as such it must be valued for its artistic qualities and not for any reality it depicts (17D-18F, 25B-C), although it clearly has references to real life and real character types (26A); to extract useful messages even from erroneous poetic sayings, or correct them by finding better statements as an antidote within poetry itself;<sup>45</sup> and, finally, to be critical of the poetic sayings rather than of the poets themselves.

Although there is admittedly an abundant use of the tragedians’ wisdom in all Plutarchan work, the word limits of a thesis do not allow a thorough examination and discussion of all cases where Plutarch uses tragic wording or imagery.<sup>46</sup> The present study will explore the importance of the ‘tragic’ in selected Plutarchan Lives and Essays, focusing on two particular aspects; firstly, on the diverse use, deployment and adaptation of actual tragic quotations in selected Essays (*How a young man should listen to poetry*, *How to tell a flatterer from a friend*, *Were the Athenians more glorious in war or in wisdom?*, *On Exile*, and the *Table Talk*); and secondly, on the more subtle contribution of theatrical imagery (mainly, metaphors) and atmosphere to the Lives (the focus will be mainly on two Roman Lives, *Caesar* and *Pompey*) and on how they contribute to Plutarch’s

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<sup>43</sup> As Russell remarks on Aristotle’s different view concerning the utility of poetry, ‘The pleasure of poetry includes that of learning. Poetry does a service for the life of contemplation, rather than for the life of action. [...] If poetry has a utility on the practical level, whether technical or moral, this must then be accidental’ ((1981, 92).

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Russell (1981), 86: a combination of *ars* and *ingenium* could be regarded as the wise poet’s aim; cf. Horace, *Ars Poetica* 341: ‘he who combines the useful with the pleasant wins every vote’.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Westaway (1922), 87.

<sup>46</sup> The work by Helmbold and O’Neil of 1959 offers a full list of all occurrences of tragic quotations (and also of allusions, paraphrases, or other, more or less dubious, references) as well as of other quotations by Plutarch from various authors.



construction of characters.<sup>47</sup> At times our author outlines the lives of his characters as if following theatrical, and particularly tragic, plots, drawing implicitly a connection between his biographies and on-stage performances, in which tragic characters are replaced, as it were, by great men of Greek and Roman history. Modern scholarship discussing the Lives, for example, of *Alexander* and *Crassus*, has demonstrated that sometimes Plutarch builds or tends to present his Lives like a tragedy, so that we compare his characters with tragic heroes:<sup>48</sup> biography crosses its boundaries thus becoming, or at least tending to become, (a kind of) tragic biography. The ‘tragic’ is a feeling which at the end does not describe and specify only Greek tragedy but also the lives of great men. The analysis of the Lives of *Caesar* and *Pompey* from a theatrical perspective makes it all the more clear how close great individuals can come to authentic tragic characters. Borrowing the title of a book on Alexander by Bosworth, in those lives one can even speak of a ‘tragedy of triumph’.<sup>49</sup> What marks these two Lives as particularly tragic is the striking reversal of *tyche* (Fortune) – reminiscent of the tragic *peripeteia*; their destructive errors in combination with their character flaws (or virtues, since some virtues of character under specific circumstances may turn into flaws working against them); the sense of unavoidable destiny which however, is gradually built on their mistakes, so that finally they are trapped in their past and can do nothing but walk to their fateful end; and last, but not least, there are many profoundly emotional scenes, which evoke pity and fear both from the ‘internal’ audience (the actual viewers of events) and from the ‘external’ audience (readers). All this creates indeed a tragic feeling overarching *Caesar* and *Pompey*.

Several scholars have discussed the ‘tragic’ in specific works of Plutarch,<sup>50</sup> and generally they describe theatre as having a negative tone; this is partly true, as theatrical behaviour

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<sup>47</sup> Of course, not all Lives offer themselves for such an analysis (an analysis of the ‘tragic’ and ‘theatrical’), but this kind of analysis can be very useful or even necessary for some Lives, e.g. the ones chosen for discussion.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g. Mossman (1988) and (1992), and the observations by Pelling in (1979), (1988a), (1995a) and (1997c).

<sup>49</sup> Bosworth (1996), *Alexander and the East: the tragedy of triumph*.

<sup>50</sup> Schläpfer (1950), De Lacy (1952), Tagliacchini (1960), Fuhrmann (1964), Di Gregorio (1976), (1979) and (1980), Carrara (1988), Mossman (1988) and (1992), Pelling (1988a), (1988b), (1997c) and (2002a) *passim*, Calero Secall (1990), Desideri (1992b), Van der Stockt (1992), Braund (1993) and (1997), Keitel (1995), Cannata Fera (1996), Zadorojnyi (1997), Jouan (2002), Duff (2004), Beneker (2005a) and (2005b).

can imply pompous, exaggerated behaviour and pretence, extreme *pathos*, or a melodramatic turn. But this is not the whole truth. In Plutarch theatre is not something that is to be rejected as such. True, together with the 'tragic', it is at times associated with inappropriate behaviour, if it defines people's behaviour in real life, when they may exhibit arrogance or behave disingenuously (e.g. the flatterer who acts in order to achieve his goals driven by personal interests). Yet at times the tragic is not reprehensible, but acceptable: this is the case, for example, when it describes emotional intensity, or is associated with the splendid and grandiose side of characters and events (cf. for example the incident with the pirates in *Caesar* (2.1.-2.4):<sup>51</sup> Caesar's theatrical behaviour is used by Plutarch to exalt and forebode his influence and power later on). A systematic analysis of the role of theatre and tragedy proves that there is a more complex connection between Plutarch and theatre. The study of their role in the Essays and Lives which are selected for the purposes of the present thesis aims to refine our understanding of their use by Plutarch, and examine in what ways they can give hints about how the reader should read about or understand characters and actions, i.e. the human *ēthos*.

The first chapter ('The moral and educational use of poetry') is an attempt to place Plutarch in the Hellenistic tradition; it touches upon his Platonism – but also on his deviation from Plato's views on poetry,<sup>52</sup> since in contrast to Plato Plutarch assigns an important role to poetry in the education of the young people. Poetry becomes for him a part of his methodology, of his argument, and finally of the ethical-educational aspect of his writings. The exemplifying case chosen for a discussion of the tragedians' influence and of their interactive communication with Plutarch is the essay *How a young man should listen to poetry*. Taking as a starting point Plutarch's own comments on the passages he quotes from tragedy, the reader is urged to be critical towards poetry, and to value the poetic views or doctrines on a pragmatic rather than merely artistic level, so that poetry will finally become useful in real-life terms and a preparatory stage to a deeper understanding of philosophy.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Jouan (2002), 194, and the examples he gives for the positive associations of the 'tragic': *Nic.* 21.1, *Demetr.* 53.1, *Pelop.* 34.1, *Mar.* 27.2, *Demosth.* 29, *Alex.* 19.7-8.

<sup>52</sup> For the banishment of poets from the ideal state see *Rep.* 398A-B, 568B, 595A ff., 607B ff. and *Laws* 817A ff.

Chapter 2 ('Theatrical imagery in Plutarch's Essays') deals with theatrical vocabulary and images in two Essays, in *How to tell a flatterer from a friend* and in *Were the Athenians more glorious in war or in wisdom?*. Since the flatterer acts as a friend in order to achieve his goals, Plutarch sees in his attitude pretence and falsehood; his mindset reflects the theatrical world: the flatterer often resembles an actor on stage and his life can be seen as a performance in life. Yet the fault lies also with the person who likes to be flattered, who prefers an audience of flatterers to true friends who might point out to him some unpleasant truths, or admonish him. Thus tragedy and theatre become a point of reference for life against which real-life attitudes and actions are measured; these are proved to be wrong if they resemble theatrical behaviour. In *Were the Athenians...?* Plutarch's view on poetry and drama is defined by the rhetorical purposes of the essay, as it is a declamation, where our author's aim is to glorify the political superiority of Athens and its military successes by using tragedy and generally the Athenians' literary achievements as a negative foil. A key-theme which is important in both Essays is the notion of *ἀπάτη* (deception), which is a main feature of the flatterer's behaviour but also specifies, in a different sense, tragedy and theatre.

In chapter 3 ('The role of tragedy in *On exile*') tragedy, and especially Euripides' *Phoenissae* where exile is an important theme, has a substantial role to play, as it is incorporated into the development of Plutarch's argument about exile. Polyneices, who is not at all a typical example for an exile, laments his fate as an exile who cannot enjoy the happiness which one can only enjoy if living in one's homeland. Plutarch rebuts this view – opportunistically, presenting it at times as the character's view and at times as the poet's view (to gain poetic authority)<sup>53</sup> – to prove that happiness and virtue can be attained in any land. Use of the tragic background is here closely connected to drawing moral lessons to make the reader think in more philosophical terms. Interestingly, even in this treatise Plutarch tampers with the original context of tragic lines according to his

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<sup>53</sup> This kind of opportunistic attitude contrasts his warning to readers in *How a young man...* (18E ff. – ironically enough, one of his examples here is Eteocles, the Eteocles of the *Phoenissae*) not to assume that what a character says reflects the view of the poet (see p. 11, and chap. 1, p. 24 ff.). This variation between Plutarch's works shows again that he adjusts his views to fit particular contexts and purposes. Cf. e.g. Nikolaidis (1991).

particular purposes. The reader's familiarity with tragedy is presupposed in this essay (more than elsewhere), and is necessary for a further understanding of Plutarch's argument as well as of the new context in which the tragic passage is set. On the whole, *On Exile* offers a good example of Plutarch's alternating between critique and positive exploitation of tragedy.

Chapter 4 ('Tragedy and Theatre in the *Table Talk*') aims to show how tragedy becomes an important theme in a symposium. Plutarch and his multiple *personae* in the *Table Talk* use the tragedians firstly as an *epideixis* of their erudition – the symposia, by nature, justify epideictic practice – and secondly, in order to gain authority from the Greek tragedians, even if their views are taken as a point of disagreement. In addition, theatre can also be used as a metaphor to draw parallels with the practice of symposia, especially if one thinks of the various types of performance which take place at a banquet, mainly for purposes of entertainment.

Chapters 5 and 6 (Theatrical aspects in *Pompey* and *Caesar*) attempt a close reading of *Pompey* and *Caesar* as a pair. Such a reading shows that the two Lives – but, significantly, not only those Lives – are less self-contained than modern scholarship has tended to assume, although they are not set as a pair by Plutarch.<sup>54</sup> In fact the two Lives complement each other in more ways than one. They share common themes, one of which is the 'tragic'; this does not confine itself to distinctive tragic texturing or tragic parallels: the theatricality of one Life carries over to the other and intensifies incidents and moments which the two Lives share but which Plutarch does not highlight in the same way. Because of the different perspectives and aims of each Life, Pompey in *Caesar* is not explored in the same way as in his own Life – the same of course applies to Caesar in *Pompey*, too. In this way the reader can only get a fuller picture of the two great men if he/she reads the two Lives together; interestingly, what may often be suppressed in one Life is brought out in the other Life. On the whole, the Lives of *Pompey* and *Caesar* make it possible for the reader to see a number of different versions of the 'tragic'

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<sup>54</sup> Cf. Pelling, who, taking as a starting point the 'boundary-breaking' in *Caesar*, emphasises how Plutarch constructs his whole series of Lives so that they go together and can be read as a coherent whole ((2006b), 269).

and of the 'theatrical'. The 'tragic' is felt in the explicit parallels which Plutarch draws with tragic and epic heroes, but all the more in his allusions to tragedy. The metaphors not only work as a part of the tragic imagery, but they also make the reader, especially by their visual impact, recall similar incidents and patterns in tragedy (such as ominous dreams, characters acting roles or facing moral dilemmas, theatrical analogies, tragic irony, the divine element).

Even a selective examination of the 'tragic' and of 'theatricality' in certain Lives and Essays, shows that these themes are a major Leitmotiv in Plutarch. Theatrical imagery and the 'tragic' are significant not only for aesthetic reasons, but also for their reference to life which makes them for the readers a way of seeing human characters and patterns of behaviour under a different light. Plutarch's treatment of tragedy and theatre shows that these areas interact with reality and can be a way of describing real life. Theatre invades a person's life and often shapes it, so that apart from role-playing in theatre, there is also role-playing in life. Clearly there needs to be a relation between poetry/theatre and reality, yet, as the opening passage of this Introduction shows, a possible failure to make a distinction between these two worlds entails dangers, which in some of Plutarch's Lives may finally lead even great men to their downfall.

## **1. The moral and educational use of poetry**

### **Introduction**

The role of poetry and its ethical value in antiquity is an issue explored as early as the Presocratics; Xenophanes, Parmenides and Heraclitus all questioned to a certain degree the authority of Homer and Hesiod as educational poets; later, Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates engaged with the issue more fully.<sup>1</sup> ‘Literature must serve a purpose outside itself: it must be useful, if not by increasing one’s command of language and knowledge of the world, then by improving the ethical makeup of its audience and readership’<sup>2</sup> – this was a fundamental as much as a widespread conviction in archaic and classical Greece. The educational role of poetry becomes problematic equally early, however, for a variety of reasons. Partly it is the disparity between the social role of poetry and its content, especially the way the gods are depicted (so e.g. Xenophanes); partly it is the rise of competing claims to educational authority, beginning again in the archaic period but especially visible in the sophists (see e.g. Protagoras’ critique of Simonides’ poem in Plato’s *Protag.* 340a ff.), in Socrates and in Plato. Plutarch is heir to this tradition.

Plato’s work – and in particular *Ion* and Books II, III and X of his *Republic*, which touch upon the role of poetry – may have constituted the theoretical background on which Plutarch based his own view on poetry and poets.<sup>3</sup> But Plato, although he may sometimes attack specific poets, such as Homer or Hesiod for being far from the truth (truth, here, as a philosophical notion), generally adopts a holistic view of the role of poets and poetry’s problematic nature. Plato rejects poetry – as an imitative art – with reference to its bad

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<sup>1</sup> Plutarch’s pragmatic approach to education owes much in spirit to Isocrates – see Marrou (1956), Too (1998), and Too and Livingstone (1998).

<sup>2</sup> Sicking (1998), 101.

<sup>3</sup> A systematic analysis of Plato’s two critiques of poetry in the *Republic* is offered by Halliwell (1997); cf. also Ferrari (1989), R. B. Rutherford (1995), 228-239, Urmson (1997), and Nehamas (2001). About Plato’s literary theory and its anthropological origins see also the discussion by Büttner (2000) in his Ph.D. dissertation, esp. pp. 1-17. Büttner argues against the idea that Plato does not develop a system of literary criticism but instead presents individual judgements on poetry in different parts of his work – even if it would be awkward to talk about Plutarch’s ‘poetics’, in Plato’s case it is not.



effect on the ‘ideal state’ (cf. *Rep.* 377f, 392c-398b, 568b, 595a, 607b, and *Laws* 817a ff.) and on the education of young men, since it brings about emotions which should be suppressed (cf. *Rep.* 603c-606d). He considers the poet to be ‘third from the truth’, because he imitates the world of senses, which in turn imitates the world of forms (cf. *Rep.* 602c).<sup>4</sup> He also reproaches poetry for its bad influence on human soul, since poets present mortals and even gods as suffering from passions. Thus, instead of trying to suppress desire in favour of reason, they stir feelings; they drive audiences and readers to extreme feelings and, by extending the human passions to the divine sphere, they may lead people to question the authority and superiority of gods.<sup>5</sup>

Plutarch was a great admirer of Plato, and his entire work is imbued with platonic influences;<sup>6</sup> yet their views diverge significantly concerning poetry.<sup>7</sup> Plutarch’s standpoint for developing his view on poetry is very different from Plato’s, as are also his criteria and purposes for examining and criticising the role of poetry together with its ethical perspectives. He does not form his judgement on poetry based on political or idealised criteria, as does Plato in order to establish the frame and the component parts of his ideal state.<sup>8</sup> Plutarch sees things in a more pragmatic aspect; therefore he examines how and to what extent poetry can become useful for or an indispensable part of the literary and philosophical *paideia*. Contrary to Plato, Plutarch does not reject poetry outright, but he does share to some degree Plato’s concern about the untruthfulness of poetry, as he admits at 17D-E (*How a young man...*): “ποιητικῇ μὲν οὐ πάνυ μέλον ἐστὶ τῆς ἀληθείας, ἢ δὲ περὶ ταῦτ’ ἀλήθεια καὶ τοῖς μηδὲν ἄλλο πεποιημένοις ἔργον ἢ γινῶσιν καὶ

<sup>4</sup> The poet’s role is thus undermined or even regarded as dangerous and deceptive, since he presents a truth which is far from mirroring anything true or real. Cf. Russell (1981), 104.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Rep.* 378b ff., where Plato develops his theory on how poets may create false images of the gods and thus make people believe that gods are responsible for both human happiness and misery. To prove this he uses several examples from well-known and respected poets, such as Homer and Hesiod.

<sup>6</sup> Plato’s influence on Plutarch is undeniable; cf. R. M. Jones (1916), Von Reutern (1933), 89-100, Dillon (1977), 184-230 and (1988), Zadorojnyi (1999a) and (2002), Trapp (1990) and (1999), Ash (1997), 192-196, and Pelling (1999a). But Plutarch was also open – often, with some reservations – to other philosophical schools (Stoics, Epicureans, Cynics, Pythagoreans): on Plutarch’s eclecticism see Russell (1972), 63-83; cf. Reardon (1971), 36 ff., Berry (1983), and Hershbell (1992a) and (1992b); cf. also the forthcoming book by Kechagia.

<sup>7</sup> Bréchet (1999) offers an extensive comparison between Plato’s view on poetry and Plutarch’s stance in *How a young man should listen to poetry*.

<sup>8</sup> Plato is particularly concerned about the education of the city’s guards (φύλακες), since they perform a very important role for the city by being responsible for its security – see *Rep.* 375c ff.

μάθησιν τοῦ ὄντος εὖ μάλα δυσθήρατός ἐστι καὶ δύσληπτος” (‘The art of poetry is not greatly concerned with truth, and the truth about these matters, even for those who have made it their sole business to know and understand the reality, is exceedingly hard to track down and hard to get hold of’). The two, poetry and truth/reality, are for Plutarch not closely related, therefore there always remains for the readers the danger of misunderstanding or not perceiving the truth expressed in poetic terms, and this is what Plutarch wants to eliminate. Poetry imitates life in a plausible way, but it also deviates from truth to offer pleasure to the audience; and this deviation may carry with it certain dangers for the ethical training of young men (note the very platonic statements at 15A: “βλάπτει καὶ διαφθείρει”, and at 15C: “ταρακτικὸν καὶ παράφορον” – poetry is apt to cause damage and corrupt, and can be disturbing and misleading) (cf. *Rep.* 388a-d). However, Plutarch can ‘forgive’ poets for inaccurate or misleading statements on important topics of life, since he recognises above all their good intentions (cf. e.g. *How a young man...* 16A-B, 19D, 20E, 25D). Poets do not try to deceive the audience on purpose, but their use of truth blended with fiction may be at times confusing and surprising.

So Plutarch does not follow Plato in his exclusion of poetry – as part of all mimetic arts that should be excluded from the *polis* – but adopts a different, more subtle approach: he prefers to include poetry in the state, provided that its citizens develop first their judgement (“κρίσις”), or, better, ‘faculty of discernment’<sup>9</sup> to an adequate level, so that they will be finally in the position both to benefit from its positive effects and to resist strongly its possible harmful effects. He does not see poetry as a threat to the state’s stability, or as a cause of the citizens’ corruption; on the contrary, he recognises its central role for the state, where the citizens will see poetry as an area that can sharpen their mind and can be used as a good exercise, directing them towards philosophy and a better understanding of the paramount philosophical truths and values for life. Philostratus went even further concerning the multiple uses of poetry. He suggested that it be used in political life as well. Thus, when referring to tyrants, he encourages them to follow a literary career. Then they will kill less (“ῥῆττον ... ἀποκτενοῦσιν”), and may even

<sup>9</sup> The translation of the term “κρίσις” which is preferred here is suggested by Whitmarsh ((2001), 50) – cf. also Too’s discussion (1998) of the term, esp. pp. 9-10 and 131.

‘cure themselves of their violent disease by the medicine of poetry’ (*Lives of the Sophists* 500.15-23).<sup>10</sup> There were of course cases where literature did not improve the tyrant’s character; the example of Dionysius I comes to mind. Although he was a playwright, he never ceased to be an oppressive, archetypal tyrant. Like Plutarch, Philostratus, too, sees in poetry an undeniable pragmatic value.

In his surviving works Plutarch does not establish a ‘coherent’ theory on poetry, but instead comments on specific passages taken from poets and other authors with the ultimate goal of eliminating any risks from adopting (morally) dangerous lines and to maximize the benefits that can derive from poetry. One could argue that he takes on the role of an intermediary – but a discreet and unbossy one – between poets and audience/readers. In his work the readers do not find comments on entire works or general judgements on authors.<sup>11</sup> Instead they are invited to read between the lines and beyond Plutarch’s individual comments on quotations and dicta to form the picture of his general attitude towards poets and poetry, or (even) reconstruct his ‘implied poetic theory’. Plutarch, for his part, focuses on how readers should understand poetry rather than on what poets teach them – thus he lays particular emphasis on the reception of poetry.

Plutarch concedes to readers authority and a significant degree of autonomy. It is the readers who are then both empowered and assigned the task to judge what they read and decide for themselves what is good or bad for their education and ethical improvement. So, the issue is not only that poets do not simply dictate to us what kind of examples we should imitate or avoid; it involves directly Plutarch’s own approach to poetry, and the ways he believes that poetry can be useful and effective. The path for poetry to achieve its significant role goes through the readers: through their active participation in the educational procedure, the careful reading of poetry, and their internalising of any truths in poetry which can be useful for their life. Plutarch teaches the readers to always choose

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<sup>10</sup> Ahl (1984), 201.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Van der Stockt (1992), 161. There is of course the comparison between Aristophanes and Menander (“Συγκρίσεως Ἀριστοφάνους καὶ Μενάνδρου ἐπιτομή”), but otherwise we do not find that kind of comparison in Plutarch.

and percolate what they read – in a way, to become eclectic as he himself was eclectic: he adopted from different philosophical Schools and authors those ideas that either appealed to him most, or were useful for the ethical and instructive purposes of his work.<sup>12</sup>

Although he appears to be indecisive as to whether poetic statements can sometimes be more dangerous than useful for the education of young people, his citation of tragedians' lines – as well as of other poets' lines – together with his personal comments, indicates that he considers poets to have a great edifying potential. Wardman rightly argues that Plutarch, in his *How a young man...*, 'keeps up his criticism of poetry, including tragedy, but offers also a partial defence. Poetry can be useful, even though it does refer to myth or the unreal'.<sup>13</sup>

Tragic poetry encourages multiple readings and interpretations of characters and actions; morality in tragedy is not straightforward.<sup>14</sup> As we will see later on in this chapter, Plutarch tries to give more pragmatic than artistic value to poetic sayings. The tragedians, whom he so often quotes in this essay, are the basis upon which Plutarch develops his educational theory. In *How a young man...* Plutarch is not seeking the mere authority of the tragedians as wise poets – as is the case in other essays, discussed in different chapters of the present thesis – as much as the authority of their moral teaching and rhetorical calibre. Pelling, when discussing ethical moralism in tragedy, notices that it is 'more often descriptive than protreptic, exploring ethical truths of human nature rather than producing simple examples to imitate or avoid'.<sup>15</sup> However, for the purposes of Plutarch's (moral) essays, the author uses more its protreptic than its simply descriptive character to achieve his goals as an educator.

Finally we come up with a paradox: Plutarch suggests systematic ways of approaching poetry, but at the same time the way he deals with poets and their sayings is not always consistent, and may even be contradictory at points. Yet his lack of coherence becomes

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<sup>12</sup> See n. 6 above.

<sup>13</sup> Wardman (1974), 171.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. e.g. recently in Gregory (2005): Croally (pp. 55-70), Allan (pp. 71-82, esp. p. 81), Pelling (pp. 83-102), and Cairns (pp. 305-320).

<sup>15</sup> Pelling (1990a), 258.

his strength as an author and educator, since it allows him to approach poetry in a more flexible way than his predecessor, Plato, and to follow different strands of thought.<sup>16</sup> Unlike the philosopher, Plutarch does not exclude poetry from the state, but he introduces a more pragmatic and sophisticated use of poets, so that they become of benefit for the citizens; Plutarch's thesis is that poetry *is* beneficial unless misused. Anyway, the intellectual environment of the first centuries A.D. would not allow Plutarch to adopt the Platonic agenda concerning poetry. Plutarch lives in a period of increasing Hellenism, of what is generally called the 'Second Sophistic' (c. 50-250 A.D.), arguably a movement which encouraged the study of classical authors and the return to the theories and examples they had set.<sup>17</sup> Plutarch's times are not times to obliterate the classical past, but to revive it, and the great liberation of the past is a central element in its relevance and appeal.

#### *How a young man should listen to poetry*

In *How a young man should listen to poetry*, the focus point of the present chapter, Plutarch places the emphasis on the educational role of poetry for the young man, and dissociates poetry from ἀλήθεια in its double sense: 'truth' and 'reality'.<sup>18</sup> The pragmatic basis of the essay is that the young in the early stage of their education cannot distinguish poetic truth from poetic pleasure, and that, in general, art's aesthetic and ethical value are in constant interaction, so that they may occasionally overlap. The pragmatic and practical side of the essay is strengthened by its structure: it is presented as a letter to Marcus Sedatius, whom Plutarch encourages to pass it on to his young son, Cleander, to read (14D-15B).<sup>19</sup> But of course the perspective is wider than that which the private

<sup>16</sup> An interesting parallel can be drawn here between Plato and Plutarch. Proclus has said about Plato that he adjusts his comments on different literary passages according to which author they belong to and according to the specific context, in which they are put (R. 1.42.3-1.54.2). The same applies also to Plutarch whose use of poetic quotations is very context-specific – cf. Van der Stockt (1999a), 134-139.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Introduction, p. 6, together with n. 22.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Schenkeveld (1982), 67 n. 15. Sicking ((1998), 99) points out that 'this ambiguity of the Greek term ἀλήθεια is often important in Plato', too.

<sup>19</sup> The issue of dating the essay is a difficult one; see C. P. Jones (1966), 71; cf. Valgiglio (1973), 68-69, Philippon (1987), 76-70, and Zadorojnyi (1999b), 18. Concerning the two addressees (Sedatius and Cleander) Zadorojnyi ((2002), 305) aptly remarks that they 'acquire symbolic significance', as if merging the Roman with the Greek world.

purposes imply, as the use of ‘we’ also suggests from 15E onwards (“μηδ’ ἡμεῖς οὖν...ἐκκόπτωμεν μηδ’ ἀφανίζωμεν...”). It is an essay for every educator, for every father and his sons.<sup>20</sup>

So, the essay has a strong educational and practical rather than theoretical element, and Plutarch is more analytical in the way he comments about poetry, since he quotes from poetic works to exemplify the various approaches to poetry – or, better, confronts poetic statements with each other.<sup>21</sup> Poetic lines can be very context-specific and therefore they may be dangerous for the readers if they think that they reflect general truths. Even if Plutarch is not always in agreement with the poets, poetic references offer him a good starting-point for developing a system of criticism based on moral and educational value. The second poet – after the poet par excellence, Homer – who appears to have for Plutarch a special educational power is Euripides; therefore he is the most popular among all tragedians in this essay but also generally in Plutarch’s work.<sup>22</sup> And yet, young people in particular who study poetry intensively should not be carried away by the authority of the wise poet and believe whatever he says. They should always examine the truth of poetic sayings and try to understand all their possible implications. Plutarch takes on the task of suggesting how his readers should understand various poetic dicta, how far and why they should approve or disapprove of poetic sayings. This task is not limited within literary boundaries but expands into the domain of morality and philosophy, as will be shown. Plutarch may not be developing an educational theory, as already said, but he wants to offer his (young) readers some edifying guidelines which they must apply then to all kinds of poetic works, and beyond.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Schenkeveld sums up the idea nicely: ‘To put it in modern terms, the textbook for the pupil and its companion, the instructions for the teacher, are here put together’ ((1982), 71). And Goldhill makes the point that the ‘how to’ texts show in Plutarch a constant move from an apparently narrow intellectual topic to the broad issues of proper living ((2002), 271).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Schenkeveld (1982), who discusses the structure of the essay and explains the relation between the theoretical and practical chapters and the way they alternate. The structure of the essay has also been discussed by Heirman (1972), 16-43, Valiglio (1973) and (1991), and by Zadorojnyi (1999b), 16-68 (esp. pp. 17-25), and (with less emphasis on the structure-part) by Von Reutern (1933), 31 and 84.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Helmbold and O’Neil (1959) – cf. also Schläpfer (1950), 48-56, Di Gregorio (1976), 151-153, and Carrara (1988).

<sup>23</sup> Education lies at the centre of Plutarch’s concerns. Harrison agrees with Hamilton on classifying all of Plutarch’s writing as *paideia* ((1987), 277) – cf. Hamilton (1969), xxxviii, and *passim*.

One of the focus points in the essay *How a young man...* is how young people should be educated.<sup>24</sup> Both their parents and their school play a major role in their education. Children who receive good education will even manage to extract useful messages from passages that may be base and improper with reference either to morality or aesthetics (cf. 32E-F). Not only will they then be able to distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ poetry – and show their preference for the former – but they will also explore ways to be taught by the poetry which depicts characters that are unworthy of imitation. In addition, Plutarch names explicitly two big advantages and values – which, again, have a practical value for life – that one will acquire from perusing poetry (35D): moderation (“μετρίότητα”) and magnanimity (“μεγαλοφροσύνη”). Unless the young men develop a skill of appreciating poetry and interpreting it correctly (less) in aesthetic and (more in) moral terms, they will not be able to discern between what has merely literary value and what could also have a pragmatic value for real life.

For Plutarch there are several things that may be disturbing or dangerous in poetry. One of those dangers emerges if one takes poetic lines at face value and thinks that they echo the poet’s personal view since the effect is to give the poet’s moral authority to morally questionable views. Even more dangerous would it be if poets were obeyed as if they were law-givers, Plutarch says emphatically (28B). The metaphor is clearly pointing out that the task of law-givers and poets is not the same; nor is the value of the work they produce in any way similar: the law-givers enact and enforce laws that must be respected by everyone, but poets produce works of which everyone must be critical, so that the poetic ways of defining both good and bad are not meant to be internalised in a direct unquestioning way.

Poetry is considered to be an imitative art, and only as such should it be assessed. The central idea of mimesis, in these passages and elsewhere, should be examined carefully. As is known, Plutarch is not the first to use this term. The term is already charged with a very specific meaning, though quite differently, in Plato (cf. *Rep.* II, III, X) and Aristotle

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<sup>24</sup> Perhaps Plutarch’s essay serves also as a reply to a lost work of Chrysippus with the same title (*How a young man should listen to poetry*), known from Diog. Laert. 7.200.

(cf. *Poet.* 1447a 8-1448b 38, 1450a 19-21). For Plato mimesis means mere imitation, while for Aristotle it becomes a less pejorative term; it means representation and includes all creative writing.<sup>25</sup> Concerning mimesis, Plutarch is Platonic, ignoring the redefinition of mimesis by Aristotle.<sup>26</sup> But, still, Plutarch deviates slightly from Plato, since he does not understand the term within the frame either of epistemology (see Plato) or of stagecraft (see Aristotle). He charges it with a more pragmatic meaning; he closely relates imitation to reality and life.<sup>27</sup> It does not concern only a part of people, such as poets, painters or actors, but it can be applied to people in general – as Duff puts it, ‘In Platonic and Aristotelian thought, as in ancient historical theory, it was the artist who engaged in mimesis. For Plutarch, the effect of the *Lives* is such that it encourages *mimesis* (imitation), in the reader himself’.<sup>28</sup> Whitmarsh has explored in Plutarch the ‘thin line’ which separates real life from Life.<sup>29</sup> Mimetic representation and reality are sometimes so close in Plutarch’s *Lives* that Plutarch can claim the fidelity of a mirror to be a paramount quality of his biographies.<sup>30</sup> Plutarch’s recasting of this subtle term may be considered as part of his significant contribution towards the understanding of imitation as a procedure which works on multiple levels.

At 17F-18D Plutarch discusses poetry and painting as imitative arts. Simonides was, presumably, the first who compared poetry to painting: it is ‘painting which speaks’ (“ζωγραφία φθεγγομένη”), whereas ‘painting is inarticulate poetry’ (“ποίησις σιγῶσα”) (17F-18A).<sup>31</sup> Plato had also described poetry and painting as mimetic activities (cf. e.g. *Rep.* 500c-501b, 597d-599b). By the parallel which Plutarch draws between poetry and

<sup>25</sup> Valgiglio ((1967), 319-337) offers an extensive analysis of the concept of mimesis in Plutarch and compares it with the view of Plato and Aristotle; cf. also Van der Stockt (1992), 21-55, Harland (1999), 6-18, and Duff (1999a), 34-45. A broader discussion of Platonic and Aristotelian poetics of imitation, with references also to Plutarch, is offered by Sicking (1998), 85-100; cf. also Walbank (1960), 216-220, Tagliacchi (1961), 81-92, and Newmyer (1964). About Plato’s hostility to art see T. Gould (1972), and about Plato’s mimesis doctrine see also Keuls (1978), 9-32, and Murray (1996), 3-6 and 28-30.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. e.g. Russell (1981), 99-113, and Halliwell (1998), 109-137; the latter discusses the different categories of mimesis, as well as Aristotle’s innovative concept of poetic mimesis as compared to Plato’s view.

<sup>27</sup> Unlike Plato, for whom the phenomenal world is only a copy of the real world, for Plutarch there is no disparity between phenomenal and real world – so imitation of the real world is less problematic.

<sup>28</sup> Duff (1999a), 40.

<sup>29</sup> Whitmarsh (2001), 54-57.

<sup>30</sup> About the image of the mirror and its use see Introduction, p. 12 n. 39.

<sup>31</sup> Sicking ((1998), 90) gives a short review of the likening of a picture to a silent poem in different authors (from Simonides and Horace to Lessing).



painting he attempts to illustrate how important it is to keep always in mind that poetry, exactly like painting, does not depict only nice or admirable things. Moreover, both arts are, more or less, based on reality, but they must not be evaluated as mirroring reality.

The example that Plutarch gives at 18D refers to Euripides' *Medea*. Timomachus, a painter, depicted the ugly and unnatural act of a mother, Medea in this case, killing her own children. The art of painting and its requirements of *εἰκός* allows or even obliges the painter to portray beautifully things which, by their nature, may be anything but beautiful (18D: “οὐ γάρ ἐστι ταῦτὸ τὸ καλὸν τι μιμεῖσθαι καὶ καλῶς” – ‘For it is not the same thing at all to imitate something beautiful and something beautifully’).<sup>32</sup> Plutarch underlines that what the art of painting here teaches the viewers to do is not to consider the act depicted as good – and consequently imitate it – but instead just admire the likeness of the act depicted, and appreciate its closeness to reality (18A: “ἡδόμεθα καὶ θαυμάζομεν οὐχ ὡς καλὸν ἀλλ’ ὡς ὅμοιον” – ‘We are pleased with it and admire it, not as a beautiful thing, but as a likeness’; and 18B: “ἀλλ’ ἐπαινέειν μόνον ὡς ἐναρμόττον τῷ ὑποκειμένῳ προσώπῳ καὶ οἰκεῖον” – ‘But we should simply commend it as fitting and proper to the character in hand’, the key-words being here “ἐναρμόττον” and “οἰκεῖον”).<sup>33</sup> The young man must be trained to discriminate between artistic and ethical values.<sup>34</sup> Art should be evaluated as art, as an imitation of reality, and not as a model to imitate.<sup>35</sup>

Not only does Plutarch warn young people against the bad use of art, but he also gives guidelines about how they should evaluate poetry itself (18E). The analogy is obvious now: the object of poetry may be far from beautiful and pleasant, but the way in which poetry treats it may render it beautiful and instructive; there is indeed a significant difference between *what* poetry describes and *how* poetry describes it:

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<sup>32</sup> Again this goes back to Aristotle's *Poet.* 1448a 1-8. Cf. Sicking (1998), 107: ‘It is not the event itself that inspires admiration, but the craftsmanship of the maker who has represented his subject *προσηκόντως*’; and earlier (p. 106): ‘Depicting an ugly being as a beautiful thing would violate the requirements of *πρέπον* and *εἰκός*’.

<sup>33</sup> The idea leads us back to Aristotle's *Poet.* 1454a 24-25 (“τρίτον δὲ τὸ ὅμοιον· τοῦτο γὰρ ἕτερον τοῦ χρηστοῦ τὸ ἥθος καὶ ἀρμόττον ποιῆσαι...”) and 1454b 8-11.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Westaway (1922), 86-87.

<sup>35</sup> On the imitative dimension of poetry and painting, as well as on art's aesthetic value, see Van der Stockt ((1990a), 23-31). For a historical overview of the idea of mimesis in poetry see e.g. Sicking (1998), esp. pp. 90 and 99-101.

(18C-D) οὕτως ὁ νέος [...] διδασκέσθω τὴν μιμουμένην ταῦτα δύναμιν καὶ τέχνην ἐπαινεῖν, ὥς δὲ διαθέσεις καὶ πράξεις μιμεῖται καὶ προβάλλεσθαι καὶ κακίζειν.

Let the young man [...] learn to admire the ability and art which imitates these things, but to repudiate and condemn the dispositions and actions which it imitates.<sup>36</sup> (18C-D)

One notices in these lines the presentation of the pairs “δύναμιν καὶ τέχνην” and “διαθέσεις καὶ πράξεις” as if they stood in strong opposition to each other. Moreover, the single (positive) infinitive “ἐπαινεῖν” contrasts its two (negative) opposites “προβάλλεσθαι καὶ κακίζειν”. The rhetorical emphasis laid on the last two words alludes to Plutarch’s emphasis on the dangerous kind of mimesis.<sup>37</sup>

Along these lines, Plutarch has to disagree with Sophocles’ dictum:

οὐκ ἔστ’ ἀπ’ ἔργων μὴ καλῶν ἔπη καλά· (Soph., *TGF*, frag. 839)

From unfair deed fair word cannot proceed. (27F)

Plutarch’s argument refers here to statements which can be highly confusing since the tragic figures’ eloquence may not reflect good character. Young people should be aware of that and disapprove of charming, eloquent words spoken by mean characters. Both examples he offers are taken from Euripides (27F-28A), the one referring to Phaedra’s allusive, yet dextrous, accusations against Hippolytus in *Hip. Veiled*, and the other to Helen in *Troades* (*Troad.* 919 ff.) who attacks Hecuba using a subtle argument, according to which she is the one to blame for the start of the Trojan war since she gave birth to Paris, the man who kindled the war. What is of particular interest in these quotations is the way Plutarch links the two tragedians: after having quoted the Sophoclean line, he introduces the Euripidean plays, about which he will talk immediately after, by using an unusual phrase: “καὶ ὁ σύσκηνος αὐτοῦ” (27F). The word “σύσκηνος” is taken from the military field – Plutarch uses it with its first meaning in the *Lives* to describe generals or political figures sharing the same tent with someone (cf. *Alc.* 4.4, 7.3, *Luc.* 8.6, *Pomp.* 3.1, *Ant.* 13.2; also in the *Essays*, at: 148A, 503A, 998D) – however, the word appears

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Aristotle’s *Poet.*, 1448b 8-10 and 1448b 24-27, where Aristotle refers to the positive or negative reception of different kinds of poetry.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Plato’s *Rep.* 601a ff., where the philosopher examines different arts and evaluates artists according to the quality of mimesis in their work.

here to depart from its first meaning, as if to introduce a pun, hinting at the theatrical stage and implying that the two tragedians shared the stage (σύν+σκηνή) in competitions; so that “σκηνή” would no longer stand for the tent but for the theatrical stage instead.

As Plutarch remarks, poets create different figures, whether good or villains, who speak lines according to their character (18E-F). Therefore, the reader must understand that bad characters do bad deeds or behave in improper ways. For example, when Eteocles utters despicable words, the readers must both perceive his words as depicting aptly his character and refrain from identifying him with the tragedian:

(18E-F) ἂν οὖν ὑπομνήσκωμεν τοὺς παῖδας ὅτι ταῦτ’ οὐκ ἐπαινοῦντες οὐδὲ δοκιμάζοντες ἀλλ’ ὥς ἄτοπα καὶ φαῦλα φαῦλοις καὶ ἀτόποις ἤθεσι καὶ προσώποις περιτιθέντες γράφουσιν, οὐκ ἂν ὑπὸ τῆς δόξης βλάπτοντο τῶν ποιητῶν.

If then we remind our sons that authors write them, not because they commend or approve them, but with the idea of investing mean and unnatural characters and persons with unnatural and mean sentiments, they could not be harmed by the opinions of poets. (18E-F)

It would be certainly both dangerous for young people and ‘unfair’ for the poet to be identified with a *dramatis persona*, although, one has to admit, this move may result from the author-reader relationship.<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, Plutarch himself seems to commit this ‘mistake’, when he launches to criticise poetry by attacking not the tragic characters who speak the specific lines but the playwrights themselves (especially clear at 17C, 21F, 25A-B, 27F, 28C).<sup>39</sup> But is this a tactical approach by Plutarch so that he may gain authority for himself? In any case, Plutarch’s opportunistic use of quotations and poets as to suit his purpose or context is a point to keep in mind concerning the way he both manipulates and presents his material.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>38</sup> There is a fascinating discussion of this confusion of *personae* by Bartsch (1994). She particularly discusses the case of Nero as *tragoedus* (pp. 36-62). Since Nero both wrote tragedies and performed on stage, it was very difficult for the audience not to identify at some point the poet with the emperor, the actor with the poet, or even the actor with the tragic character. On the author-reader relationship see Introduction, pp. 6-12.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Aeschines: he seems to commit the same ‘mistake’, e.g. in his *Against Timarchus* 128 (quoting Hesiod), 129 (quoting Homer), 151 and 152 (quoting Euripides) – in all these cases he does not make any distinction between the poet’s voice and the individual characters’ voices.

<sup>40</sup> See also Schläpfer (1950), 14 and 23.

Plutarch underlines the fact that some poetic lines may convey disturbing moral messages and have a bad influence on the readers if the latter do not realise the poet's objectives; yet the same lines are to be regarded as right and appropriate if they correspond to the character who utters them. Here possibly Plutarch goes further than Aristotle, who disapproves of 'unnecessary' baseness (*Poet.* 1454a);<sup>41</sup> he places the emphasis on appropriateness to character rather than appropriateness in less specific aesthetic terms. In the example which Plutarch gives at 18D-E he makes clear that the reader must dissociate the authorial voice from the poetic character; Eteocles says:

εἴπερ γὰρ ἀδικεῖν χρή, τυραννίδος πέρι

κάλλιστον ἀδικεῖν

(Eur., *Phoen.* 524-525)

If one must commit injustice, it is best

to do so for the sake of tyranny.

(18D)

The reader may perceive the lines as an attempt of the poet to describe wrongdoing as “καλόν”.<sup>42</sup> Propriety, however, concerning the faithful representation and propriety in moral terms are two different things, and so the reader is meant to transcend the propriety of the lines as such to think about propriety in terms of the character who speaks these lines. As so often in Plutarch, tragic quotations are reused in different contexts. So, at 125D-E of *Advice on health* Plutarch clearly disapproves of the lines, and goes on to correct them so as to suit their new context which makes the point about continence for the sake of health.<sup>43</sup> Again in the *Nicias-Crassus Synkrisis*, Plutarch recasts and expands the Euripidean lines;<sup>44</sup> yet in this case Plutarch's spirit is more compromising concerning the implications of the tragic lines: if one must do wrong, then it would be better to do it for the sake of a great undertaking (4.3: “ἀλλὰ πολλοῦ τιμητέον τὸ ἀδικεῖν, μὴ ῥαδίως μὴδ' ἐπὶ τοῖς τυχοῦσιν ὥς τι φᾶνλον ἢ μικρὸν προϊέμενους τὸ δίκαιον”).

<sup>41</sup> However, it must be noted, there is no strong evidence that Plutarch had first-hand knowledge of the *Poetics* – see Sandbach (1982), 208 and 229, Zadorojnyi (1997), 172, and Duff (2004), 285 n. 53.

<sup>42</sup> This question of what is ‘wrong’ or ‘right’, ‘good’ or ‘evil’ seems to be potentially at the centre of most great dramas. Circumstances may sometimes necessitate wrongdoing, forcing people to choose between the lesser of two evils (e.g. in *Antigone* what seems to the protagonist as right and appropriate, to bury her brother, appears to Creon as wrong and illegal).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Nikolaidis (1991), 158-159.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Duff (1999a), 273-274.

Similarly to Eteocles' case, Ixion's lines are in character, although they are fallacious for the truth they suggest:

(18E) τοῦ μὲν δικαίου τὴν δόκησιν ἄρτυσο  
τὰ δ' ἔργα τοῦ πᾶν δρῶντος· ἔνθα κερδανεῖς (Eur., *Ixion*, frag. 426a)  
Achieve the just man's good repute,

but deeds that fit a man capable of everything, therein shall be your gain. (18E)

Plutarch's comment is explicit (17B): “μοχθηροὶ μὲν εἰσι λόγοι καὶ ψευδεῖς, Ἐτεοκλεῖ δὲ καὶ Ἰξίονι...πρέποντες.” (‘These are wicked and fallacious sentiments, but fitting respectively for Eteocles and Ixion...’) (18E). Significantly, the lines here (18D-E) are not meant to be read in isolation, detached from their context, but presuppose that the reader has knowledge of the complete work, so as to understand that the portrayal of Eteocles and Ixion in the lines quoted by Plutarch reflects the general portrayal of the two characters.<sup>45</sup> Earlier, too, Plutarch was able to read beyond the disturbing truth of Aeschylus' lines suggesting that ‘a god creates fault in men/ whenever he is willing to crush a house in woe’ (“θεὸς μὲν αἰτίαν φύει βροτοῖς, ὅταν κακῶσαι δῶμα παμπήδην θέλῃ”) (*Niobe*, frag. 154a 15-16): lines such as these serve the goal of conveying the delusion and ignorance of the character who utters them concerning the gods.

Plutarch advises his audience/readers to make a distinction between what fictitious characters say and what poets say accordingly, and to pay particular attention to any hints or reactions from the poets' side concerning their agreement or disagreement with how their characters speak or act (cf. 19A: “εὖ μάλα προσεκτέον εἴ τινας ὁ ποιητὴς αὐτὸς ἐμφάσεις δίδωσι κατὰ τῶν λεγομένων ὥς δυσχεραينوμένων ὑπ' αὐτοῦ” – ‘Close attention must be given to see whether the poet himself gives any hints against the sentiments expressed to indicate that they are disliked by him’). One of the reasons Plutarch admires Homer is exactly this, that he is one of the poets who explicitly approve or disapprove of what different characters say, leaving the reader with no doubts as to how poetic lines are to be understood (19B ff.).

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<sup>45</sup> Schenkeveld (1982), 64-65.

In amending poetic quotations, Plutarch often makes use of words such as “ἀντιπαρατίθηναι” (‘set against’), “παραβάλλω” (‘interpolate’), “μεταγράφω” (‘rewrite’), “ἐπανορθόω” (‘amend’) (cf. 21B, and esp. 33C-D) as part of his terminology when dealing with passages, yet he does not develop this terminology further into a system of wider application.<sup>46</sup> Plutarch recognises that the poets have a certain degree of authority – which he exploits opportunistically himself – but he still scrutinises their words and shows their occasional misinterpretations of truth or reality.<sup>47</sup> As the words listed above show, the tragedians’ (and other poets’) dicta are subject to the audience’s/readers’ judgement while the truths expressed by the tragedians are to be adjusted to the readers’ needs. The words “ἐπανορθόω” and “ἐπανόρθωσις” are interesting for yet another reason which fits into the wider perspective of the Plutarchan corpus: Plutarch uses the word “ἐπανόρθωσις” in the prologue of *Aemilius* (*Aem.* 1.4: “[τῇ] πρὸς ἐπανόρθωσιν ἡθῶν ἐνεργότερον;” – ‘what more effective for the improvement of character?’). Beyond the very specific aim which Plutarch sets in this essay on poetry and which he will achieve by amending poetic texts so that they become more of ethical value for the young men, there is always the general programmatic goal of his *Lives* as he himself defines it in the prologue of *Aemilius*, and that is the improvement of character. The ethical register is undoubtedly a significant element that imbues all of Plutarch’s works, and the word “ἐπανόρθωσις” gives a tinge of that register even in this essay, where Plutarch seems to be apparently only correcting poetic texts.

When Plutarch detects a disturbing statement, he first tries to find another statement (as a counterbalance) within the works of the same poet, and encourages the young readers to do the same. An example of this correcting pattern can be found at 20D, where Plutarch compares pairs of lines taken from Euripides’ *Archelaus* and explicitly indicates which of the two lines one should prefer – here it is always the second:

πάλλ’, ὦ τέκνον, σφάλλουσιν ἀνθρώποις θεοί.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Schläpfer (1950), 55. On “ἐπανόρθωσις” see also Gómez Cardó (1999), esp. 375-376.

<sup>47</sup> Concerning the poetic criticism practised by Plutarch Wardman infers that it ‘is that of a philosopher who is used to turning to the poets for quotable examples and who is prepared to rewrite or bend what seems to him false doctrine’ ((1974), 171-172).

τὸ ῥῆστον εἶπας, αἰτιάσασθαι θεούς.

(Eur., *Archel.*, frag. 254)<sup>48</sup>

Often do the gods, my child, cause men to fail.

You have named the simplest way; just blame the gods. (20D)

And again in the same set of quotations Plutarch quotes lines which refer to a common theme, that is, the gods and our duties towards them:

τί δῆτα θύειν δεῖ σε κατθανούμενον;

ἄμεινον· οὐδεὶς κάματος εὐσεβεῖν θεούς. (Eur., *Hyps.*, frag. 752k, lines 20-21)

Why to sacrifice when you must die?

It is better thus; god's worship is not toil. (20D)

The comparison of lines such as these, which are put in a close sequence, suggests that contradictory sayings must not lead us to reject poetry and blame poets for inconsistency. Plutarch proposes a different approach to his readers: to justify and defend the poets by choosing the better sayings found in their works.<sup>49</sup> This positive approach to poetry can be also traced in his suggestion that, if something strikes the readers as completely misleading, or simply as unpleasant, they must consider the astonishment it causes to be one of the poet's edifying methods, since it manages to attract their special attention and invites them to react immediately and amend, if possible, the dictum (cf. 17A).

This pattern of poetic criticism is developed by Plutarch also when quoting several lines from Sophocles in a long sequence of tragic lines:

δεινὸς γὰρ ἔρπειν πλοῦτος ἔς τε τᾶβατα

καὶ πρὸς βέβηλα, χῶπόθεν πένης ἀνὴρ

οὐδ' ἐντυχὼν δύνατ' ὦν ὦν ἐρᾷ τυχεῖν.

καὶ γὰρ δυσειδὲς σῶμα καὶ δυσώνυμον

γλώσση σοφὸν τίθησιν εὖμορφόν τ' ἰδεῖν. (Soph., *Aleadae*, frag. 88.6-10)

Clever is wealth at finding ways to reach

both holy and unholy things, and hence

a poor man, even if he gains access,

<sup>48</sup> Again cited at 1049E of *On Stoic contradictions*, where the two lines are quoted as contradicting each other – and at 1049F Plutarch makes the point that the second line could be used as a reply to Chrysippus in more than one cases.

<sup>49</sup> On the same discussion see Schläpfer (1950), 9-10, where he argues in favour of Plutarch's positive attitude to poetry, which may be explained as due to his admiration of what was achieved during the classical period, and which constitutes a deviation from Plato's polemic against poets.

could not attain what he desires.

For wealth makes an ugly and ill-omened body,

by means of speech both wise and beautiful to look at. (21B)

Against those statements about wealth Plutarch suggests that the young reader sets other lines that are preferred for being closer to the truth; the verb he uses (“ἀντιπαράθῃσει”) is part of the special vocabulary that signals Plutarch’s reaction and attempt to lead the young men to a positive reaction (cf. above, p. 33). Yet, Plutarch follows a different method of rectification here: although the ‘better’ (preferred) lines are still to be found in the work of the same poet, this time they are not necessarily taken from the immediate context but can come from a different context in other plays:

γένοιτο καὶ ἄπλουτος ἐν τιμαῖς ἀνὴρ (Soph., *TGF*, frag. 835)

καὶ

οὐδὲν κακίων πτωχός, εἰ καλῶς φρονεῖ (Soph., *TGF*, frag. 836)

καὶ

ἀλλὰ τῶν πολλῶν καλῶν

τίς χάρις, εἰ κακόβουλος

φροντὶς ἐκτρέφει τὸν εὐαίωνα πλούτον; (Soph., *Tereus*, frag. 592.1-3)

Even without wealth a man may be esteemed

and

A beggar is not bad, if he has a noble mind

and

In the blessings of plenty

what enjoyment is there,

if blessed wealth owes its increase to evil-counselling care? (21B-C)

Plutarch suggests that young people should be critical towards poetic statements while directing them explicitly – with the language he uses – towards the best (cf. 20C: “δεῖ τῷ βελτίονι συνηγορεῖν”, and 20D: “πρὸς τὰ βελτίονα τῇ κρίσει τοὺς νέους κατευθύνωμεν”; similarly at 33D: “τοὺς νέους παρακαλεῖν πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον”). Where it is impossible to find a better saying from the same poet, then the reader is advised to look into other poets’



works and find lines which can restore truth and give to things their right value.<sup>50</sup> Again later, Plutarch quotes lines from two Euripidean plays to finally add another, better line from the same poet:

πολλαῖσι μορφαῖς οἱ θεοὶ σοφισμάτων  
σφάλλουσιν ἡμᾶς κρείσσονες πεφυκότες (Eur., *TGF*, frag. 972)

By many forms of artifice the gods  
defeat our plans, for they are stronger. (20F-21A)

To those lines he prefers another Euripidean line:

εἰ θεοὶ τι δρῶσι φαῦλον, οὐκ εἰσιν θεοὶ (Eur., *Beller.*, frag. 286b 7)  
If gods do something that is base, they are not gods. (21A)

It is certainly not accidental that most of the examples corrected at 20D-21A refer to gods, or touch upon a religious context.<sup>51</sup> Plutarch's religious sentiment obviously ranks high among his concerns. Frag. 972 is quoted again at 431A (*On the obsolescence of oracles*), only there Plutarch suggests that the word "σοφισμάτων" were substituted by "πραγμάτων" to make the line less offensive concerning gods' attitude towards mortals ('gods don't act using tricks but facts').<sup>52</sup> It is not only in the poets themselves that Plutarch searches for better sayings, but he also proceeds to make personal suggestions for correcting and improving poetic sayings. At 34A Plutarch introduces his own 'better version' of a tragic line in a way which is similar to 21A ("βέλτιον εἰρημένον ὑπ' αὐτοῦ"): "ἦν δὲ βέλτιον εἰπεῖν" (34A), and stresses the importance of virtue as compared to beauty; according to Plutarch young men should replace the word "κάλλος" with "σώφρον" in frag. 355 ("ἔπου προσῆ τὸ κάλλος, ἀμφιδέξιος") – the same method of correcting a tragic line by replacing a word for another is followed in the other line which he quotes at 34A (*TGF*, adesp., frag. 356).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Schenkeveld ((1982), 63), who discusses 'the various remedies offered [by Plutarch] in order to protect the boy's mind against bad influences', ranging 'from choosing the better opinion of two conflicting lines which stand in immediate vicinity to countering a wrong statement with one chosen from the writings of another author' – cf. also p. 69.

<sup>51</sup> Plutarch's theology is discussed by Flacelière (1974), Brenk (1977), and (1998), Valgiglio (1988), as well as by Bernard (1990) (with reference to *Dialogue on love*), esp. pp. 268-274, and Gallo (1996b).

<sup>52</sup> At 1049E (*On Stoic contradictions*) Plutarch refers once more to the same quotation as applauded by the Stoics, but here instead of "φαῦλον" (or, "φλαῦρον" in other MSS.) we have the word "αἰσχρόν". Barigazzi has discussed Plutarch's use of some fragments from Euripides' *Bellerophon* (and from *Phaethon*) in (1994), 39-55.

These last examples introduce another way of ‘correcting’ poetic verses, where Plutarch rewrites them, replacing specific words or interpolating another verse or two to give a clearer message to the readers and guide them in the right direction. It is interesting to compare this practice of editing texts by making amendments with the practice of Alexandrian scholars such as Zenodotus and Aristarchus of Samothrace. The former became famous for his recension of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and, in his effort to get back to the original Homeric text, he made several alterations, introduced new readings, and sometimes even inserted new lines.<sup>53</sup> However, while Zenodotus usually amends the text, so that it makes better sense, Plutarch – rather in the manner of Aristarchus’ emendations on the grounds of τὸ πρέπον<sup>54</sup> – corrects the text with moral criteria in mind.

At 33C Plutarch gives an example of interpolation of a phrase in a supposed dialogue where Antisthenes is presented to give an immediate reply to the poet upon hearing the lines from Euripides’ *Aeolus*:

τί δ’ αἰσχρὸν ἢν μὴ τοῖσι χρωμένοις δοκεῖ; (Eur., *Aeolus*, frag. 19)

What is shameful if its doer think not so? (33C)

Plutarch adopts and reproduces the line which Antisthenes interjected (“παραβάλλον”):

αἰσχρὸν τό γ’ αἰσχρὸν, καὶν δοκῇ καὶν μὴ δοκῇ

A shame is a shame, though one may think so or not. (33C)

Plutarch uses Euripides’ quotation in his attempt to moralise against the true danger which would arise, particularly for young people, if there were no absolute standards in life and if everything was subject to relative truth. Plutarch’s educational system allows no such sophistries as the one suggested above by the tragedian.

Plutarch advises his reader to be alert to the nature of the poetic language, and examine, for instance, whether the use of poetic words is literal or metaphorical/twisted. Poets often use figurative speech or words with their different meanings at various instances (cf. 22C, 22E-F, 23B-C, 24D). Some typical examples are provided by the tragedians

<sup>53</sup> Aristarchus of Samothrace (c. 216-144 B.C.) also produced critical recensions of various texts (e.g. of Homer, Hesiod, Archilochus, Alcaeus, Anacreon, Pindar) and commentaries (ὑπομνήματα) on Homer, Hesiod, Archilochus, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Herodotus a.o. mainly based on the criteria of consistency and appropriateness of *ethos*.

<sup>54</sup> See above, n. 53.

again. In the first passage cited below (24D), the word to which Plutarch refers as having various meanings in different poets is the word ‘virtue’ (“ἀρετή”). As virtue can describe a quality of a person in different domains, poets may use the same word to imply e.g. good repute, influence, honesty and justice:

εἰ δὲ θανεῖν θέμις, ὦδὲ θανεῖν καλόν,

εἰς ἀρετὴν καταλυσσάμενους βίον

(Eur., *TGF*, frag. 994)

If to die is right, thus to die is good,

letting our lives go in a way that is virtuous. (24D)

Dying in virtue would be the best end which a man could hope for. So, in this case ‘virtue’ is used with one of its main, most straightforward, meanings.

However, in the second example, at 25A-B, a distortion of the notion of ‘happiness’ (“εὐδαιμονία”) strikes Plutarch as most disturbing and dangerous, while it gives him a reason to attack Euripides (25A: “Εὐριπίδης δὲ πολλὴν ἐργάζεται ταραχὴν καὶ σύγχυσιν...”) <sup>55</sup> – his attack is based on two of his lines, the first from *Medea* and the second from the *Phoenissae*:

μὴ μοι γένοιτο λυπρὸς εὐδαιμόνων βίος

(Eur., *Med.* 598)

A prosperous life that causes pain is no wish of mine. (25B)

And:

τί τὴν τυραννίδ', ἀδικίαν εὐδαιμόνα,

τιμᾶς;

(Eur., *Phoen.* 549-550)

Why do you so excessively honour tyranny,

which is prosperous injustice? (25B)

Unless one comprehends the figurative and distorted use of ‘happiness’ in these lines, one may be thrown into confusion and puzzlement. Obviously Plutarch does not agree with the verse from *Medea*. According to him, we should wish to live, even if we shall live a painful life only. Plutarch warns against understanding all poetic words with their literal meaning. The examples he takes to demonstrate this refer again to the gods, the one taken from Euripides and the other from Sophocles:

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<sup>55</sup> About allegorical interpretations of poetry and the potential dangers they may carry see 19A ff. – cf. e.g. Nikolaidis (1991), 163.

μὰ τὸν μετ' ἄστρον Ζῆν' ἼΑρη τε φοῖνιον (Eur., *Phoen.* 1006)

No, by Zeus enthroned among the stars and

by Ares, the god of slaughter (23B)

and:

τυφλὸς γὰρ, ὦ γυναῖκες, οὐδ' ὁρῶν ἼΑρης

σοὺς προσώπῃ πάντα τυρβάζει κακὰ (Soph., *TGF*, frag. 838)

For blind and unseeing Ares, you women,

with the face of a swine stirs up all ills. (23C)

In Euripides' line the names of the gods stand for the gods themselves, but in Sophocles' lines Ares is used only as the equivalent of 'war' (cf. 23D-E).

Reading poetry can be more beneficial for the readers if they move to a wider application of general statements made in poetry – Aristotle emphasises that poetry, in contrast to history, does not deal with what did happen but more with what might happen (*Poet.* 1451b 4 ff.). This approach, which again involves a quasi-editorial approach to the text, gives poetry a wider application and makes it important for the education of all generations of all times. Plutarch gives several examples of poetry's potential as an area from which general truths can be extracted. At 34B, after acknowledging that this method of reading poetry by giving to the poet's statements a wider application was first introduced by Chrysippus, Plutarch quotes a Euripidean line:

τίς δ' ἐστὶ δούλος τοῦ θανεῖν ἄφροντις ὦν; (Eur., *TGF*, frag. 958)

What man who does not reckon death can be a slave? (34B)

Immediately he suggests to the readers to replace readily the word “θανεῖν” with “πόνος” or “νόσος”, whereupon they would get a new statement, which would be equally correct and of similar value. And again, another example at 34E:

μὴ πλοῦτον εἴπῃς. οὐχὶ θαυμάζω θεὸν

ὃν χῶς κάκιστος ῥαδίως ἐκτήσατο. (Eur. *Aeolus*, frag. 20)

Do not speak of wealth. I can't admire a god

whom the basest man secured easily. (34E)

This time the central word is “πλοῦτον”. In the same context in place of “πλοῦτον” we can put repute (“δόξαν”), personal beauty (“σώματος εὐμορφίαν”), the general's cloak

(“στρατηγικὴν χλαμύδα”), or the priestly crown (“ἱερατικὸν στέφανον”),<sup>56</sup> and still the implications of the line would be very similar. This is part of poetry’s grandeur, that it can be applied to and understood in wider contexts and always keep its great educational value. This is exactly what young people have to learn and always keep in mind, how to appreciate poetry in all its possible dimensions, versions and interpretations. This approach to poetry underlines multiple moral messages and offers the readers a good starting-point to make further thoughts on what they read and how they interpret it (cf. also 34D). Rather than offering his readers a definitive answer about, simply, what is good and what is bad about poetry, Plutarch invites them to a more reflective appreciation of its value which shall lead them to the accomplishment of pedagogical and ethical aims.

Nevertheless, Plutarch is elsewhere wary of accepting general poetic statements, since they may occasionally result in dangerous conclusions. Therefore, one must be ready to react against sayings such as:

δουλοῖ γὰρ ἄνδρα, καὶ θρασύσπλαγχνός τις ἦ,  
ὅταν συνειδῇ μητρὸς ἢ πατρὸς κακά (Eur., *Hippol.* 424-5)

For it enslaves even a bold-hearted man when he is conscious  
of sins committed by his mother or father. (28C)

and:

σμικρὸν φρονεῖν χρή τὸν κακῶς πεπραγότα. (Eur., *TGF*, frag. 957)

The one who does not prosper must be of humble mind. (28C)

Euripides’ lines are expressed as general truths but they must not be adopted by young people who will come across them; instead, they must question them to prove that the truth is different concerning the matter of the lineage as the defining factor in one’s life. The importance of the family is undeniable; yet if that be humble, then one must find the strength to rise against one’s bad fortune and become a great man (34C-D). Doctrines such as the one quoted above must be rejected so that they do not mislead the young men or lead them to receive passively their fate. Heraclitus has said that “βλάξ ἄνθρωπος ἐπὶ

<sup>56</sup> Plutarch’s reference to the *priestly crown* reminds us of his position as a priest at Delphi’s oracle. It is certainly an odd word, which would not easily come to mind in this generalising context; but for Plutarch it seems to be a common word in his life at Delphi.

παντὶ λόγῳ φιλεῖ ἐπτοῆσθαι” (DK B87) (‘the fool is dismayed by every word that is said’), and Plutarch advises that one should internalise the saying as a guideline so as not to be carried away by truths that are not well sustained. For Plutarch philosophy can set things right and alert young men against anything that might be harmful for them (cf. 28D: “ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἀβλαβὴ παρέξει τὴν τῶν ποημάτων ἀκρόασιν” – ‘This, then, will take away all danger of harm from the perusal of poetry’).

Yet it is not only poetry that can profit from philosophy, as the example above proves. The relation between poetry and philosophy is double-sided: therefore, philosophy can benefit from poetry, too. Plutarch considers poetry to be a necessary part of education on account of its introductory role to philosophy (and beyond): poetry prepares the ground for the readers to understand what philosophers have said.<sup>57</sup> Poetry can serve as the most effective propaedeutic to philosophy (cf. 15F-16A: ‘Poetry should not be avoided by those who are intending to pursue philosophy, but they should use poetry as an introductory exercise in philosophy (“προφιλοσοφητέον”), by training themselves habitually to seek the profitable in what gives pleasure, and to find satisfaction therein’).<sup>58</sup> Blended with philosophy, poetry can redefine its objectives and make readers pursue philosophy via poetry. Although the poets’ sources may differ greatly from those of the philosophers, since they use fiction/myths as their source(s), both of them aim to point out to those who study them valuable moral and edifying messages. On poetry as the correct way to start one’s education Plutarch invokes Sophocles by name (“κατὰ τὸν Σοφοκλέα”) for the gnomic wisdom he offers, when saying:

ἔργου δὲ παντὸς ἥν τις ἄρχεται καλῶς,  
καὶ τὰς τελευτὰς εἰκὸς ἐσθ’ οὕτως ἔχειν (Soph., *TGF*, frag. 831)  
If one begins each task in the proper way,  
so it is likely that also the ending will be. (16A)

Therefore Plutarch does not only encourage young people to start from poetry to be able later on to understand philosophical matters, but he also suggests to them that they should

<sup>57</sup> Compare Heirman’s observation that ‘the importance of poetry is the purification of both poet and listener, and above all the preparation of the reader to a life of moral culture, the life of a philosopher’ ((1972), 189).

<sup>58</sup> As Morgan remarks, ‘Poetry must be shown to display *logos*; *logos* trains the *psyche* of the *nous* and is associated with *philosophia*, which produces virtue’ ((1988), 147).

accept it and approve of it as long as they can benefit from the pleasure it offers; if not, then they should rather disapprove of it and question the value of the poetry which would contradict beneficial principles.

Poetry may contain both good and bad elements, but so does life. Plutarch draws a parallel at 25C-D where two Euripidean lines work in a double way: they emphasise the coexistence of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ in both gods and men’s life while they also make an important point for Plutarch’s argument about the value of truth and imitation in poetry. The lines read as follows:

οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο χωρὶς ἐσθλὰ καὶ κακά,

ἀλλ’ ἔστι τις σύγκρασις.

(Eur., *Aeolus*, frag. 21.3-4)<sup>59</sup>

The good and the bad cannot be kept apart,

but there is some commingling.

(25C-D)

When it comes to poetry, what matters most – apart from the practical value – is variety and pleasure. Therefore poets present both characters and gods experiencing the good as well as the bad, for otherwise their stories would be dull and uninteresting. Watching the changes of *tyche* and of characters’ emotions contributes significantly to the entertainment and emotional engagement of the audience. At the same time Plutarch uses this Euripidean statement to respond to the Stoics, who declare that nothing base can attach to virtue and nothing good to vice.<sup>60</sup> In this way the quotation gains, beyond anything else, a philosophical character – just another piece of evidence that poetry and philosophy go hand in hand.

Plutarch goes on to explore how closely poetry and philosophy are related. Poetry may indeed sometimes teach similar things to philosophy, as is shown in the following lines taken from Euripides:

ἐγὼ δ’ οὐδὲν πρεσβύτερον

νομίζω τὰς σωφροσύνας,

ἐπεὶ τοῖς ἀγαθοῖς ἀεὶ ξύνεστι

(Eur., *TGF*, frag. 959)

<sup>59</sup> The lines are quoted again at 369B of *On Isis and Osiris* and 474A of *On tranquillity of mind*.

<sup>60</sup> Homer is also said to have contradicted this statement of the Stoics (25C). There is an important discussion of the terms ‘good’ and ‘evil’ as used by the Stoics in Roller (2001), 64-126, esp. pp. 64-77.

There is nothing that I hold  
in a higher esteem than a moderate life,  
when it always joins those that are good. (36C)

There is nothing of higher esteem than a virtuous life. This statement could be introduced or, at least, shared by a philosopher, too. The further examples which Plutarch offers his readers at 36F-37A, all taken from tragedy, show that poetry can initiate young men into important philosophical truths concerning the value of life and death (cf. the lines from Euripides' *Cresph.*, frag. 449.4-6), the wealth that nature brings (Eur., frag. 892.1-2), or the control of emotions as a way leading to happiness and virtue (adesp., frag. 360). Poetry attached to reality, as well as to philosophical truths, can be as useful as philosophy itself. Plutarch gives poetry unquestionable power and value, which, if ignored, would confine poetry within the boundaries of imitation and to its value as individual pieces of literature with no reflections of moral truths in it. By that stage the young man has graduated to the world of Plato, and this is the important allusive register in the last simile at 36E which captures the most significant reasons why one should read poetry: after the young man will have studied poetry he will be able to perceive philosophical tenets more easily, as if looking upon the sun after leaving darkness, although accustomed for some time to a reflected light.<sup>61</sup> This light may be only a reflection, as Plutarch says; however, it will allow the young man to see the truths of philosophy (and poetry) and it will dispose him positively toward them, inviting him not to run away but to engage deeper in them.

The emphasis which Plutarch lays on poetry as the first step of a young man's philosophical education and of his deeper understanding of it is demonstrated by the structure of this essay: *How a young man...* starts and finishes with the discussion of that issue (chap. 1, esp. 15F-16A and chap. 14, 35F-37B); it is then apparently a strategic choice made by Plutarch to open his discussion of education and to end it by making a point about philosophy. Even if the readers, by the end of the essay, may question the benefits from poetry as such on the basis of the poets' occasional untruthfulness, they can have no doubts about poetry's true value as the best introductory exercise to philosophy.

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<sup>61</sup> The image echoes the cave simile from Plato's *Republic* (514a-517b, 532b) – cf. Sicking (1998), 113.



## **2. Theatrical Imagery in Plutarch's Essays**

### **Introduction**

The use of dramatic vocabulary and theatrical imagery may vary significantly in the different Essays, according, firstly, to Plutarch's objective, secondly, to the addressee and, thirdly, to the genre to which each essay belongs and which directs the main train of thought in each treatise. The identification of 'genres' in Plutarch is a complex question,<sup>1</sup> and may have been so even for original readers: at least in some cases they may have been effectively working out, as they read, the way in which a work was operating, sensing particular affinities with different genres and antecedents, and evaluating for themselves, say, how far an argument was to be taken as Plutarch's last and deepest word on a subject, or how far an argument was to be developed for the needs of the immediate context. Therefore, we should not necessarily expect the treatment of tragedy, or indeed borrowings from tragedy, to work in exactly the same way in every treatise. In the same way, we should not be trying to work out a single, coherent Plutarchan 'view of tragedy', but rather seeing what sort of possibilities tragedy opened up for Plutarch, and the range of ways he could exploit it for particular contexts and arguments.

The present chapter will focus on two essays, on *How to tell a flatterer from a friend* and on *Were the Athenians more glorious in war or in wisdom?*, which exemplify the different ways in which Plutarch treats tragedy. In Plutarch's work there are varying aspects of tragedy: there are many tragic quotations – a direct use of tragedy – and there is also the use of tragedy as a metaphor. Accordingly, we can expect to find strands in these two works that do not reconcile easily with each other or with what Plutarch says elsewhere (e.g. in *How a young man should listen to poetry*). Although in *Were the*

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<sup>1</sup> One may ask the same kind of question for the Lives: is it history, biography, or both? And even if we give an answer to this question, it will still be awkward to give only one definition of what is meant under those two genres. The purposes of this chapter do not allow a thorough discussion of the genre-issue in Plutarch. About the issue of Plutarchan biography overlapping with historiography, see e.g. Duff (1999a), 17-22 and 52-53, and Pelling (1980)=(2002a), 102-107, (1990c)=(2002a), esp. pp. 156-162, (1990d)=(2002a), 130-132, (1995b)=(2002a), 207-211; cf. also de Romilly (1988b).

*Athenians...?* there are no tragic quotations, in *How to tell a flatterer...* Plutarch uses the wisdom of the canonical Greek tragedians with significant frequency.<sup>2</sup> However, the distinguishing feature of this essay is the use of theatre as part of the imagery which Plutarch employs, therefore the analysis in this chapter will focus on this usage of theatre. The discussion will concentrate on theatrical images (vocabulary, metaphors, allusions) in these two essays where theatre is used to make a significant point either concerning the inappropriateness of a possible transposition of theatre into real life,<sup>3</sup> or exploiting the notion of theatre as a world of illusion in order to describe behaviour which is mainly impersonation.

In this context theatre becomes the place which brings to the foreground the antithesis between illusion and reality – as much as the convergence of the two elements. In *How to tell...* the antithesis involves both the flatterer and the person who is flattered, as the former creates an illusionary reality which influences the latter's life, and the person flattered is unable to distinguish a true friend from a flatterer. The essay *Were the Athenians...?* is itself based on a contrived antithesis (not operating elsewhere in Plutarch), that between dramatic action (performances) and political action. In his attempt to exalt the historical and especially the military achievements of the Athenians, Plutarch places a low value on poetic production, a move which stands in contrast to his use of tragedy in other essays, and especially in *How a young man...*, where the use of poetry is a proof of Plutarch's acknowledging a certain value in it as an essential part of the education of young people. And yet, in his quotations it is poetry which survives, and Plutarch himself contributes to the survival of tragedy. The antithesis might seem internally contradictory or at least uneasy for another reason too, because this essay of epideictic character suggests a hierarchy of important events in the Athenian past which cannot possibly favour the cultural achievements in a comparison with the military or political success of Athens.

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<sup>2</sup> 49F, 50F, 51C, 51E, 52C, 53C, 58A-B, 61A, 62C, 63A, 64C, 65A, 68E, 69A, 69D, 70A, 71F, 72C, 72E, 73C, 74A-B.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Tagliacchi (1960), 129. It is the presence in the real world of events and behaviour which belong in the theatre which Plutarch criticises.

In both essays there is a formal borrowing from rhetorical/epideictic, but that does not preclude a commingling of tragic texturing too: the important thing then is to see how this works and what it adds to the two essays under examination. *How to tell a flatterer from a friend* is in its outset pragmatic in the sense that it is presented as advice – a kind of παραινετικός λόγος – on how one should be aware of flatterers and at the same time learn to appreciate true friendship, and in that it also displays a moral value. *Were the Athenians more glorious in war or in wisdom?* has close affinities with the *declamatio*, and that particular character can partly justify Plutarch's derogatory attitude towards tragedy and poetry. Thus, the 'generic' particularity of the essay may generate a different mindset, and in these registers and trains of thought we should not be surprised if attitudes are slightly different from elsewhere (e.g. *How a young man...*). The essay's tone may also affect the way in which theatre imagery is used. The pragmatic focus is again very important. It governs Plutarch's judgement not just of poetry but also of historiography.

#### *How to tell a flatterer from a friend*<sup>4</sup>

There is a quite popular saying which Plutarch repeatedly uses on different occasions and in different essays,<sup>5</sup> according to which Phocion replied to Antipater who told him to do something that was not right and appropriate to do: 'You cannot use me both as a friend and as a flatterer'. The saying, with which Plutarch fully agrees, illustrates that to be a friend and at the same time a flatterer is incompatible. The negative portrayal of the flatterer by means of theatrical imagery connected to falsehood and exaggeration casts, at the same time, a favourable light on the behaviour of the true friend; thus the contrast between flattery and friendship is accentuated.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Many of the themes discussed here can be also found in Papadi (2005).

<sup>5</sup> See *How to tell a flatterer...* 64C, *Marriage Advice* 142B, (the spurious) *Sayings of Kings* 188F (about the spurious Plutarchan works see e.g. D'Ippolito (2000b)), *On Compliancy* 532F-533A, and again *Phocion* 30.3, *Agis and Cleomenes* 2.4.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. 49E-F, 50B-C, 53C, 54C, 55A, 55D, 59D-E, 62A ff., where the contrast between the flatterer and the true friend is highlighted.

The construction of a parallel between flatterer and actor is effective and apt if one thinks that the flatterer is a person who is, or must be, distinguished by some of the main qualities which distinguish an actor;<sup>7</sup> in both cases a possible successful impersonation brings rewards to the individual – for the actor it brings credit for his impersonation, and similarly for the flatterer it brings more influence and power. Thus the flatterer's acting must be plausible, if he is to achieve his goal, or at least, a part of his goal, which is to convince his audience of something that is not true, or that he is something that he is not. This aspect of his role is what makes the objective of the flatterer and the actor seem so similar; they both have to perform, to put on a play, to pretend they are someone else, for otherwise they will fail. This failure would entail in the end the 'mask slipping' and the disclosure of the real self, the real character of the flatterer or that of the actor.<sup>8</sup> So, theatre offers an effective metaphor to describe the character of the flatterer, and at the same time it is a pointer of propriety concerning patterns of behaviour. Moreover, the flatterer, exactly as the actor, is forced in a way to enter into a nexus of multiple 'voices', according to what both the occasion and the person he flatters require.<sup>9</sup> Behind the mask of a friend, and indeed of a very trustworthy and caring friend, the flatterer veils his real face and suppresses his self-interested ambitions. Behind the care for the other, for the person he flatters and serves, he tries to hide the selfish interest in himself.

The danger for the people affected by the behaviour of the flatterer and of the actor may be not of the same kind and level, but is undoubtedly real. The one flattered may be taken in by the flatterer's pretence and take the wrong decisions in life, whereas the audience who attends an actor's performance needs to become part of the spirit of the theatrical *ἀπάτη* which, in this case, does not entail any actual dangers.<sup>10</sup> Thus the theatrical

<sup>7</sup> O'Donnell also traces similarities between the flatterer and the actor in the passages she discusses in (1975), esp. pp. 73-76.

<sup>8</sup> However, we have to acknowledge here a difference in the meaning of 'real character', if there is such a thing, in these two cases. In the case of the flatterer, it would be helpful for the person who is being flattered to know his real character and intentions, his *ἦθος* – a term of highest importance for Plutarch, especially in the *Lives*. In contrast, in the case of the actor, the real character is not at all what the audience seeks to know; in the theatre, it is not at all about disclosing the 'real'.

<sup>9</sup> Plutarch describes emphatically, by means of a simile, this quality of the flatterer to adjust at 53D: the flatterer is like a chameleon; he can imitate everything, as the chameleon can imitate all the different colours of its environment. See also p. 54.

<sup>10</sup> More on *ἀπάτη* on p. 55 ff.

illusion, apart from being an indispensable part of the conditions of performance, is also a means of persuasion. The audience has to be deceived, they have to believe that what is happening on stage is to some extent based on reality of some sort and in some sense, so that the actors and the performance as a whole may convey a 'reality'. This kind of deception is a harmless one in comparison to the damage that may be caused by the flatterer. Gorgias supports this theatrical variation of illusion and justifies it: it is proper in its entirety, and it is part of the pleasure (*ἡδονή*) which theatre offers to the audience.<sup>11</sup>

Whereas most of the time this rapprochement is implicit, it becomes explicit on occasion, for example when Plutarch says that the flatterer is considered to be playing the role of the friend in full consciousness and solemnity: “καὶ ὅλως τραγικός ἐστὶν οὐ σατυρικός φιλίας ὑποκριτῆς οὐδὲ κωμικός” (‘and in general he plays the part of friend with the gravity of a tragic actor and not like a comic or satyric actor’) (50E). This statement puts the actor of a satyric drama or comedy in a lower position in the sense that his acting is less serious. This whole notion merits further attention. What is it that makes tragic acting more ‘serious’? Some of it may relate to performative differences and acting styles: the comic plot allows more scope for explicit breach of the ‘dramatic illusion’, e.g. in the case of a comic actor acknowledging the presence of the audience. This may be further accentuated by the acting styles. In contrast, the tragic character never acknowledges the play’s illusion. So part of the difference between tragedy and comedy may be the consistency with which the tragic actor remains ‘in character’.<sup>12</sup> But Plutarch’s statement here, at 50E, is part of his argument that the flatterer wants to intervene in serious *praxeis*.<sup>13</sup> Part of what is at stake is the profoundly serious issues involved and the

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. the discussion of Gorgias’ words, which are fully quoted by Plutarch himself at 348B-C, on pp. 61-62.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. e.g. Dover (1972), esp. 59-65, and Silk (2000), esp. 91, 215 and 272.

<sup>13</sup> We must keep always in mind that a circle of flatterers is usually formed around an important and powerful person (the king is an obvious representative example here, which is also discussed by Plutarch – cf. for example 56F, 58A, 58E-F, 60B-D, 62F-63A), and the impact of that person’s decisions is often not only on his personal life but on the lives of others, too. In *Demetr.* 18.4 we have an example for the powerful influence of a flatterer: “τοσούτον ἴσχυσε κύλακος φωνὴ μία καὶ τοσαύτης ἐνέπλησε τὴν οἰκουμένην μεταβολῆς” (‘so great influence had a flatterer’s single word, and with so great a change did it fill the whole world’). Dio’s second oration focuses on how a king should be most careful to avoid the flatterers – cf. Berry (1983), 75.

consequences of the deception;<sup>14</sup> for, instead of merely flattering in a purely social context, the flatterer seeks to become involved in activities which affect the well-being of the victim. In addition, for Plutarch ‘the flattery which we must regard as difficult to deal with is that which is hidden, not that which is openly acknowledged, that which is serious, not that which is meant as a joke’ (50F: “καὶ κολακείαν ἡγηγτέον χαλεπήν τὴν λανθάνουσαν οὐ τὴν ὁμολογοῦσαν, οὐδὲ τὴν παίζουσαν ἀλλὰ τὴν σπουδάζουσαν”). In this<sup>15</sup> is straightforward and presented as a joke resembles comedy.

Later, when Plutarch talks about rich or powerful people, he describes their need to be surrounded by friends who agree with them in everything by employing images from drama. They are, he says, like the tragic actors who need a chorus of approving voices, consisting either of friends or the audience. The vocabulary here is clearly taken from the theatrical context, and bears interesting implications for Plutarch’s attitude to display and to the realism/illusion antithesis: “ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ οἱ τραγικοὶ χοροῦ δέονται φίλων συναδόντων ἢ θεάτρου συνεπικροτούντος” (‘But, like the tragic actors, [such people] want to have a chorus of friends singing the same tune or a sympathetic audience to applaud them’) (63A). The flatterer, as Plutarch asserts at 63C, is always in agreement with his victim in words and expressions, without having a personal, independent voice.<sup>15</sup> The people, however, who need flatterers around them seem to prefer – and in this way they encourage – those who, by assenting or remaining silent, behave as attendants (“ὑπουργός”) or servants (“διάκονος”) (cf. 63B). The silence of the flatterer is a specious way of expressing agreement, and in its goals it is very different from the theatrical silence of characters on stage, when this occurs.

Unlike Pliny,<sup>16</sup> Plutarch clearly here does not just blame the flatterer; he also blames those who succumb to flattery. They like to be surrounded by people who agree with

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1453a 34-39, where Aristotle observes that in comedy even the worst enemies, such as Orestes and Aegisthus, exit at the end as friends – nothing too serious ever happens in the end.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Arist. *EN* 1126b 13-14, where exactly this attitude of the flatterers is described – see Hunter (2002), 204 n. 35.

<sup>16</sup> Pliny only finds fault in the flatterer and not in the victim’s behaviour (*Letters* 2.20). Cf. also Tacitus, *Hist.* 1.15.



them (“χοροῦ...φίλων συνιδόντων”, 63A) and to have the approval of others (here presented by the applause of the theatre audience: “θεάτρου συνεπικροτοῦντος”, 63A); thus they also take part in the acting as they themselves are performers in the ‘play’ that takes place in real life. They do not look for, or expect, honesty from those around them. In this context of false behaviour (on the flatterer’s side) and wrong objectives (on the side of the people who like to be flattered) the theatrical is used to create dissonance, to mark a kind of unacceptable human attitude. It is true that plays need the chorus; performers need an audience as well as the approval of the audience. But people who crave for this kind of approval in real life behave inappropriately, because they prefer illusion to reality.

We see here an example of a pattern common in Plutarch, according to which what is most disturbing is not the ‘theatrical’ in itself but the transfer of what is presented in theatre – and regarded as appropriate for theatrical purposes and conventions – into real life, which has very different conventions, rules and ideals from those which are prominent in theatre (cf. also pp. 52, 62, 71-72, 127, 180, 188 ff., and *passim*). Theatrical illusion seems to clash with the reality of life. Arguably then the ‘chorus’ of flatterers (here and e.g. at 65C-D, quoted on p. 52 below) creates an illusion which impedes understanding and appropriate action. We shall see that the attitude taken here is in harmony with that in *Were the Athenians...?*, where the literature/life antithesis is still more prominent; it is also to some degree compatible with Plutarch’s attitude in *How a young man...*, where poetry is not presented as conveying truth as such. Poetry imitates life in a plausible way, but, in order for it to also offer contrived pleasure to its audience/readers, it has to comprise some other elements too, which however, may be far from touching upon truth.<sup>17</sup> Thus neither in this case is poetry an area which teaches truths of life as such; it is rather the readers’ way of approaching poetry that will

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<sup>17</sup> See e.g. 15C-D (on poetic deception), 16B ff. (on truth contrasted with fiction, and on poetry’s falsehood combined with plausibility and pleasure) – at 17A note especially Plutarch’s wording: “τοῦτο δὲ παντὶ δήλουν ὅτι μυθοποίημα καὶ πλάσμα πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἢ ἐκπληξιν ἀκροατοῦ γέγονε” (‘but it is clear to everybody that this is a mythical fabrication which has been created to please or surprise the hearer’), and at 17D: “ποιητικὴ μὲν οὐ πάνυ μέλον ἐστὶ τῆς ἀληθείας” (‘the art of poetry is not greatly concerned with truth’). For more on this essay see my chapter 1.

distinguish truth from lie. Taken as a whole, Plutarch's relationship with tragedy shows both some persistent elements and some tensions which are never quite resolved.

The image of a chorus of flatterers appears again at 65C-D, where Plutarch describes Medius, a close attendant of Alexander, as the leader of the chorus of flatterers around him: “ἦν δ’ ὁ Μήδιος τοῦ περὶ τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον χοροῦ τῶν κολάκων οἶον ἕξαρχος καὶ σοφιστὴς κορυφαῖος ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀρίστους συντεταγμένων” (‘This Medius was, if I may call him so, leader and skilled master of the choir of flatterers that danced attendance on Alexander, and were banded together against all good men’). The choice of vocabulary cannot be accidental: “ἕξαρχος” and “κορυφαῖος” make the metaphor explicit and encourage the reader to perceive, once more, a scene of real life in theatrical terms. The example of Alexander shows, once again, that flatterers are keener to seek the company of important men to gain some of their authority and fame.

The way in which a friend must offer his admonitions requires for Plutarch no audience either, since this should not be seen as an opportunity to make profit or gain some kind of glory, as if rebuking someone were a kind of public ‘spectacle’. Therefore, the advice given should have ‘nothing of show or display in it to attract a crowd of witnesses and spectators’ (70F-71A: “...μὴ πανηγυρικὴν μὴδ’ ἐπιδεικτικὴν μὴδὲ μάρτυρας καὶ θεατὰς συνάγουσαν”). Although the metaphor is quite general with possible resonances of non-theatrical contexts such as epideictic oratory, the noun “θεατὰς” (not “ἄκροατάς”) certainly invites us to think in part about theatre. The flexibility of theatre metaphor is noteworthy. The issue is not here about theatrical illusion versus reality but about public versus private, though again the question of display/spectacle is at issue, since the rebuke in this case shares with the behaviour of the flatterer the focus on the impression that is made. Accordingly, the public rebuke is self-regarding rather than helpful to the friend, since it serves more to display the speaker’s virtue than to improve the friend’s flaws. The very fact that it is public may prompt display (the flatterer sees himself as performing to an audience) and illusion. But it also transposes into the public domain matters which should be dealt with in private. Not only does Plutarch use theatrical vocabulary to make his point but he also quotes here a line from Euripides’ *Stheneboea*



(frag. 665) on the distressful effect of admonishing the one we love, to add that this distress is increased by the presence of a public, thus rendering the reproof undesirable and more painful.<sup>18</sup> It cannot be without importance that he quotes a tragic poet; there may be certainly some effect in having a quotation from tragedy incorporated in his warning against being tragic:

(71A) οὐ γὰρ ἀπλῶς “νουθετούμενος ἔρωι μᾶλλον πιέζει” κατ’ Εὐριπίδην, ἀλλ’ ἂν νουθετῇ τις ἐν πολλοῖς καὶ μὴ φειδόμενος, πᾶν νόσημα καὶ πᾶν πάθος εἰς τὸ ἀναίσχυντον καθίστησιν.

For it is not enough to say, as Euripides has it, that ‘if love is reproved, then it grows more urgent’, but if admonition is offered in public, and unsparingly, it only confirms each and every morbid emotion in its shamelessness. (71A)

The use of ‘theatre’ gains in flexibility from its use both as a simile-metaphor and as a literal aspect in social intercourse. The flatterer is the kind of person in whose actions pretence and falsehood prevail; he even takes the front seats at entertainments and theatres, so that he will have the opportunity to flatter the rich, famous or powerful by giving up his seat:

(58D-E) ὅθεν ὁρᾶν ἔστιν αὐτοὺς ἔδρας τε τὰς πρώτας ἐν ἀκροάσει καὶ θεάτροις καταλαμβάνοντας, οὐχ ὅτι τούτων ἀξιούσιν αὐτούς, ἀλλ’ ὅπως ὑπεξιστάμενοι τοῖς πλουσίοις κολακεύωσι, καὶ λόγου κατάρχοντας ἐν συνόδοις καὶ συνεδρίοις, εἴτα παραχωροῦντας ὡς κρείττοσι καὶ μετατιθεμένους ῥᾶστα πρὸς τὸν ἀντιπάλιν, ἅνπερ ἢ δυνατὸς ἢ πλούσιος ἢ ἐνδοξος ὁ ἀντιλέγων.

This is the reason why such persons are to be seen taking possession of the front seats at entertainments and theatres, not because they think they have any right to them, but so that they may flatter the rich by giving up their seats. So, too, in an assemblage or a formal meeting they may be observed to begin a subject of discussion, and later to give ground as though before their betters, and to shift over with the utmost readiness to the other side, if the man opposing them be a person of power or wealth or repute. (58D-E)

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Trapp (2007), 152-153.

To the theatrical spectacle the flatterer adds his own performance. All the flatterer does and says serves his ultimate goal, namely to appear as an honest, trustworthy friend and as a person who does nothing out of personal interest, while at the same time he receives the powerful person's favour.

However, the flatterer can only appear as a friend, but he can never obtain the inner and more substantial qualities of a friend. The element of imitation together with deception is brought out in Plutarch's comparison of the flatterer's type with animals, and more specifically with a chameleon (53D). The comparison shows that the flatterer is someone who can imitate everything and everyone,<sup>19</sup> apart only from what is really worthwhile – exactly as the chameleon can take every possible colour apart from white.<sup>20</sup> Again at 51D the chameleon image is employed, although this time to stress the very changeability of the flatterer's appearance rather than of his character, as well as the fact that he never changes the reality:

(51D) ὥσπερ τῶν θηρίων ὅσα πεφυκότα τὴν χροάν τρέπεσθαι συναφομοιοῦται τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις χρώμασι καὶ χωρίοις· ἐπεὶ δ' ἐκεῖνος ἐξαπατᾷ τε καὶ περικαλύπτεται ταῖς ὁμοιότησιν...

As in the case with some animals to which Nature has given the faculty of changing their hue, so that they exactly conform to the colours and objects beneath them.

And since the flatterer uses resemblances to deceive and to wrap about him...

(51D)

The flatterer can indeed create an illusion of anything or anyone he chooses to imitate, yet it will be only an illusion.

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. 50A-B (about imitation again). Compare *Political precepts* 800A: 'Now court flatterers, like bird-catchers, by imitating the voices of kings and assimilating themselves to them, insinuate themselves deeply into their good graces and decoy them by deceit'. An obvious parallel which comes to mind is again that of the actor, although his case is slightly different, since he is *forced* by the theatrical conventions to enter the same procedure of changing and altering his character. Cf. *Demetr.* 18.3-4: Plutarch describes here the ability of 'the actors to adapt to their costumes their gait, voice, posture at table, and way of addressing others': "καθάπερ τραγικῶν ὑποκριτῶν ἅμα τῇ σκευῇ συμμεταβαλόντων καὶ βάδισμα καὶ φωνὴν καὶ κατάκλιση καὶ προσαγόρευσιν".

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *Alc.* 23.4-5, where Alcibiades is compared to a chameleon.

Ἀπάτη (deception) which here is related to the flatterer's behaviour is a common term used by Plutarch when talking about poetry, especially tragedy, and about the actors' role on stage.<sup>21</sup> In *How a young man...* Plutarch often depicts poetry as something deceptive and fake. Gorgias also called tragedy a deception (15D): “Γοργίας δὲ τὴν τραγωδίαν εἶπεν ἀπάτην...” – and again, in *Were the Athenians...?* Plutarch introduces the same quotation (348B-C; see below, pp. 61-62). But here it is necessary to make a distinction between the good ἀπάτη and the bad ἀπάτη, as it were; following that distinction, the theatre can then be an example of good – if properly understood and properly used – ἀπάτη, and flattery clearly the example of bad ἀπάτη. In theatre, as in other representative arts as well, deception is acceptable as part of the mimesis; it is a necessary convention there (cf. above, pp. 48-49). Similarly, a less harmful kind of flattery, and consequently of ἀπάτη, is that of the lover, discussed at 56D: in order to create often a beautified picture of the person he loves, the lover is guided by motives which are more honest; this is why the deception he may favour is clearly more ‘innocent’ than a deception that is intended. However, in the case of the flattery which does not originate from innocent motives it is only an aberrant means of achieving the flatterer's ultimate goal. Taking the notion of ἀπάτη further, the flatterer does not only incorporate deception and falsehood, but leads, with his words and behaviour, the one whom he flatters to ignorance, or, at least, to a deceptive knowledge of his self: “ἀντιτάττεται γὰρ αἰεὶ πρὸς τὸ ‘γνῶθι σεαυτὸν’, ἀπάτην ἐκάστω πρὸς ἑαυτὸν ἐμποιῶν καὶ ἄγνοίαν ἑαυτοῦ καὶ τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν ἀγαθῶν καὶ κακῶν” (‘For [the flatterer] always takes a position over against the maxim ‘know yourself’, by creating in every man deception towards himself and ignorance both of himself and of the good and evil that concerns himself’) (49B).<sup>22</sup>

The whole discussion on this side of the flatterer's character reminds us of a very similar discussion in *How a young man...*, with poetry being presented as akin to flattery, and poets taking the role of flatterers, as demonstrated, for example, at 16A-B. There Plutarch disassociates truth from fiction, by stressing the fact that the latter avoids distress in favour of the pleasant. The most important thing for fiction is to please its

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Di Gregorio (1976), 172.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. later, at 65F, where the value of the precept “γνῶθι σεαυτὸν” is again stressed: if we are aware of our flaws and keep away from self-love or conceit, we will not fall easy victims to flatterers.

audience/readers, consequently it sometimes has to beautify things for this purpose, while the truth is rather factual and is not afraid of becoming sometimes unpleasant:

(16A-B)...‘πολλὰ ψεύδονται αἰοιοί’<sup>23</sup> τὰ μὲν ἐκόντες τὰ δ’ ἄκοντες. ἐκόντες μὲν, ὅτι πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἀκοῆς καὶ χάριν, ἣν οἱ πλεῖστοι διώκουσιν, αὐστηροτέρων ἡγούνται τὴν ἀλήθειαν τοῦ ψεύδους. ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἔργῳ γιγνομένη, καὶ ἀτερπὲς ἔχει τὸ τέλος, οὐκ ἐξίσταται· τὸ δὲ πλαττόμενον λόγῳ ῥῆστα περιχωρεῖ καὶ τρέπεται πρὸς τὸ ἥδιον ἐκ τοῦ λυποῦντος.<sup>24</sup>

...‘Poets tell many lies’, some intentionally and some unintentionally; intentionally, because for the purpose of giving pleasure and gratification to the ear (and this is what most people look for in poetry) they feel that the truth is too stern in comparison with fiction. For the truth, because it is what actually happens, does not deviate from its course, even though the end may be unpleasant; whereas fiction, being a verbal fabrication, very readily follows a roundabout route, and turns aside from the painful to what is more pleasant. (16A-B)

Deception is also attributed to the art of painting, which, by creating illusive pictures, may well be compared to poetry’s falsehood (16B): “ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ ἐν γραφαῖς κινητικώτερόν ἐστι χρῶμα γραμμῆς διὰ τὸ ἀνδρείκελον καὶ ἀπατηλόν, οὕτως ἐν ποιήμασι μεμιγμένον πιθανότητι ψεῦδος ἐκπλήττει...” (‘But just as in pictures, colour is more stimulating than line-drawing because it is life-like, and creates an illusion, so in poetry falsehood combined with plausibility is more striking...’). One notices here the emphasis on the element of colour, which, exactly as at 51D (see above, p. 54), is a powerful means of accomplishing deception.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>23</sup> About this aphorism ascribed to Solon, see Sicking (1998), 105, and n. 3; cf. also Valgiglio (1967), 320.

<sup>24</sup> Similarly at 17A: “τοῦτο δὲ παντὶ δῆλον ὅτι μυθοποίημα καὶ πλάσμα πρὸς ἡδονὴν ἢ ἐκπλήξιν ἀκροατοῦ γέγονε” (‘But it is clear to everybody that this [sc. a mythical image created by Aeschylus in his *Niobe*] is a mythical fabrication which has been created to please or astound the reader’). Cf. De Lacy (1952), 161: ‘This deception arises in part from the poets’ conscious and intentional use of fiction to please or amaze the audience, in part from the fact that the poets are themselves deceived’.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. 53D-E, where the discussion concerns again the painters, and indeed the bad painters, who are unable to attain to the beautiful, and resort to bad traits of the face in order to achieve resemblance. In the same way the flatterer has to imitate all kinds of vices to achieve his base goals. The flatterer, like a bad painter, is by nature inclined to the worse and distasteful (“φύσει τε γὰρ ἀφ’ ἑαυτοῦ πρὸς τὰ χείρονα κατάντης ἐστί”) (‘For by nature he is of himself prone to the worse’) (53E). Cf. De Lacy (1952), 161 and his comparison between poetry and painting concerning the creation of deception.

So: is tragedy in this essay a wholly negative thing? Not necessarily. Theatre is undoubtedly a place where myth and drama are intermingled to serve as sources of education and pleasure, and not to produce a false reality which the audience must then project on real life – as is the case with the flatterer. The audience at theatre is, to some extent, always aware of the illusion that takes place, and considers it as appropriate in its place. Yet the person who is flattered does not always realise the *ἀπάτη* and therefore he often projects himself into a ‘play’ unwillingly; this kind of connivance is undignified and inappropriate. So, unlike what might happen from attending the theatre, in everyday life real dangers can emerge from theatrical behaviour; thus the transposition of tragedy on stage into life, especially when the two become hard to distinguish from one another may entail true dangers for the people who are affected by the deception created. It is the very availability of tragedy as a point of reference for life which should enable people to realise that they are behaving badly, because their behaviour is more appropriate for one mode – namely, tragedy – than for another, real life. In this respect tragic poetry, and poetry in general, has an important mission to accomplish, not only as a propaedeutic stage leading to philosophy, but also as a way of discovering the truths of a moral life. And this is a point which Plutarch makes convincingly in *How a young man should listen to poetry*.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See my chapter 1. Cf. in that essay 15F, 35F-36A, 36C-37B. On the interrelation between poetry and philosophy see also Wardman (1974), 171, Di Gregorio (1976), 173, Schenkeveld (1982), Morgan (1998), 147-148, and Zadorojnyi (2002).

Juxtaposing drama and history: *Were the Athenians more glorious in war or in wisdom?*

In this rhetorical essay Plutarch attempts to compare two things that are very different: the contemporary value of theatrical performances and the eternal value of historical achievements which would stand as an unquestionable, eternal proof of the importance of Athens to all generations ever after. Plutarch draws on a pattern which he has also used in other essays, such as “Περὶ τοῦ πότερον ὕδωρ ἢ πῦρ χρησιμώτερον”: exactly as in this essay, this pattern (πότερον...ἢ...) is based on a contrived antithesis or choice which is in fact rhetorical and serves the author as a way of *epideixis*, to argue the one or the other case.<sup>27</sup> The comparison between the historical past of Athens and its literary achievements limits the writer’s ability to present a nuanced picture. This means that Plutarch is forced to some extent into a black-and-white view by the antithetical nature of the essay. Instead of taking its place within a complex of ideas, poetry becomes isolated as the subject of choice and comparison. This, once again, suggests that Plutarch’s attitude toward poetry (and history) is likely to be very context-specific and to some degree fluid, depending on the very choice of theme.

Tragedy is presented as an occupation which is significantly less important and of less practical value than military activity;<sup>28</sup> moreover, tragedy is blamed for the significant cost it has for the Athenians: it makes them lose valuable time and it diverts the funds which would otherwise be devoted to military affairs.<sup>29</sup> At 348F-349B Plutarch criticises the expenses of dramatic productions, such as those of the *Bacchae*, *Phoenissae*, *Oedipus*, and *Antigone*, and suggests that the money spent for them might better be given to warlike undertakings:

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<sup>27</sup> Cf. Van der Stockt (1990b), who goes as far as to suggest that the specific rhetorical purposes do not allow the reader to take the essay seriously (p. 173).

<sup>28</sup> This is explicitly stated when Plutarch uses the word “*παιδιά*” for describing poetry, and especially tragic poetry. See 348F (discussed below, on p. 59), and 350B: “*Ἀλλὰ νῆ Δία παιδιὰ τὰ τῶν ποιητῶν*”. Poetry is supposedly just a kind of amusement, a childish pastime.

<sup>29</sup> For the issue of time lost (or, not spent in a profitable way) cf. 350E-F, where Plutarch compares the time needed to complete important political or cultural achievements with the time needed to complete pieces of literature; for the issue of excess in money spent for performances (their preparation, etc.) see also e.g. 349A-B – cf. Wilson (2000) about the expenses and the sponsors of dramatic performances (esp. pp. 50-108).

(348F-349A) Πρὸς ἃ Λάκων ἀνὴρ ἀποβλέψας οὐ κακῶς εἶπεν ὡς ἁμαρτάνουσιν Ἀθηναῖοι μεγάλα τὴν σπουδὴν εἰς τὴν παιδίαν καταναλίσκοντες, τουτέστι μεγάλων ἀποστόλων δαπάνας καὶ στρατευμάτων ἐφόδια καταχορηγοῦντες εἰς τὸ θέατρον. ἂν γὰρ ἐκλογισθῇ τῶν δραμάτων ἕκαστον ὅσου κατέστη, πλέον ἀνηλωκῶς φανεῖται ὁ δῆμος εἰς Βάκχας καὶ Φοινίσσας καὶ Οἰδίποδας καὶ Ἀντιγόνην καὶ τὰ Μηδείας κακὰ καὶ Ἡλέκτρας, ὧν ὑπὲρ τῆς ἡγεμονίας καὶ τῆς ἐλευθερίας πολεμῶν τοὺς βαρβάρους ἀνάλωσεν.

It was in reference to all this that a Spartan not ineptly remarked that the Athenians were making a great mistake in wasting their energies in amusements, that is to say, in lavishing on the theatre what would pay for great fleets and would support armies in the field. For, if we reckon up the cost of each tragedy, the Athenian people will be seen to have spent more on productions of *Bacchae*, *Phoenissae*, *Oedipuses* and *Antigones*, and the woes of Medea and Electra, than they spent in fighting for their supremacy and for their liberty against the barbarians. (348F-349A)

The Athenians make too much effort for something that is just a pleasant pastime (“ἁμαρτάνουσιν Ἀθηναῖοι μεγάλα τὴν σπουδὴν εἰς τὴν παιδίαν καταναλίσκοντες” – note here the contrast between the two terms used: “σπουδὴν” and “παιδίαν”).<sup>30</sup> The fact that the remark which Plutarch defends here belongs to a Spartan is not without significance: Spartans were exemplary warriors, men of deeds and not of words, the epitome of practicality.<sup>31</sup> Plutarch is looking upon Athenian tragedy through non-Athenian eyes. His stance is a-historical in the sense that he extracts his discussion from its immediate historical context and ignores, for the purposes of emphasis on his argument, the cultural, social, political, and religious importance of tragic festivals in Athens, which were an established state institution (and an excellent opportunity for Athenian *epideixis* to the rest of the Greek world).<sup>32</sup> He also ignores the fact that Athenian tragedy was admired elsewhere in the Greek world as early as the fifth century. It seems that tragedy is an area where the Athenians spend vainly a lot of time and money, and this may have impeded

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Plato's *Laws*, 803c-e. Plato there has the Athenian stranger making a distinction between serious and non-serious preoccupations, clearly suggesting that only the former deserve our attention (“σπουδή”).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Rawson (1969), 107-115.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Goldhill (1990); also Silk (2000), 9.

the battles fought for both the establishment of their military supremacy and the restoration of their liberty. Yet Plutarch's objection is restricted to tragedy as 'performance' – and all that this entails. The poetic content may be useful and important for educational and other purposes, but it is the financial cost of performances which is problematic. Although Plutarch recognises that tragedy is popular and pleasant, in this essay he repeatedly lays emphasis on the contrast between 'real' heroes (on the battlefield) and tragic heroes (on stage), and employs theatre in an epideictic or even polemic approach to characterise everything that is more concerned with words instead of actions. So arguably the real/illusionary antithesis emerges here again and brings the two essays under discussion in this chapter closer regarding their standpoint.

The outcome of this comparison is not positive for tragedy and for all those involved in its production and performance. In the end it seems to be a comparison on two different levels, as the value of tragedy and history are not equal; tragedy's positive effects are temporary and superficial, in contrast to those of historical and military action, which offer the city a true reason for pride and glory, even many years after the achievement.<sup>33</sup>

In Plutarch's words:

(348D) εἰ οὕτως ἡ Εὐριπίδου σοφία καὶ ἡ Σοφοκλέους λογιότης καὶ τὸ Αἰσχύλου στόμα τι τῶν δυσχερῶν ἀπήλλαξεν ἢ τι τῶν λαμπρῶν περιποίησεν, ἄξιόν γε τὰ δράματα τοῖς τροπαίοις ἀντιπαραθεῖναι καὶ τῷ στρατηγίῳ τὸ θέατρον ἀνταναστήσαι καὶ ταῖς ἀριστεύουσιν τὰς διδασκαλίας ἀντιπαραβαλεῖν.

If in this manner the wisdom of Euripides, the eloquence of Sophocles, and the poetic magnificence of Aeschylus rid the city of any of its difficulties or gained for her any brilliant success, it is right to compare their tragedies with trophies of victory, to let the theatre rival the general's office, and to compare the records of dramatic performances with the prizes for excellence at war. (348D)

Tragic performances are contrasted to war and its effects in a comparison which does not favour them. Even the three great tragedians cannot be of any practical benefit for

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<sup>33</sup> Plutarch stresses also elsewhere, e.g. in *Political precepts*, that the glory or fame of a performance does not last for long (823E: 'So, observing these things, we must not be humiliated or overwhelmed by the reputation which the masses gained from theatres, kitchens, and assembly-halls, remembering that it lasts a short time and ends the minute the gladiatorial and dramatic shows are over, since there is nothing honourable or dignified in this reputation').



Athens, since they cannot solve any of its problems. Plutarch, once again, ignores the original historical context (the practical value of the works of the tragedians was widely recognised in all antiquity and beyond) – this move is effectively prejudging the issue by the choice of criteria, which are always going to favour the practical.<sup>34</sup> At the same time Plutarch does not treat tragedy as part of the Greek cultural heritage that still survives in his days, whereas he treats the historical achievements of the classical years – already ‘ancient’ history in his days – as something live and present. However, he acknowledges certain virtues of the three tragedians: he shows his respect for Euripides’ wisdom, for Sophocles’ eloquence and for Aeschylus’ grandeur, although somehow all three words (“σοφία”, “λογιότης”, “στόμα”) have a spot of ambivalence about them. One wonders if by “σοφία” Plutarch is here also thinking of some kind of ‘sophistry’, ‘cunning’; if “λογιότης” hints at a touch of garrulity in Sophocles’ style; and if by “στόμα” he attributes bombast to Aeschylus.

At 348B-C Plutarch calls tragedy ἀπάτη, ‘deceit’, and here again Gorgias’ remark on ἀπάτη is exploited:

ἦνθησε δ’ ἡ τραγωδία καὶ διεβροθήθη, θαυμαστὸν ἀκρόαμα καὶ θέαμα τῶν τότε ἀνθρώπων γενομένη καὶ παρασχούσα τοῖς μύθοις καὶ τοῖς πάθεσιν ἀπάτην, ὡς Γοργίας φησὶν, ἦν ὅ τ’ ἀπατήσας δικαιότερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατήσαντος, καὶ ὁ ἀπατηθεὶς σοφώτερος τοῦ μὴ ἀπατηθέντος. ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἀπατήσας δικαιότερος, ὅτι τοῦθ’ ὑποσχόμενος πεποίηκεν· ὁ δ’ ἀπατηθεὶς σοφώτερος· εὐάλωτον γὰρ ὑφ’ ἡδονῆς λόγων τὸ μὴ ἀναίσθητον.

But tragedy blossomed onwards and won great acclaim, becoming a wondrous entertainment for the ears and eyes of the men of that age, and, by the mythological character of its plots, and the vicissitudes which its characters undergo, it effected a deception wherein, as Gorgias remarks, ‘he who deceives is more honest than he who does not deceive, and he who is deceived is wiser than he who is not deceived’. For he who deceives is more honest, because he has done what he promised to do; and he who is deceived is wiser, because the mind which is not

<sup>34</sup> This is articulated most lucidly by the characters in Aristophanes’ *Frogs*, where the contribution of poetry to the improvement of the city is acknowledged – on this point cf. Too (1998), 48-49.

insensible to fine perceptions is easily enthralled by the delights of language.  
(348B-C)

Again here the issue of illusion versus reality comes into play. For Plutarch, deception is an important aspect of tragedy, if not one of its main traits. Both the representation of the mythical character of the plot (“μύθοις”), and the characters’ sufferings (“πάθειν”) lead to deception. We have already seen something of this treatment of ἀπάτη (p. 55), and this is where the two works we are treating come together, but this time the nature of the deceit is explored more elaborately. Gorgias’ remark, phrased like a sophistic conundrum, indicates the inevitable effect of ἀπάτη as referring both to the actors on stage and to the audience. In tragedy, according to Plutarch’s interpretation of Gorgias’ remark, deception works on three levels: firstly, the material is false, since the plot is based on myth and not history; secondly, the audience is deceived, as tragedy performed on stage makes the audience confuse the real with the imaginary; and thirdly, the actors themselves pretend to be other than they really are, thus causing confusion in their own personality and character, since theatrical conventions compel them to adopt various ethical values and behave in somebody else’s manner (cf. 345E, and above, p. 54 n. 19)<sup>35</sup> – and might not the effect of acting and speaking with the mouth and the personality of the character whom the actor impersonates be disastrous for the consistency of his character and behaviour if transferred to real life?

At 348E Plutarch goes one step further in his ‘polemic’ against the lavishness that tragedy presents in performances; he describes tragedy as a statue, and tragic actors as its decoration. Again Plutarch presses here the issue of practical value, hence the emphasis on the visual trappings of tragedy (on the stage and on the street of tripods). His language is harsh and derogatory, especially when he refers to bad examples of tragic actors, such as Callipides, Nicostratus, Polus and others, who contribute nothing but lavish and exaggerated ornaments to tragedy:

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<sup>35</sup> For this tripartite deception see De Lacy (1952), 159. On the connection between falsehood and tragedy cf. also Plato’s *Cratylus* 408c: “ἐνταῦθα γὰρ πλείστοι οἱ μῦθοί τε καὶ τὰ ψεύδη ἐστίν, περὶ τὸν τραγικὸν βίον” (‘for tales and falsehoods are most at home there, in the tragic life’). Plutarch makes use here of a less qualified version of Plato’s argument, contrasting to the unplatonic line he took e.g. in *How a young man...* which was more accommodating to literature.

(348E) ...καὶ σκευὰς καὶ προσωπεῖα καὶ βωμοὺς καὶ μηχανὰς ἀπὸ σκηνῆς περιάκτους καὶ τρίποδας ἐπινικίους κομίζοντες· τραγικοὶ δ' αὐτοῖς ὑποκριταὶ [καὶ] Νικόστρατοι καὶ Καλλιπίδααι καὶ Μηνίσκοι καὶ Θεόδωροι καὶ Πῶλοι συνίτωσαν, ὥσπερ γυναικὸς πολυτελοῦς τῆς τραγῳδίας κομμωταὶ καὶ διφροφόροι, μᾶλλον δ' ὡς ἀγαλμάτων ἐγκλωστοὶ καὶ χρυσωταὶ καὶ βαφεῖς παρακολουθοῦντες.

...Let them bring with them their equipment, their masks and altars, their stage machinery, their revolving changes of scene,<sup>36</sup> and the tripods that commemorate their victories. Let their tragic actors accompany them, men like Nicostratus and Callippides, Mynniscus, Theodorus and Polus, who robe Tragedy and bear her litter, as though she were some woman of wealth; or rather, let them follow on as though they were painters and gilders and dyers of statues. (348E)

Theatre imagery, here as also throughout the essay, is useful for Plutarch to encapsulate a whole set of ideas concerning the 'arty' life as opposed to life of action, all bound up with history, writing, painting, statuary and the like. Plutarch, once again, draws a comparison between tragedy and imitative arts (paintings, statues).<sup>37</sup> The comparison entails that tragedy is something impractical, like a statue. Moreover, the treatment of statue is idiosyncratic in this train of thought, as is also the treatment of theatre itself.<sup>38</sup> Arguably Plutarch is interested more in the significance of a statue than its appearance, in the ideas it conveys rather than in its aesthetic value. As Mossman remarks, the writings of poets and authors of fiction are connected with the more pejorative idea that images only offer an imperfect and sometimes delusory version of reality. Tragic actors, painters and gilders of statues are all concerned with producing deception.<sup>39</sup>

At the beginning of this passage Plutarch also refers to the tragic equipment. Again, everything, namely the tragic masks, the machine, the altar and the other tragic

<sup>36</sup> We must bear in mind that these are features of theatre contemporary with Plutarch; so, Plutarch is not criticising the classical theatre here.

<sup>37</sup> About mimesis and Plutarch's conception of it in the essay see Van der Stockt (1990b), 174-177.

<sup>38</sup> For a full discussion of Plutarch's use of statues see Mossman (1991). Statues are of inadequate value if compared to living originals (p. 100). Mossman discusses representative examples of the use of statues in tragedy to show that Plutarch makes a similar use of them. In both tragedy and Plutarch there are statues which are substitutes for the people they represent, and statues which are used in similes (p. 103). They are used either to create pathos or irony, or as symbols of the futility of human pride (p. 107). Cf. also Wardman (1967) and (1974), 140-152.

<sup>39</sup> Mossman (1991), 109.

contrivances constitute evidence of a great dramatic victory; however, this kind of evidence is for Plutarch of only poor value. At the same time he contrasts dramatic victories with military triumphs which are unquestionably more significant. One also notes that the image of deceptive tragedy is supported by Plutarch's reference to painters; painters can 'give life' to statues and pictures (with the colours and the material they use), and likewise actors can provide tragedy with grandeur by using various kinds of equipment, but they must know that this grandeur is far from lasting for as long a time as, for example, military glory lasts (cf. 347C: "ὥστ' εἰ τοὺς ζωγραφούντας οὐκ ἄξιον παραβάλλειν τοῖς στρατηγοῖς, μηδὲ τοὺς ἱστοροῦντας παραβάλλωμεν" – 'So, if it is unworthy to compare painters with generals, let us not compare historians either').<sup>40</sup>

Plutarch makes a series of comparisons which are supposed to bring out his (suggested) antithesis between poetry (tragedy) and history, poets and historiographers, actors and heroes, men of words and men of action, artists and writers, myth and life, words and deeds, illusion and reality.<sup>41</sup> His objection is not confined to tragedy, but extends into the area of historiography as well. As he finds fault with the truth which the tragedians convey, he makes analogous comments for the accounts of historians who, although they themselves are not part of any historical events, make claims on the glory gained by those who rightly deserve to be glorified (345F: "ἀνακλᾶται γὰρ ἀπὸ τῶν πραττόντων ἐπὶ τοὺς γράφοντας καὶ ἀναλάμπει δόξης εἰδῶλον ἀλλοτρίας, ἐμφαινομένης διὰ τῶν λόγων τῆς πράξεως ὡς ἐν ἐσόπτρῳ" – 'For there is reflected from the men of action upon the men of letters an image of another's glory, which shines again there, since the deed is seen, as in a mirror, through the agency of their words').

When referring to the example of Xenophon, Plutarch stresses that he, unlike the other 'passive' narrators-historiographers, deserves some of the glory which his narrative generates, since he was both actor and narrator of the historical events he described

<sup>40</sup> About this passage see Van der Stockt (1990b), 177.

<sup>41</sup> Aristotle, too, compared history with poetry in his *Poetics* but along quite different lines (cf. above, p. 39). De Ste. Croix (2001) discusses especially *Poetics* 1451a 36-b 11, where Aristotle, in contrast to Plutarch here, proceeds to draw the conclusion that 'poetry is something more philosophic and more worthwhile ("σπουδαιότερον") than history, because poetry deals rather with universals ["τὰ καθ' ὅλον"], history with particulars ["τὰ καθ' ἑκάστων"]' (p. 391). Aristotle places poetry above history. Cf. also Walbank (1960), 217-219.

(345F). The attitude of those historiographers who seek to be glorified for the events they just narrate is judged as wrong for one more reason: it resembles very much the attitude of the tragic actors who often merge themselves with the characters they play, in order to gain for themselves the heroes' glory and success (345E: “οἱ δ' ἄλλοι πάντες ἱστορικοὶ [...] ἀλλοτρίων γεγονόασιν ἔργων ὥσπερ δραμιᾶτων ὑποκριταί, τὰς τῶν στρατηγῶν καὶ βασιλέων πράξεις διατιθέμενοι καὶ ταῖς ἐκείνων ὑποδύμενοι μνήμῃς, ἵν' ὡς αὐγῆς τινος καὶ φωτὸς μετέσχωσιν” – ‘But all the other historians [...] have been for the exploits of others what actors are for plays, exhibiting the deeds of the generals and kings, and merging themselves with their characters as tradition records them, in order that they might share in a certain effulgence, so to speak, and splendour’). The historians who compete with their figures, exactly like performers, arguably violate propriety and do harm to themselves by creating an illusion. Plutarch's evaluation of historiography is consistent with his view of tragedy, and the two genres are assimilated to one another; but his broad-brush view on reflected glory is only established by the *petitio principii* that the doers of deeds are the really meritorious ones.

While Plutarch is generally rather chary of praising imitative arts, including painting and poetry, at 347A he detects some (basic) affinity in the aim of those two arts, since they both aim to represent vividly emotions and characters. But exactly this vividness of representation, which is essential for theatrical performances (and paintings), may be also one of the aims of the historians. Thucydides is named as an example of historians who strive to achieve a certain vividness in his writing:

(347A) ὁ δ' οὖν Θουκυδίδης αἰεὶ τῷ λόγῳ πρὸς ταύτην ἀμυλλᾶται τὴν ἐνάργειαν, οἷον θεατὴν ποιῆσαι τὸν ἀκροατὴν καὶ τὰ γινόμενα περὶ τοὺς ὁρῶντας ἐκπληκτικὰ καὶ ταρακτικὰ πάθη τοῖς ἀναγινώσκουσιν ἐνεργάσασθαι λιχνευόμενος.

Thucydides is certainly always striving for this vividness in his writing, since it is his desire to make the reader a spectator, as it were, and to produce vividly in the minds of those who peruse his narrative the emotions of amazement and consternation which were experienced by those who beheld them. (347A)

Moreover, writers, in this case mainly historians, are said to take on a role which is decidedly secondary in the sense that their history gains value only because of the real

value of the acts described (345C ff.) – that same *petitio principii*. Although the best historian is the one who manages the best mimesis (347A: “καὶ τῶν ἱστορικῶν κράτιστος ὁ τὴν διήγησιν ὥσπερ γραφὴν πάθει καὶ προσώποις εἰδωλοποιήσας” – ‘The most effective historian is he who, by a vivid representation of emotions and characters, makes his narration like a painting’), it is assumed that this kind of mimesis must clearly take second place to the original. Evidently, Plutarch applies comparable strictures to tragedy and historiography concerning mimesis. Historians take on features of the tragedians’ style, so as to make the readers feel as spectators of the history narrated, ‘performed’ in front of them.<sup>42</sup> In this way emotions of amazement and consternation are raised in the reader-spectator: “τὰ γινόμενα περὶ τοὺς ὀρώντας ἐκπληκτικὰ καὶ ταρακτικὰ πάθη τοῖς ἀναγινώσκουσιν ἐνεργάσασθαι” (347A), a statement which hints at tragedy’s effect on the audience, and illustrates an affinity between tragedy and visual art.

Further light on the value of historiography which Plutarch attributes to good mimesis is shed by the proem of *Pericles*, and the proem of *Nicias*, which suggests that for rhetorical purposes the essay is pushing a particular line further than Plutarch, in another genre or mindset, would find comfortable.<sup>43</sup> In the former (1.2-2.4) the art of painting is compared to history, and, although the train of thought is quite different, Plutarch suggests that good mimesis can itself impact on real life achievement. The ‘pleasure’ gained from the vision of bright and pleasant colours is contrasted to the usefulness of reading about other men’s virtuous deeds which invite the reader to imitate them, thus contributing to his/her own good (2.4: “τὸ γὰρ καλὸν ἐφ’ αὐτὸ πρακτικῶς κινεῖ καὶ πρακτικὴν εὐθὺς ὀρμὴν ἐντίθησιν, ἡθοιοῦν οὐ τῇ μιμήσει τὸν θεατὴν, ἀλλὰ τῇ ἱστορίᾳ τοῦ ἔργου τὴν προαίρεσιν παρεχόμενον” – ‘For the good stirs one actively towards itself and implants immediately an active impulse, forming the spectator’s character not so much by imitation but by the investigation of the work, providing him with a characterful choice of action’; and earlier, at 1.4: “ταῦτα δ’ ἔστιν ἐν τοῖς ἀπ’ ἀρετῆς ἔργοις, ἃ καὶ ζῆλόν τινα καὶ προθυμίαν ἀγωγὸν εἰς μίμησιν ἐμποιεῖ τοῖς ἱστορήσασιν” – ‘These things are found in works done out of virtue,

<sup>42</sup> The author’s attempt to make his narrative more vivid and emotionally more engaged and effective, reminds us of the *ecphrasis* and its importance in works of literature – cf. Bartsch (1989), 109-143.

<sup>43</sup> On the proems of Plutarch’s Lives and the principal themes and techniques which Plutarch employs in them see e.g. Stadter (1988).

which implant in those that investigate them a sort of emulation and desire which leads to imitation'). The focus is on the impact, which good imitation may have on the readers, by stirring them up towards imitation of the 'virtuous' in their life.

In the second passage, in *Nicias'* prologue, Plutarch explicitly refers to Thucydides and to his virtues as a historian. As Pelling notices,<sup>44</sup> in contrast to what Thucydides is today most admired for, Plutarch here seems to base his admiration on the aesthetic value of his work, namely on his emotional, vivid and varied narrative (*Nic.* 1.1: "...ὅπως ἐπὶ ταῖς διηγήσεσιν αἷς Θουκυδίδης, αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ περὶ ταῦτα παθητικώτατος ἐναργέστατος ποικιλώτατος γενόμενος, ἀμμιμήτως ἐξενήνοχε") ('...as I treat the events that Thucydides has already handled incomparably: in this part of his narrative he was indeed at his most emotional, vivid, and varied'). This remark of Plutarch on Thucydides' *enargeia* is comparable to what he suggests at 347A, in the passage quoted. Interestingly, all three passages make a significant point concerning Plutarch's stance toward historiography, toward his own work, and furthermore toward tragedy. Plutarch's own work is mimesis, but he sees it as *having a practical purpose*, since it educates and offers examples.<sup>45</sup>

Contrary to Thucydides' treatment of history which is vivid but emotionally restrained, there were other historians, like Duris of Samos, Phylarchos, or Timaeus of Tauromenium, who were more strident examples of sensational historiography and aimed to write history with the emotional impact of tragedy ('tragic history'). For Polybius tragedy and history are not compatible. Yet Plutarch is not entirely consistent on the issue, although both are very critical towards the historians who did not respect the particular aims of history as opposed to those of tragedy.<sup>46</sup> However, as Mossman proves

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<sup>44</sup> Pelling (1990d) = (2002a), 117.

<sup>45</sup> For a detailed analysis of the multiple levels of mimesis and their interpretation in the prologue of *Pericles* see Duff (1999a), 34-42.

<sup>46</sup> On 'tragic history' see Walbank (1955), (1960), (1972), 34-43, (1985), (2002), 231-241, esp. 236-239; cf. also Brink (1960), Russell (1973), 123, Wardman (1974), 168-179, Pelling (1980) = (2002a), esp. p. 111 n. 27, Desideri (1984), Mossman (1988), 91-92, Duff (2004), 280 (esp. n. 31, where he interestingly questions the very existence of a school of 'tragic history'), and Van der Stockt (2005), 298-305 (esp. pp. 299-303).

with the examples she gives from *Alexander* and *Demetrius*, Plutarch himself partly succumbs to the charms of tragic history, thus assimilating tragedy to history.<sup>47</sup>

Despite any reservations about tragic writing that often surface in the *Lives*, there are also many tragic tinges and hints that Plutarch himself uses to give depth to his writing. The different strands of thinking about tragedy we have found in the *Essays* reflect a multiplicity of perspectives that also surfaces in the narratives of the *Lives*. We shall see a good deal of this later in the thesis.

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<sup>47</sup> Mossman (1988), 85 and 91 ff. Cf. De Lacy (1952), 168-171, Tagliacchini (1960), 129 ff., and Wardman (1974), 178. Walbank (1985) makes a similar point about Polybius: although his stance towards history was anti-tragic, in his own narrative there are hints of tragic colouring.



### 3. The role of tragedy in *On Exile*

#### Introduction

(*Demosth.* 1.1) Ὁ μὲν γράψας τὸ ἐπὶ τῇ νίκῃ τῆς Ὀλυμπίαςιν ἵπποδρομίας εἰς Ἀλκιβιάδην ἐγκώμιον, εἴτ' Εὐριπίδης ὡς ὁ πολὺς κρατεῖ λόγος, εἴθ' ἕτερός τις ἦν, ὃ Σόσσιε Σενεκίῳ, φησὶ χρήναι τῷ εὐδαιμόνι πρῶτον ὑπάρξαι “τὰν πάλιν εὐδόκιμον”. ἐγὼ δὲ τῷ μὲν εὐδαιμονήσῃν μέλλοντι τὴν ἀληθινὴν εὐδαιμονίαν, ἧς ἐν ἡβῇ καὶ διαθέσει τὸ πλεῖστόν ἐστιν, οὐδὲν ἡγοῦμαι διαφέρειν ἀδόξου καὶ ταπεινῆς πατρίδος ἢ μητρὸς ἀμόρφου καὶ μικρᾶς γενέσθαι.

The author of the encomium upon Alcibiades for his victory in the chariot-race at Olympia, whether he was Euripides, as the prevailing report has it, or some other, says, Sosius Senecio, that the first requisite to a man's happiness is birth in a 'famous city'; but in my opinion, for a man who would enjoy true happiness, which depends for the most part on character and disposition, it is no disadvantage to belong to an obscure and poor city, any more than it is to be born of a mother who is without beauty and of little stature. (*Demosth.* 1.1)

This is the prologue of the *Life of Demosthenes*, and although it is not about exile (it does not mention exile at all), it could serve as a very good introduction to the subject of banishment which Plutarch discusses in a separate essay with that title (“Περὶ φυγῆς”), since it touches upon important themes for the argument of that essay.<sup>1</sup> The main point in these first lines quoted above is that no famous city or noble lineage can guarantee true happiness, or should be regarded as a prerequisite towards achieving it; instead, it is rather one's character and disposition which plays the major part (“ἐν ἡβῇ καὶ διαθέσει τὸ πλεῖστόν ἐστιν”) towards reaching, or not reaching, happiness. Moreover, this is the main line on which Plutarch draws to develop his argument in the essay *On Exile*. Adopting a rationalistic approach to the subject rather than a more emotional approach that the issue of exile would seem to invite by its nature – he claims that there is not one single place, the place of birth, that one must regard as his homeland, but a homeland can be

<sup>1</sup> On this prologue see recently Zadorojnyi (2005), and on the rhetoric of the whole *Life* see Mossman (1999). About the proems in the *Lives* see Stadter (1988), and about the constructed narrator and narratee in them see Pelling (2002c) and (2004b), esp. pp. 407-412 (on *Demosthenes'* prologue).

potentially *any* place which one chooses to live in or is compelled to resort to (in case one is exiled).<sup>2</sup> Consequently, a man should not think of happiness as something strictly and exclusively interwoven with his homeland but should consider it to be a good (*ἀγαθόν*) which he can attain in any city or village, provided that he himself, by his own character and attitude, develops the appropriate conditions for that purpose.

Living in a different historical reality from the classical city-states, Plutarch attempts to disconnect *polis* and *patris* – and consequently also to weaken the bond between the citizen and the city for the rhetorical purposes of his consolation-treatise – two concepts which in the archaic and classical Greece were generally considered to be identical.<sup>3</sup> In addition, he distances himself from most of the literature before him (e.g. Homer, Tyrtaios, Alcaeus, Theognis, Herodotus, Xenophon, Euripides, Andocides, Isocrates, Cicero, Ovid, Seneca), i.e. from authors who either just described single cases of exiles and discussed different sides of banishment, or wrote about exile based on their personal experience.<sup>4</sup> In literature exile was generally presented as a terrible misfortune, since it implied the loss of *patris*, which defined the identity of a hero or citizen. Plutarch rejects this view and recasts the *consolatio*-tradition under a different light by arguing in this essay that exile should be actually nothing to console one about. The topic of exile was popular also for the Hellenistic *diatribe*; among others, writers about exile included Teles, Musonius Rufus, Favorinus, and Dio Cassius (all profoundly influenced by cynic-stoic doctrines)<sup>5</sup> – and it is from them that Plutarch, partly, borrows many conventional consolatory topics (*topoi*).

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<sup>2</sup> About places of Roman exile see Baldson (1979), 112-115. He also discusses the different forms of banishment in Rome (*relegatio*, *deportatio*, etc.) in Imperial times (pp. 102-115). Cf. also Seibert (1967), and (1979); Nielsen (2004), and Forsdyke (2005) (about exile in Greece).

<sup>3</sup> On the meaning of *patris* and patriotism (which is also traced in the *Demosthenes*-prologue, 2.2) in archaic and classical times see Dover (1974), 161-163, 186, 231, 296-299, and Nielsen (2004). Passages where *polis* appears as a synonym of *patris* include: Hdt. 6.109.6, 8.61.1, Lysias 31.6, Xenophon's *Hell.* 4.4.6, 4.8.28, Isocr. 3.23, 14.13, Demosth. 20.51, 21.15, Plato's *Crit.* 51c, *Laws* 856d.

<sup>4</sup> See *Odys.* 9.34, 15.228, 23.120, *Il.* 13.695-696, Hdt. 1.150.1, Andoc. *On the Myst.* 5, Eur. *Troad.* 1272-1274, Sen. *Cons. Helv.*, Ov. *Tr.* 2, *Epistles from Pontus* (for the two works and their place in Ovid's poetics of exile cf. Nagle (1980), and Williams (1995)). For more examples from various authors and genres see Seibert (1979), 275 ff., and Nielsen (2004), 51-57.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Pisani (1992), 463, and Caballero and Viansino (1995), 16-17.

### On Exile

In the opening of *On Exile* Plutarch refers to tragedy, and more specifically to the tragic chorus. The use of tragedy in this programmatic statement allows Plutarch to encapsulate his rationalising approach by using an extreme example of sympathy to articulate the difference between emotion and reason. His argument concerns how to treat a friend who has fallen into adversity. The words addressed to him should be encouraging and helpful, and have a positive effect on him, or at least they should aim to mitigate the cause of distress and not to make things worse. If the adviser who takes up the role to comfort a friend does not follow the right path of encouragement and does not use the right technique, then exactly the opposite result is achieved, and he may resemble one who is unable to swim and yet tries to save somebody who is drowning (599B). Plutarch introduces himself as a friend and as an author who takes on the task of offering moral advice to the specific or general reader of his letter of consolation.<sup>6</sup> The second simile which Plutarch introduces at this point refers us directly to the tragic context, although it describes an aspect of real life:

(599B) οὐ γὰρ συνδακρύνωνται καὶ συνεπιθρηνοῦντων ὥσπερ χορῶν τραγικῶν ἐν τοῖς ἀβουλήτοις χρεῖαν ἔχομεν, ἀλλὰ παρρησιαζομένων καὶ διδασκόντων ὅτι τὸ λυπεῖσθαι καὶ τὸ ταπεινοῦν ἑαυτὸν ἐπὶ παντὶ μὲν ἄχρηστόν ἐστι καὶ γινόμενον κενῶς καὶ ἀνοήτως...

It is not partners in tears and lamentation, like tragic choruses, that we need in unwished-for circumstances, but men who speak frankly and instruct us that grief and self-abasement are everywhere futile, that to indulge in them is unwarranted and unwise... (599B)

Here as elsewhere tragedy can be used to express aberrant behaviour, behaviour which is criticised as inappropriate because it fails to address reality. Plutarch criticises the excess of reaction: the role of the tragic chorus as a group of people who accentuates the suffering by lamenting with and for the characters is far from being commendable as the model for the reaction of a friend in a similar situation.<sup>7</sup> For example, in *OT* (1297 ff.) or in the *Persians* (843 ff.) the chorus weeps together with the main character; yet in

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Opsomer (2002), 290.

<sup>7</sup> For more on the dramatic role of the chorus, its fictive identity and its contribution to the drama see e.g. J. Gould (1996).

*Antigone* the chorus is not sympathetic.<sup>8</sup> Whether choruses are sympathetic or not, the element of sympathy is emphatically underlined – even by the absence of sympathy. One also notices here that in Plutarch’s language there is a reflection of his attitude in minimising the ‘unfortunate’ side of the situation; he is decidedly euphemistic (“ἐν τοῖς ἀβουλήτοις”). The true friend should be honest and advise the person in adversity towards a stance of life which does not allow grief and self-degradation in the course towards recovering and acting wisely thereafter. This life-as-drama metaphor shows that the theatrical conventions must not be applied to ‘real life’.<sup>9</sup> However strong the emotional engagement of theatrical participants (chorus) may be, however (theatrically) necessary their compassion seems to be on stage and within the play, this kind of behaviour in real life, where practical decisions need to be taken for the future, is not merely unhelpful but actually detrimental.

And indeed there are similar implications in Plutarch’s *Lives*. There, again, we see that there is no space for pity for a ‘great man’ who, after achieving great fame in his life, by showing admirable qualities, fails to cope with adversities, such as banishment. As Pelling has remarked in his detailed discussion of ‘pity in Plutarch’,<sup>10</sup> there are circumstances when, if a hero reacts in such a way as to make pity appropriate, then he can be blamed; and Plutarch does not refrain from reproaching him with reprehensible behaviour, as e.g. the *Lives of Cicero* and *Demosthenes* show (*Cic.* 32; *Demosth.* 26).<sup>11</sup> Surprisingly, the two men proved to be unable to cope with their banishment in a decent way, showed no courage and spent their lives in great misfortune and idleness. Their case

<sup>8</sup> On adding our own laments to somebody’s misery see also (the example of the flatterer in) *How to tell a flatterer from a friend* 56A (“οἱ πολλοί...μᾶλλον ὑπὸ τῶν συνεπιθροούντων ἄγονται καὶ συνοδυρομένοι”) (cf. 55D: “ὁ κόλαξ...συνῶδων ἀεὶ καὶ συμφθεγγόμενος”), and *Consolation to his wife* 610A-C. Cf. also *Dialogue on love* 749A: “ἡ πρόφασις...χορὸν αἰτεῖ συμπαθῆ” – Autobulus at the start of the dialogue points out that the debate only needs a sympathetic chorus and a stage to become a dramatic performance.

<sup>9</sup> See also my chapter on *How to tell a flatterer from a friend*, where exactly this argument is sustained.

<sup>10</sup> Pelling (2005a), esp. p. 302.

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, in the *Demosthenes-Cicero Synkrisis*, Plutarch presents Demosthenes in a slightly different light, not as a great man who was lamenting for being driven out of his country (*Demosth.* 26.5-7) – indecent behaviour for such a great man – but rather as a good, conscientious citizen who, in contrast to Cicero, offered much to his country, both when in exile and after coming back. Plutarch makes his appreciation of this quality of Demosthenes even more emphatic by contrasting his attitude with that of Themistocles and Alcibiades, when they faced the same adversity (*Synkr.* 4.3-4) – they both even went as far as treachery (*Them.* 22 ff., and *Alc.* 23 ff.).

exemplifies how personal failings of character may diminish (former) public preeminence.

The tragic touch at the beginning of the essay serves several purposes. Apart from its programmatic value, it also prepares the reader for the later quotations from specific tragic plays, and especially, as we will see, from Euripides' *Phoenissae*, one of the most popular tragedies quoted in Plutarch's work.<sup>12</sup> It is perhaps due to the richness and diversity of themes in this tragedy that Plutarch uses lines from the *Phoenissae* in different essays, always according to the needs of his argument. The quotations from this play as well as from other tragic plays have multiple functions. Plutarch often finds the most concise way to express his view on exile via poetry, particularly tragic poetry. So, instead of developing in this case a theory about banishment, trying to answer, on a theoretical level, questions such as whether exile is the ultimate misfortune for a man or not, or how one should act once in such a hardship, he prefers to be more pragmatic and explicit, taking specific examples from the tragic tradition, and commenting on them, either rebutting or supporting them.

A tragic quotation may thus serve Plutarch as a way to summarise different views on exile, or present just one of the angles from which one could examine the matter. Such is the case, for example, at 599D-E, where he quotes from the *Phoenissae*:

– τί τὸ στέρεσθαι πατρίδος; ἢ κακὸν μέγα;

– μέγιστον· ἔργῳ δ' ἐστὶ μείζον ἢ λόγῳ· (Phoen. 388-389)

Joc. What is it like to be deprived of your country? Is it a great calamity?

Pol. The greatest: the reality far surpasses the description. (599E)

Plutarch does not agree with Polyneices' reply, where he claims the exile to be the greatest evil in life – note especially here the superlative (“μέγιστον”) and the

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<sup>12</sup> Quotations in other essays: *How a young man should listen to poetry* 18D (vv. 524-525), 23B (v. 1006), 25B (vv. 549-550), *How to tell a flatterer from a friend* 62C (v. 469, 472), 70A (v. 1742), 72C (v. 1688), 73C (v. 528), *Advice on health* 125D-E (vv. 524-525), *Why does the Pythia no longer give oracles in verse?* 407D (vv. 958-959), *On brotherly love* 481A (vv. 504-506, 536-538), 483E (v. 68), 484C (v. 539), *On the love of offspring* 497B (vv. 439-440), *On the love of wealth* 526F (v. 368), *Table talk* 643F (vv. 537, 539), *Whether an elderly man should engage in politics* 784A (v. 1688). Even Mastronarde (1994) says little about the popularity of the play in antiquity – cf. Morgan (1988), 116, with the relevant nn. 99 and 100; cf. also Criboire (2001), 198-199.

comparative (“μειζον”) forms of “μέγα”, the adjective which Jocasta uses in her question. Plutarch explicitly states that he will refute the view of the majority which considers exile to be the ultimate misery in one’s life (599F: “Ἐστω δὲ δεινόν, ὥσπερ οἱ πολλοὶ λέγουσι καὶ ᾄδουσιν, ἢ φυγή” – ‘Assume that exile is a calamity, as the multitude declare in speech and song’) – “οἱ πολλοὶ” here may allude to the ‘unwise’ people, as also at 600D it is used as the opposite of ‘the wise’: “οἱ μὲν νοῦν ἔχοντες... τοῖς δὲ πολλοῖς”; even the language is suggestive of Plutarch’s view.<sup>13</sup> It is certainly not without importance that he mentions song here (“ᾄδουσιν”): probably he is thinking of sung poetry; this could include lyric poetry but it is more likely that he thinks primarily of tragedy, as the example he has chosen to attack (Polyneices/Euripides) derives from that genre.

Poetry also provides the reply to the Euripidean character by means of words placed in the mouth of Alcman by the author of the following (Hellenistic) epigram:<sup>14</sup>

Σάρδιες, ἀρχαῖος πατέρων νομός, εἰ μὲν ἐν ὑμῖν  
 ἐτρεφόμεν, κέρνας ἢ τις αὖ ἢ μακέλας  
 χρυσοφόρος, ῥήσσω καλὰ τύμπανα· νῦν δέ μοι Ἀλκμᾶν  
 οὔνομα, καὶ Σπάρτας εἰμὶ πολυτρίποδος,  
 καὶ Μούσας ἐδάην Ἑλληνίδας, αἶ με τυράννων  
 θῆκαν Δασκύλεω κρείσσονα καὶ Γύγεω.

Sardis, of old the dwelling-place of my fathers,  
 had I been bred in you, then had I been  
 some priest or temple eunuch, tricked in gold,  
 smiting the beautiful kettledrums; now instead  
 my name is Alcman, and my country Sparta,  
 city of many tripods; I have been taught  
 the Hellenic Muses, who have made me better  
 than the despots Dascyles and Gyges.

(599E)

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Caballero and Viansino (1995), 88.

<sup>14</sup> In the *Anthol. Pal.*, VII 709 [=frag. 9, *Collectanea Alexandrina*] the epigram is attributed to Alexander Aetolus, a Hellenistic poet of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. B.C. Cf. Pisani (1992), 464. Interestingly, Plutarch uses here a technique (i.e. to correct poetic lines by using other poetic lines) which he has prescribed in the *How a young man...* (cf. chap. 1, p. 33 ff.).

The epigram addresses issues of loss and puts forward the present in contrast to the past: the person of the poem says that he would be a 'nobody' if he had stayed in his city but *now* that he lives as an exile in Sparta he has become a famous poet, even more famous than those two important figures, Dascyles and Gyges. The negative look on the homeland is part of the paradox on which Plutarch plays in this essay as it is also an important part of his argument, stressing the good that may derive from an adversity, and thus adding to his argument some educational value. The epigram echoes Pindar's *Olympian* 12. In the ode the poet makes the point that Ergoteles, Philanor's son, would never had gained fame from his victories at Olympian and Nemean contests, had he not been driven from Knossos in Crete (vv. 13-19).<sup>15</sup>

The quotation of the epigram, as all others in this essay, is carefully chosen by Plutarch to meet his target of playing down the principle that one can only be happy in one's homeland. The specific citation could gain even more importance, if his addressee in this essay is Menemachus of Sardis, who, as implied at 604B, was exiled but was not confined to live in a specific place; in that case Plutarch specifically chose this epigram because of its reference to Sardis.<sup>16</sup> Plutarch's argument is of philosophical rather than of merely aesthetic value, and the same can be said about the quotations which he uses here: they are not decorative but embedded in the general argument. The reader, on his/her part, must be especially alert to read closely the cited text, in order to be able to follow the argument throughout the essay.

Contrary to Polyneices, Alcman does not see exile as a great evil at all. Plutarch sees in him a wise man who made good use of (the turns of) his *tyche*, while in Polyneices he sees a man to whom exile was just a misfortune, an event which turned out to be completely useless for his life and harmful to him.<sup>17</sup> The contrast between the attitudes of

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<sup>15</sup> Compare *Pythian* 4, where Pindar combines the formal occasion of the ode (King Arcesilaus' IV chariot-victory) with his immediate motive, by entering a plea for the recall of his friend Demophilus, a Cyrenean exile (vv. 279-299). For more on the two odes (*Pythian* 4 and *Olympian* 12) see Gildersleeve (1906), Burton (1962), and Braswell (1988).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Pisani (1992), 462, 470, and Caballero and Viansino (1995), 7-10. However doubtful the identification of Plutarch's addressee in this essay, Plutarch explicitly dedicated his *Political precepts* to Menemachus; cf. C. P. Jones (1971), 43, 110-111.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Barigazzi (1966), 252-253.

the two is also reflected in the language which Plutarch uses, especially in the antithetical μέν – δέ, and no less in the clear contrast between the two adjectives specifying exile (εὐχρηστον – δύσχρηστον): “τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ πρᾶγμα τῷ μὲν εὐχρηστον ἢ δόξα... τῷ δὲ δύσχρηστον καὶ βλαβερόν ἐποίησεν” (‘Thus opinion had made the same event useful for the one, but useless and harmful to the other’) (599F). The one attitude is recommended as wise and beneficial, whereas the other implies that exile was, apart from useless, badly used – “δύσχρηστος” possibly treated here with its double meaning.

However, there are several interesting and complex issues that are raised by Plutarch’s use of Polyneices, if one reflects that Polyneices is, after all, not a typical example of an exile, for he did not remain idle while away from home: instead he used his exile energetically and sought powerful connections in order to prepare his attack. So, apart from the image of Polyneices as an exile, in the Euripidean sub-text there is also the suggestion that he was in fact an example of inappropriate reaction to exile. But still, this returning exile with high ambitions to acquire absolute power represents for Plutarch the model example of the type of exile which he attacks in this essay. He is indeed a representative example of a person who was driven to exile because of his dissatisfaction with his lot and because he was no longer welcomed in his homeland, which are typical conditions in most of the cases of exiles. In choosing extreme cases, one could argue that Plutarch is in tune with the spirit of tragedy, which regularly seeks extreme examples to explore aspects of human experience.

Rather than Polyneices, Plutarch sides with Alcman who overcame the (supposed) calamity of exile and made the most out of that experience, following a philosophical course of thought. Philosophy, both as a practical activity and as the recommended attitude in life, comes again into play a few lines later in a reference by Plutarch to theatre, in this case to comedy:

(600B) ὥσπερ οὖν ἐν κωμωδίᾳ τις ἡτυχηκότα φίλον θαρρεῖν καὶ τὴν τύχην ἀμύνεσθαι παρακαλῶν, ἐρομένου, “τίνα τρόπον;” ἀποκρίνεται, “φιλοσόφως,” οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς αὐτὴν ἀμυνώμεθα φιλοσοφοῦντες ἀξίως



“τὸν Δία δὲ πῶς ὕοντα; τὸν βορέαν δὲ πῶς;”<sup>18</sup>

As, then, in the comedy a character who is urging an unfortunate friend to take heart and make a stand against Fortune, when asked, ‘How?’ replies, ‘like a philosopher’, so let us too make a stand against her by playing the philosopher worthily. But how are we to face

‘Zeus when he pours down rain? And how the North Wind?’ (600B)

By approving the comic character who exhorts his friend to show courage and to follow a philosophical path in his life, Plutarch recommends to his readers to apply to their own life the attitude of a philosopher towards any kind of misery by not remaining idle and passive but instead acting wisely (cf. 600B: “καὶ γὰρ οὐχ ὕοιμενοι καθήμεθα οὐδὲ κλαίομεν” – ‘in a rainstorm we do not sit idle or lament’). Contrary to other instances (already seen elsewhere),<sup>19</sup> where Plutarch warns us not to imitate theatrical behaviour in our own lives, here he encourages us to be taught by the words of a dramatic character (“ὥσπερ...οὕτως καὶ ἡμεῖς...”). However, the quotation catches the reader’s attention because the recommended way of reaction and the good advice comes in this case from comedy, which is a less obvious genre than tragedy to provide philosophical lessons but still a genre which comes in some ways closer to ‘real life’ – and this can partly justify Plutarch’s choice of the quotation in this case. Comic characters are usually portrayed as unable to keep good temper and to show steadfastness when facing adversities; they rather display weakness of character and often whimper about their misery.<sup>20</sup> Yet in this case they display the kind of behaviour which Plutarch sets as a model. One notes also the oblique juxtaposition of tragedy (Polyneices) and comedy, the one being cast under a negative light here, and the other being given an unusual degree of dignity.<sup>21</sup> Plutarch makes a highly pragmatic use of the material available.

Plutarch uses another powerful image to show that the view which presents banishment as an unbearable calamity is just an unfounded opinion, and therefore should not affect

<sup>18</sup> Kassel and Austin (2001), adesp. 728 (=Kock, adesp. 118).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. e.g. 599B-C (the image with the tragic chorus lamenting together with the tragic character for his miseries), discussed above, on pp. 71-72.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. e.g. Strepsiades in *Clouds*, Xanthias in *Frogs*, Cinesias in *Lysistrata*.

<sup>21</sup> Aristotle describes comedy as ‘a mimesis of baser characters’ (*Poetics*: 1449a 31-32: “ἡ δὲ κωμῳδία ἐστὶν [...] μίμησις φαυλοτέρων”).

us. The image is again related to the theatrical world (600E): children are sometimes, for no particular reason perhaps, afraid of masks, yet we usually mitigate their fear by bringing them closer to masks in order to get accustomed to them. Knowledge moderates fear in many cases, and reveals in this case all ‘the unsoundness, the hollowness and the tragic’ (“τὸ σαθρὸν καὶ τὸ κενὸν καὶ τετραγυφθῆμένον ἀποκαλύπτειν”, 600E)<sup>22</sup> of the masks. This is actually one of the rare moments in Plutarch where he comments on one of the theatrical devices and its aspects of deception, here created by the masks. By drawing on the reader’s familiarity with masks, Plutarch turns a theatrical image into a practical image which is economical and efficient. The mask may also stand here as a metaphor for the truth hidden underneath; behind the apparent calamity of the exile or of any other adversity, there is a reality which is not so hard to bear. According to Plutarch the fear of exile is an irrational fear, as is also children’s fear. Moreover, banishment figures in Plutarch as an evil coming only from outside and as something that can affect our life and psychology only if we appear weak, idle and do nothing to fight it with our internal strength. Banishment is an intolerable misery if we acknowledge it as such and do not see any good in it, or, rather, if we do not change it into anything which is good.<sup>23</sup>

As he will declare later on, in this essay Plutarch rejects the view that every man should be considered to have a native land, and develop a special, or, even more, an exclusive bond to it.<sup>24</sup> ‘There is no such thing as a native land, any more than there is by nature a house or a farm or forge or surgery’, the Stoic Ariston had said,<sup>25</sup> and Plutarch fully adopts his view by adding that in each of those cases a thing is so named and called with reference to the occupant and user (600E-F). Tragedy can, as elsewhere, teach positive lessons, too; and Plutarch, to prove the rightness of his words, uses this quality of tragedy here by adopting Heracles’ words, who ‘rightly said’ (“εὖ μὲν ὁ Ἡρακλῆς εἶπεν”):

Ἀργεῖος ἢ Θηβαῖος· οὐ γὰρ εὐχόμεαι

μῆας· ἅπας μοι πύργος Ἑλλήνων πατρίς.

(TGF, adesp., frag. 392)

<sup>22</sup> Apart from indicating the singing of the tale of a tragedy, “τραγυφδεσθαι” can also be used as to mean ‘tell in tragic style’, ‘declaim’, or even ‘exaggerate’; so, in a sense, it is connected to preposterous, pompous behaviour.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. 600D-E, just before the mask-simile.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Lysias 31.6: “πᾶσα γῆ πατρίς αὐτοῖς ἐστίν”, together with Carey’s comments on this passage and about the political importance of citizenship ((1989), 186-187).

<sup>25</sup> SVF (ed. Von Arnim), i. 371, p. 85.

An Argive I, or Theban, for I boast no single city;  
every fort in Greece is my country. (600F)

Along the same lines, and in order to strengthen his argument, Plutarch invokes Socrates, who, he claims, did not call himself an Athenian or a Greek, but a ‘Cosmian’ (600F), ‘because he did not shut himself within Sounion, Tainaros and the Cenaarion mountains’. The attribute ‘Cosmian’ is also, as Opsomer has noted, an obvious pun on the meaning ‘orderly’, ‘decent’, ‘well-behaved’.<sup>26</sup> Yet, beyond perhaps its justified metaphorical connotations (those of a symbol of timeless wisdom), the attribute ‘Cosmian’ for Socrates is not justified either by his life – he rarely left Athens – or by the image which Plato and Xenophon created of him in their works. Plutarch puts forward the cynic or stoic representation of Socrates, which serves his rhetorical and authorial targets – exactly as the Cynics and the Stoics attributed cosmopolitanism to Socrates as a ‘Socratic pedigree for their views’.<sup>27</sup> Here again Plutarch remembers Euripides and cites his lines:

‘Ὅρᾳς τὸν ὑψοῦ τόνδ’ ἄπειρον αἰθέρα  
καὶ γῆν περίξ ἔχονθ’ ὑγραῖς ἐν ἀγκάλαις;<sup>28</sup> (TGF, frag. 941.1-2)  
You see there the boundless aether overhead  
that holds the earth within its soft embrace? (601A)

Once more the quotation does not just serve illustration purposes; it is embedded in Plutarch’s argument, and carefully selected for the specific point it makes. Plutarch turns the imagery offered by the citation, which notably is so general that it could be used in discussions of various issues, into a part of his sustained argument, and requires that the reader take it as such. By using the words of famous philosophers (of Socrates here, and earlier, at 600F, of Plato), and of popular tragic poets, such as Euripides, Plutarch manages to present his personal view on exile – that the whole earth is our native land, and that ‘here no one is either an exile or foreigner or alien’ (601A) – as being of general value. His view is supposed to be not only a comfort for anybody found in that situation, but also a ‘philosophy’, a stance of life. Plutarch goes one step further, consciously

<sup>26</sup> About this view and generally about the origins of cosmopolitanism see Opsomer (2002), 282 ff.

<sup>27</sup> Opsomer (2002), 282. Cf. Epict., *Diatr.* 1.9.1 (Epictetus argues that Socrates called himself a ‘Cosmian’ because of the kinship of god and humans), Cicero, *Tusc. Disput.* 5.37, and Diog. Laert. 6.63.

<sup>28</sup> The lines are again quoted at 780D of the spurious (according to Teubner) *To an uneducated ruler*, and at 919B of the *Causes of natural phenomena*.

arguing a paradox: he claims that, if we regard a single city as our homeland, then we consequently set our self as a stranger to all the other cities (602B).<sup>29</sup> Thus Plutarch achieves his two interlinked goals, the oblique use of public opinion about the definition of homeland, and the rhetorical manipulation of his material so as to serve the purposes of his argument.<sup>30</sup>

The sophistry is striking rhetorically since thereby Plutarch not only presents the bond between the citizen and its city as something that may entail dangers (cf. e.g. 602B above) but he also suggests that the homeland can be a prison, where the citizen is forced to live, no matter if the city happens to be inglorious, unhealthy, or in turmoil (602B: "...καὶν ἄδοξος ἤ, καὶν νοσώδης, καὶν ταραττήται στάσεσιν ὑφ' ἑαυτῆς καὶ πράγμασι μὴ ὑγιαίνουσιν"). Bearing this in mind, the Euripidean line in *Telephus*: "Σπάρταν ἔλαχες, ταύταν κόσμει"<sup>31</sup> (frag. 723.1) ('Your lot is Sparta; look to Sparta then') quoted in this context (602B) cannot possibly suggest for Plutarch useful guidance since it puts forward a passive approach to homeland. The line has a proverbial ring. The moral stance it adopts is not one which Plutarch would always either accept or reject, as a comparison with its other use at 472D of the essay *On tranquillity of mind* proves. There the same line is cited, but in quite a different context: notably, Plutarch agrees with Euripides' words and interprets them as urging us to wish to obtain things for ourselves which are in accordance to our personal qualities and calibre. This coheres with a tendency of Plutarch to use quotations of general value opportunistically, here particularly to attack those who exaggerate the value of the native city.

Plutarch supports the view that *tyche* gives us the freedom to choose the place where we wish to live and make it our 'own city': "οὐδὲ ἡ τύχη τὴν ἰδίαν ἀφήρηται, τούτῳ δίδωσιν ἔχειν τὴν ἀρέσασαν" ('But Fortune grants possession of what city he pleases to the man she has deprived of his own', 602B),<sup>32</sup> and will later declare, in a most succinct way:

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<sup>29</sup> Cf. Musonius 41.11.

<sup>30</sup> Plutarch is here heir to one strand of epideictic tradition. Cf. Kennedy (1972), 553 ff.

<sup>31</sup> Euripides has: "κείνην" instead of "ταύταν".

<sup>32</sup> Plutarch goes as far as regarding the feeling of not being bound to any specific place as a great privilege. The kings of Persia used to spend every different season in a different region; in the same way the exile is

“*πασῶν ἐστὶν ἐξουσία πόλεων ἢ μᾶς κώλυσις*” – ‘the exclusion from one city is the freedom to choose from all’ (604B), a remarkably positive way of seeing exile. In addition to this positive light which he casts on exile, he is creating a general reality which is partly un-historical.<sup>33</sup> The truth is that Plutarch’s reasoning here is only based on the specific situation of his addressee (obviously he was free to wander around the world as long as he did not return to his homeland – cf. 604B).

Just before his discussion of *tyche*, at 601F-602A, Plutarch gave two examples of famous men who made the most out of their banishment, received kingly treatment as exiles and became first among many, Themistocles and Demetrius. He also quoted Diogenes the Cynic who replied to the one who remarked: ‘The Sinopians condemned you to banishment from Pontus’, by using the following words: ‘But I condemned them to stay *there*’; *there*, adds Plutarch, ‘where the waves of the Hostile Sea break’ – a quotation from Euripides’ *IT*, v. 253: “*ἄκραις ἐπὶ ῥηγμῖσιν ἀξένου πόρου*” (602A). The word “*ἀξένου*” creates a direct link with Plutarch’s topic, as exiles are also “*ἄξενοι*”, wandering around. However, the line functions in favour of Plutarch’s argument since it emphasises the potential limitations of the home city and presents the removal as a blessing.

At 607A-B we are given more examples of famous men and sons of exiled men, who offered glory to cities and who gained the appreciation and admiration of many people, who were not prejudiced against exiles; such were the cases of Theseus and Codrus for Athens, Eumolpus for Eleusis, and Heracles. Cadmus too, though ‘Phoenician born’, did not return to his homeland, ‘but by coming to Thebes expatriated his ‘descendant’” (“*Φοῖνιξ πεφυκώς, ἐκ δ’ ὀρίζεται γένος*” εἰς τὰς Θήβας παραγενόμενος, 607B-C). The quoted words are adapted from Euripides’ *Phrixus* (frag. 819.3), where the lines read as follows: “*Φοῖνιξ πεφυκώς, ἐκ δ’ ἀμείβεται γένος/ Ἑλληνικόν*” (‘Phoenician born, he exchanged his race for Greek’). Plutarch suggests that, when somebody is reviled being called an ‘exile’ (cf. 607A: “*ἀλλ’ ἐπονείδιστον ὁ φυγὰς ἐστί*” – ‘but ‘exile’ is a term of

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free to stay in Eleusis during the Mysteries, in Athens during the Dionysia, to visit Delphi for the Pythian and Corinth for the Isthmian games, and generally he has a lot of leisure time and freedom (604C-D).

<sup>33</sup> In Imperial times the exiled were not always free to choose the place of their exile, at least not in Rome. For a historical overview of the issue see Seibert (1979), Balsdon (1979), and the recent work by Forsdyke (2005).

reproach'), he should use the poet's words to reply to the affront, since these words support the argument that there are well-known examples of exiles in antiquity who either were banished against their will or denied their homeland, but still became famous at the end. Plutarch picks up on the point made when he discussed the epigram about Alcman (599E); only there, he refuted Euripides to argue in favour of Alcman, whereas here he uses the tragedian's voice as his own voice.

Plutarch's renouncing of Polyneices' view on exile becomes yet stronger and clearer at 605F-606A, where he cites the same lines from the *Phoenissae* as at 599D-E but in a fuller version, indeed in a surprisingly extensive citation by Plutarchan standards. In the following words of Polyneices we have a clear declaration of his love for his homeland, an *encomium patriae*, as it were:<sup>34</sup>

- τί τὸ στέρεσθαι πατρίδος; ἡ κακὸν μέγα;
- μέγιστον· ἔργῳ δ' ἐστὶ μείζον ἢ λόγῳ.
- τίς ὁ τρόπος αὐτοῦ; τί φυγᾶσιν τὸ δυστυχές;
- ἐν μὲν μέγιστον· οὐκ ἔχει παρρησίαν.
- δούλου τόδ' εἶπας, μὴ λέγειν ἅ τις φρονεῖ.
- τὴν τῶν κρατούντων ἀμαθίαν φέρειν χρεών.<sup>35</sup> (Phoen. 388-393)

Joc. What is it like to be deprived of your country? Is it a great calamity?

Pol. The greatest: the reality surpasses the description.

Joc. What is its nature? What is hard for exiles?

Pol. One thing is most important: no free speech.

Joc. A slave's lot this, not saying what you think.

Pol. You must endure the stupidity of your rulers. (605F-606A)

This is actually the opening quotation of chapter 16; in this chapter most of the quotations are verses by Euripides, with a particular preference for the *Phoenissae*.<sup>36</sup> Plutarch partly

<sup>34</sup> Caballero and Viansino (1995), 18 n. 52. They also make another point, by noticing that Polyneices' profile is re-evaluated in Euripides; whereas in Aeschylus he was cast under an unfavourable light for going against his own land in his fight with his own brother to become a king, in Euripides he rather sets the model for an exceptional love for the homeland.

<sup>35</sup> In the Euripidean text we have at v. 390 "δυσχερές" instead of "δυστυχές" ("δυστυχές" seems to fit nicely Plutarch's preoccupations).

<sup>36</sup> Notably, the lines which Plutarch quotes are mainly from the famous dialogue between Jocasta and Polyneices about central aspects of exile (vv. 357-442).

justifies the choice of citing Euripides by acknowledging straight from the beginning that he is a poet who is both popular – in the sense that his words exercise significant influence on audiences – and famous for his powerful denouncing of exile: “Ἀλλ’ ἐπεὶ πολλοὺς τὰ τοῦ Εὐριπίδου κινεῖ, δυνατῶς τῆς φυγῆς κατηγορεῖν δοκοῦντος...” (‘But since many are stirred by the words of Euripides, who is thought to arraign exile very forcibly...’) (605F). It is difficult to trace between the lines Plutarch’s stance towards the tragic poet or the tragic character, since the issue of the appropriateness of the words quoted is hard to solve. The readers may see in Plutarch’s introduction of the citation an attempt by the author to distance himself from the popular view (“δοκοῦντος”), or to warn the readers against identifying Polyneices with Euripides. In that case Plutarch defends here the tragic poet. It could also be that Plutarch just implies that the lines from the *Phoenissae* may admit a more complex reading.

Yet more questions are raised by the comment which follows the quotation: “ταῦτα πρώτως οὐκ ὀρθῶς οὐδ’ ἀληθῶς ἀξιούται” (‘these initial assumptions are wrong and untrue’) (606A). The way in which Plutarch phrases his comment suggests that he wants to avoid indicating specifically who is making these wrong assumptions. Then, whom does Plutarch in truth attack here: Polyneices or Euripides? Plutarch plays with the ‘doubleness’ of ‘he’, moving between poet and character according to his rhetorical needs. The problem of identifying who is Plutarch’s ‘ally’ or ‘target’ in his criticism is also traced in the following denouncement of Polyneices’ lines (or, of what is presented as Polyneices’ view in the tragedy): “πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ οὐ δούλου τὸ ‘μὴ λέγειν ἅ τις φρονεῖ’, ἀλλὰ νοῦν ἔχοντος ἀνδρὸς ἐν καιροῖς καὶ πράγμασιν ἐχεμυθίας καὶ σιωπῆς δεομένοις” (‘In the first place it is not a slave’s part ‘not to speak one’s mind,’ but that of a man of sense on occasions and in matters that demand silence and restraint of speech’) (606A) – and he also gives historical examples of exiles, such as Theodorus, Diogenes, or Hannibal who stood up for themselves and did not fear any ruler (606B-C).

In contrast to the earlier instance where Plutarch ‘corrected’ Euripides by using another poet (599D-E), here he amends his sayings by using Euripides himself, words written by him in a different play, in his *Ino*. This should support the point, which I have made

elsewhere,<sup>37</sup> that Plutarch is not hostile to Euripides or tragic poetry as a whole, but selects and comments on passages in his various essays according to his argument and to the objectives of the specific topic under discussion. So, in this case Plutarch finds more suitable Euripides' words in *Ino*, because they support his own view that silence is not one of the compelling restrictions of banishment but a wise choice in certain cases:

σιγᾶν θ' ὅπου δεῖ καὶ λέγειν ἵν' ἀσφαλές.<sup>38</sup> (Eur., *Ino*, frag. 413.2)

Keep silent where there is a need, and speak where speech is safe. (606A)

This second quotation from Euripides is certainly of a more general character than the lines by Polyneices where he emphasises his misfortunes caused by exile. Immediately after siding with the tragic poet, Plutarch returns to the first extended citation to rebut it. Contrary to what Polyneices asserts (v. 393), it is a general convention – and thus not only a restriction which is associated exclusively with banishment – that one has to bear the stupidity of the mighty. Plutarch takes his argument to the limit here. He assumes that the city goes through political upheavals which the exile will avoid by going away, although it must be acknowledged that local political strife can be at times the cause for one being driven to exile. Then, he presents only half the truth, since it is true that the exile will have no longer any obligations towards his home town, but he avoids saying that the exile will probably have no rights as a citizen in his new city either. Plutarch manipulates the facts as he manipulates his (tragic) material so as to serve the casuistic purposes of his argument.

In chapter 16, which is impressively rich in quotations from the *Phoenissae*, Plutarch continuously switches from the poet to the character when commenting on the citations. At 606D he cites another couple of verses from the dialogue between Polyneices and Jocasta, but this time he presents them as Euripides' lines (“τὰ δ' ἐξῆς τοῦ Εὐριπίδου”). The lines are taken from the same part of the play, almost following the lines quoted before:

– αἱ δ' ἐλπίδες βόσκουσι φυγάδας, ὥς λόγος.

– καλοῖς βλέπουσί γ' ὄμμασιν, μέλλουσι δέ. (Phoen. 396-397)

<sup>37</sup> See esp. chap. 2, p. 51 (with the references given there), as well as my remarks on *How a young man...* (chap. 1, pp. 20-21 and 34), an essay with clearly more 'programmatic' value concerning the use of tragic poetry.

<sup>38</sup> The same quotation is found again at 506C of *Concerning talkativeness*, where Plutarch uses the same line to exalt the importance of silence as opposed to talkativeness.



Joc. Exiles, they say, live on hopes.

Pol. Yes, hopes with loveliness in their glance but delay in their step. (606D)

Interestingly, as Plutarch proceeds into his analysis of the difficulties, or rather the supposed difficulties, which banishment carries for the person who is forced to leave his own land, he returns to Euripides' treatment of the effects of exile in the *Phoenissae*, and quotes extensively from the famous dialogue between Jocasta and Polyneices about power (*Phoen.* 357-442). Yet, in the following quotation from the same play he deftly changes his target, focusing now on the tragic characters themselves:

– φίλοι δὲ πατρός καὶ ξένοι σ' οὐκ ὠφέλουν;

– εὖ πρῶσσε· τὰ φίλων δ' οὐδέν, ἦν τις δυστυχῇ.

– οὐδ' ἡύγενεία σ' ἦρεν εἰς ὕψος μέγα;

– κακὸν τὸ μὴ ἔχειν· τὸ γένος οὐκ ἔβασκέ με. (*Phoen.* 402-405)

Joc. But did your father's foreign friends not help you?

Pol. You must prosper: Friends vanish if your luck turns sour.

Joc. And did your birth not raise you high?

Pol. Poverty is a curse; my lineage did not feed me. (606E)

Plutarch attacks the tragic character here, reproaching him with ingratitude (“ταῦτ' ἤδη καὶ ἀχάριστα” – 606E), and, as he did before with the tragic poet (606A), he suggests that the reader pays attention to other lines which are closer to the truth. For, in contrast to this declaration of *ἀφιλία* and to the expression of his complaint and bitterness that he is left alone (vv. 402-405, see 606E, above), the Euripidean character himself admits a few lines later that he indeed has friends, thus contradicting himself:

πολλοὶ δὲ Δαναῶν καὶ Μυκηναίων ἄκροι

πάρεσι, λυπρὰν χάριν, ἀναγκαίαν δ', ἐμοὶ

διδόντες.

(*Phoen.* 430-432)

Many nobles of Argos and Mycenae are here,

rendering me a favour that I need but that

brings me pain.

(606F)

One notices that tragic citations are embedded in Plutarch's argument. In both the previous set of quotations (606D-E) and here, he corrects Euripides and Polyneices by using Euripides and Polyneices themselves, respectively. Thus he manages both to demonstrate his ability to see (from an authorial distance) the truth among the different – and occasionally misleading – views that poet and character express in the *Phoenissae*, and to create an image of Polyneices which presents him at times as individually 'responsible' for his views and at times as the mouthpiece of the poet. When that is the case, then Polyneices emerges as the example *par excellence* for an exile, since his individual thoughts and ideas become the basis on which Euripides develops his general stance towards the issue of exile. In addition, the manipulation of the quotations by Plutarch appears to reflect the manipulation of the individual perspectives and experiences of Polyneices and Jocasta to present them as the standard mindset concerning exile. Plutarch warns his reader and points out how distorted and misleading the views of the two tragic characters may be, and how important it is to understand that their views are defined by their personal experiences – and this is a significant part of Plutarch's contribution.

The same approach is evident also in the next citation:

ἐγὼ δέ σοι οὔτε πῦρ ἀνῆψα

νόμιμον ἐν γάμοις,

ἀνυμέναια δ' Ἰσμηνὸς ἐκηδεύθη

λουτροφόρου χλιδᾶς.

(*Phoen.* 344-348)

I did not kindle for you the blazing torch

that custom requires in marriages.

[345-6]

The Ismenus River<sup>39</sup> made this alliance

without the luxurious bath.<sup>40</sup>

(606F)

The comment which follows on the lines, quoted above and spoken by Jocasta, shows Plutarch's disapproval of Jocasta's lamentations about not having a torch to light on her

<sup>39</sup> Ismenus was the river in Thebes from which the water for the bridegroom's ritual bath was taken.

<sup>40</sup> In these lines there are several discrepancies between the Plutarchan and the Euripidean text. At l. 344 the text by Euripides reads: "ἐγὼ δ' οὔτε σοι πυρὸς ἀνῆψα φῶς", and in the next line: "νόμιμον [ἐν γάμοις], ὡς πρέπει μητέρι μακαρίᾳ".

son's wedding day. Plutarch's argument that both water and fire would certainly be available in Argos, as almost everywhere, and therefore they would also be available to Polyneices for his royal wedding, addresses the text only at its most superficial level, but at the same time it may reflect trends in Greek philosophy, such as Stoicism, or Cynicism. For in philosophy, and especially according to stoic doctrines, happiness can be achieved independently from material goods (represented here by water and fire). With these reproaches against Jocasta and Polyneices chapter 16 comes full circle, since it started and finished with verses from the play that is so familiar by now, the *Phoenissae*.<sup>41</sup> As already seen, it is a chapter where Plutarch engages in a more detailed discussion of tragic verses than usual to advertise the truth which he himself, as a moral philosopher, knows and defends. Significantly, in chapter 16 we have both a warning against poetic depictions and a use made of them, to show how wrong the characters can be. Whether Plutarch's target at each case is the poet or the character, the readers are encouraged to be aware that poetic depictions may have dangerous consequences if applied to one's actual life; the awareness as a response to the authorial warnings and advice will lead them finally towards a philosophical evaluation of exile.

As we have seen, at several instances of this essay Plutarch not only rebuts sayings by (characters or) poets, such as Euripides, for being misleading and dangerous as a guide for life, but he also adjusts sayings by poets and philosophers so that they may serve his argument.<sup>42</sup> Such is the case for example, when he argues that any land can become our native land. He remembers 'the wise and useful' Pythagorean precept 'choose the best life, and familiarity will make it pleasant' and changes it into his own maxim 'choose the best and most pleasant city, and time will make of it your native land' ("ἐλοῦ πόλιν τὴν ἀρίστην καὶ ἡδίστην, πατρίδα δὲ αὐτὴν ὁ χρόνος ποιήσει", 602C) – again using here a technique which he advocates in *How a young man...*(cf. pp. 39-40) . Since life in a native land often is accompanied by many duties which one has to fulfil for the sake of the state, the life in a quieter and smaller place can be politically calmer and of better quality (see also p. 84 on 606A).

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Helmbold and O'Neil (see also above, p. 73, and n. 12).

<sup>42</sup> For more on the philosophical background of the essay see Barigazzi (1966), and Opsomer (2002).

The examples that he gives here are again extreme examples designed to emphasise the point; he mentions two islands, Gyaros and Cinaros, which are very small and dry, their land being described in a quotation, again from a tragic play:

σκληρὰν, ἄκαρπον, καὶ φυτεύεσθαι κακὴν (TGF, adesp., frag. 393)

Rocky, unfit for corn or vine or tree. (602C)

Notably, this last quotation, in contrast, for example, to those from the *Phoenissae*, is not part of Plutarch's polemic against wrong or dangerous views on banishment, but is smoothly incorporated into the author's analysis. The line is from an unknown play and is not clearly identified, since the name of the poet and the play's title are missing, or perhaps not given by a conscious choice of the author. The choice of the two examples that Plutarch gives is striking; the two islands (Gyaros and Cinaros) are the outmost places for one to dwell, and both were places of Roman exile<sup>43</sup> – just as before Polyneices was treated as a typical example for an exile, whereas he too is rather an exception, and an extreme case. However, the quotation manages to support Plutarch's argument that, even in places of no fame and importance, one can lead a decent and prosperous life.

Happiness should not be measured by physical measures, for example by the actual size of a city or an island, but by more general and perhaps philosophical criteria, especially if we think that our mortal life is a 'journey', with our souls being exiled from Heaven and Moon (607D) – all together, a very Empedoclean idea (cf. e.g. Emped. DK B115, which is partly quoted at 607C). Plutarch again gives his work a philosophical cast by detaching happiness from external superficial goods. Yet these philosophical thoughts are in a way dictated by the pragmatic purposes of his essay (a letter of consolation). Plutarch transfers both his addressee and his general reader to philosophy as a mindset and as a genre (in the manner of e.g. Seneca's *Epistles*).

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Sen. *Cons. Helv.* 6.4, Juven. 1.73. The Stoic philosopher Musonius Rufus was sent to Gyaros by Nero and later again by Vespasian – Pisani (1992), 467.

The point about conceiving life on earth as a journey is introduced just before with a citation of a tragic line by Aeschylus and makes the point that even Apollo was exiled from heaven:

ἀγνόν τ' Ἀπάλλω φυγάδ' ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ θεόν (Aesch., *Suppl.* 214)

And pure Apollo, god exiled from heaven. (607C)

The quotation, carrying again Empedoclean resonances (cf. Emped. DK A31; see also above, p. 88), alludes to the prologue of Euripides' *Alcestis*, where Apollo explains how he ended up being a slave in Admetus' palace.<sup>44</sup> Plutarch passes no comment on this saying, or rather prefers silence as the best comment to Aeschylus' lines ('εὔστομά μοι κείσθω' καθ' Ἡρόδοτον – 'let my lips be sealed', in the words of Herodotus, 607C).<sup>45</sup> His silence could imply several things: it could mean that he agrees completely with the tragic poet, fully adopting his point as his own, or it could exemplify Plutarch's pious treatment of the divine; in that case, it may not be a silence of awkwardness (i.e. he has nothing to add to Aeschylus' saying) but a pious silence to create authority. The silence is interesting from another perspective, too, in that it casts a revealing light on his authorial relationship with Herodotus: taking into account that Plutarch wrote an essay against Herodotus ("Περὶ τῆς Ἡροδότου κακοηθείας"), the reader is surprised that here Plutarch stands in agreement with the historian, but then perhaps it is just another confirmation that he uses authors pragmatically as it suits him. In any case, the tragic quotation, which implies a kind of 'divine exile', makes Plutarch's point about 'human exile' more convincing and efficient. So, his addressee, as every reader, could be comforted by thinking that, since also gods are subject to exile, men should not consider banishment to be an unfair and unbearable adversity in life.

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<sup>44</sup> The story goes that Zeus punished Apollo because he killed the three Cyclopes to take revenge for the death of his son, Asclepius, whom Zeus had killed because he had brought back to life a dead person. Apollo plays a significant role in *Alcestis*, not only for the denouement of the story, but also as a symbol of light, juxtaposed to Death, who is also a prominent figure in the drama.

<sup>45</sup> It refers to Hdt. 2.171.2, a phrase which the historian uses when he refers to Egyptian mysteries and to the Greek Thesmophoria, in honour of Demeter. The phrase is repeated at 636E of *Table Talk* and at 417C of *On the obsolescence of oracles*, just before Plutarch quotes the same line (from Aeschylus) as here, at 607C: interestingly, in that essay Plutarch is dismissive of the Aeschylean line, claiming that tales of concealment, banishment and servitude concern only demigods and not gods.

The two consecutive citations from Aeschylus' *Niobe* at 603A illustrate even more clearly Plutarch's point, by emphasising that all human affairs are much less important than divine affairs, and that no physical measurements can be applied to happiness. In contrast to those quotations discussed earlier (602A, 602C), in this case Plutarch gives some more details about the lines, mentioning the name of the character who speaks and the genre to which the work belongs ("τοῦ Ταντάλου λέγοντος ἐν τῇ τραγωδίᾳ"). The choice of the lines is not accidental, and their function does not (only) serve aesthetic purposes, as the specifics of the text are important for a fuller understanding of Plutarch's argument. As he did before with Polyneices (and Jocasta), now too he wants the reader to think in specific terms about Tantalus and all the connotations which the character carries with him:

σπείρω δ' ἄρουραν δώδεχ' ἡμερῶν ὁδόν,

Βερέκυνθα χῶρον

(*Niobe*, frag. 158.1-2)

The field I sow is twelve days' journey long,

the Berecynthian land.

(603A)

The passage is striking for its (deliberate) hyperbole. Tantalus' extreme wealth, though not the reason for his punishment in Hades, forebodes his downfall. However, the spirit is slightly different at 778B of *On the fact that a philosopher ought most of all to converse with leaders*, where these lines reappear. The point there is that the philosopher should approach rich and powerful men only when these men use their resources for the common good and never if they aim at selfish ends.

In the lines that are quoted together with these at 603A Tantalus appears to have learned his lesson – another quotation from the same play:

οὐμὸς δὲ πότημος οὐρανῷ κυρῶν ἄνω<sup>46</sup>

ἔραζε πίπτει καὶ με προσφωνεῖ τάδε·

γίνωσκε τὰνθρώπεια μὴ σέβειν ἄγαν;

(*Niobe*, frag. 159)

My fate, while reaching upward to the skies,

falls to the earth, and speaks these words to me:

Learn not to honour human things too much.

(603A)

<sup>46</sup> In Aeschylus the first three words read: "θυμὸς ποθ' ἀμὸς".

The last line makes again the point about the superiority of the divine to the human element. Plutarch continues to give a philosophical dimension to his treatise which matches perfectly its real goals as a letter of consolation (*παραμυθητικὸς λόγος*).<sup>47</sup>

At 604D-E Plutarch traces a paradox, a contradiction between Euripidean words and deeds. It is well known, he says, that Euripides wrote an encomium of his native land, Athens, but with his decision to move to Macedonia and to spend the last years of his life at the court of King Archelaus, he actually, in a way, refuted his own encomium. At this point Plutarch combines two Euripidean quotations from different tragic plays – yet they are very close concerning their content – producing one of the longest quotations of this essay, and generally of all his essays (nine lines, in total):

ἥ πρώτα μὲν λεῶς οὐκ ἐπακτὸς ἄλλοθεν,  
αὐτόχθονες δ' ἔφυμεν· αἱ δ' ἄλλαι πόλεις,  
πεσσῶν ὁμοίως διαφορηθεῖσαι βολαῖς,<sup>48</sup>  
ἄλλαι παρ' ἄλλων εἰσὶν εἰσαγώγιμοι. (Erechth., frag. 360.7-10)

εἰ δὴ πάρεργον χρή τι κομπάσαι, γύναι,  
οὐρανὸν ὑπὲρ γῆς ἔχομεν εὖ κεκραμένον,  
ἴν' οὔτ' ἄγαν πῦρ οὔτε χεῖμα συμπίτνει·  
ἂ δ' Ἑλλάς Ἀσία τ' ἐκτρέφει κάλλιστα, γῆν  
δέλεαρ ἔχοντες τῇνδε, συνθηρεύομεν. (TGF, frag. 981)

Where, first, the people are no immigrants  
but native to the soil; all other cities,  
disrupted once, as in the game, have been  
pieced out by importation from abroad.  
If, lady, you permit a passing boast,  
the sky above our land is temperate,  
where neither comes excess of heat nor cold,  
and we join in the chase of all the fairest fruits of Greece and Asia,  
having this land as bait. (604D-E)

<sup>47</sup> The term refers back to the Sophists of the 4<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C., who introduced a *τέχνη ἀλυπίας* – Caballero and Viansino (1995), 11.

<sup>48</sup> In Euripides the line ends: “...διαφοραῖς ἐκτισμέναι”.

Euripides exalts the virtues of Athens and Attica, his own native land, but the reality of his decision to depart from there shows that he could after all also bear living a life away from it. At this point we notice that Plutarch moves from commenting on Euripidean verses to commenting on the life of the poet itself, offering the same kind of *ad hominem* argument against the poet which, as we saw earlier, he offered against the character Polyneices (since also in the tragic character's life he detected a discrepancy between words and practice) (cf. 606E-F). The characters who speak in the two citations above are here supposed to declare the view of the tragic poet about his own *patris*. The quoted verses, a hymn to Athens, serve here as a proof to Plutarch's argument that no eulogy of one single native land is to be justified; and Euripides stands as the striking proof to that. So, although in this case Plutarch, again, does not support the view which the Euripidean lines suggest, the actual life of the poet offers him the example he needs to emphasise the relative significance of what is called 'native land' and suggest to his readers that what they may call 'native land' is of no actual importance towards achieving prosperity and virtue, and gaining fame.

The use of tragic quotations in this essay shows how Plutarch can both exploit and criticise tragedy, at times even weaving out of diverse tragic quotations a sustained argument about exile. The differing degrees of thoughtfulness required by different quotations challenge the readers to follow closely the argument and recall the specific context of the quotations, or just evaluate their general value. Although not explicitly, Plutarch both rejects and embraces tragic sayings according to the specific requirements of his argument and rhetoric. The readers are guided to re-read Euripides (and re-evaluate Polyneices' words) through Plutarch's filter. Plutarch's strategy in *On Exile* agrees with his general attitude towards poetry, as expressed, for example, in the *How a young man...* (see chapter 1), where he encourages the readers not to imitate what poetry dictates but instead to be critical of it before applying poetic suggestions to their life.

The role of philosophy in this essay aligns, too, with the pre-eminent role of philosophy in Plutarch's works. The philosophical attitude and thinking in life (here,



suggested both to the exile and to the general reader) is a main thought-line in Plutarch. Philosophy is, after all, a generic choice and mindset, and as such it is preferred to 'tragic' thinking, which may depict sides of the truth but cannot possibly be compared to the paramount philosophical truths. In addition, the essay transcends its advertised pragmatic purposes to gain timelessness.<sup>49</sup> Yet, this timelessness does not only derive from the philosophical background and suggestions; it also emerges through the timeless wisdom of the tragedians who are quoted – and this is perhaps why tragedy is found so valuable in other works of Plutarch as well – and through the issues (such as exile, the value of homeland and friendship) which they addressed and Plutarch still addresses here, in this letter of consolation which has no longer just a pragmatic target and a contemporary audience.

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<sup>49</sup> Different aspects of timelessness in Pelling (1995a), (2000a), 58-60, (2002b)=(2002a), 253-265 (esp. 261-262).

#### **4. Tragedy and Theatre in the *Table Talk***

##### **Introduction**

“Symptotic dialogues are distinct from other kinds of philosophical dialogue because of the mark left on them by the background against which they are supposed to take place. They adopt the relaxed atmosphere of this background, the agreeable tone and nature of the topics discussed, the variety of different voices and that perfect blend of discipline and freedom which guides the course of the conversation and of events, and which always leaves an opening for something unexpected or spontaneous to happen. Plutarch’s symptotic writings are in similar vein”.<sup>1</sup>

Indeed in the *Table Talk*, which consists of nine books, there is a great variety of topics discussed (philosophical, scientific, religious, issues concerning the character and emotions of men and women, and, as expected, the layout of dinners as well as food, of course). The great range of topics is one of the aspects in which Plutarch’s symposium deviates from the previous symposia tradition. Plato’s *Symposium* is a profound discussion of a single (if complex) philosophical issue; Xenophon’s *Symposium*, which was presumably influenced by Plato, is a more circumstantial account of a symposium focusing on one person, Socrates. In contrast Plutarch’s *Table Talk* is distinguished by the variety of topics which it examines, since it touches upon all kinds of everyday matters, also sometimes trivial matters, such as for example, ‘why men are hungrier in autumn’ (635A-D), ‘whether a variety of food is more easily digested than one kind alone’ (660D-664A), ‘why sailors draw water from the Nile before daybreak’ (725A-725E), etc.<sup>2</sup> Plutarch’s symposium does not just present a gathering for drinking and

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<sup>1</sup> Lukinovich (1994), 264.

<sup>2</sup> Teodorsson (1989) sees in Plutarch’s *Table Talk* the confluence of two different genres, the symposium and the collections of problems (p. 12) – about the genre of *problems* in Plutarch see Harrison (2000). Concerning the tradition of symposia which may have influenced Plutarch in composing this work, Teodorsson lists as possible models Aristoxenus’ “Σύμμικτα συμποτικά”, Perseus’ “Συμποτικοὶ διάλογοι” or “Συμποτικά ὑπομνήματα”, and Didymus’ (“Σύμμικτα”) “συμποσιακά”, whereas Plutarch himself mentions

entertainment, an event of social and cultural importance, but it becomes for both author and reader an event of educational character;<sup>3</sup> it is a mirroring of and a contribution to *paideia*.

Philosophy and literature have certainly a prominent role to play in this *paideia*. Various aspects of poetry and theatre also come into discussion, such as, what is considered to be an appropriate and which an inappropriate quotation from the poets at drinking-parties (736D-737C), or, how old competition in poetry is (674D-675D), or even the intriguing question ‘why we take pleasure in hearing actors represent anger and pain but not in seeing people actually experience these emotions’ (673C-674C). In this kind of poetic context, but also in the whole of the *Table Talk*, Plutarch cites tragic plays in order to support his argument and reinforce the discussion, thus borrowing sometimes the gravity of tragedians’ words and at the same time their poetical authority.<sup>4</sup>

In addition, theatre also functions as a metaphor, as a way to talk about the character of a drinking-party, about what characteristics such a gathering should, or, rather, should not have. Amusement and spectacle are allowed as long as they accomplish the party’s aim which, according to Plutarch, is the creation of new friendships (621C: “ἀλλὰ καὶ λόγοις καὶ θεάμασι καὶ παιδιαῖς δώσει τόπον ἐκείνοις μόνοις, ὅσα πρὸς τὸ συμποτικὸν τέλος ἐξικνεῖται”).<sup>5</sup> At 621B-C a participant – whom Plutarch may possibly in this case use as his mouthpiece – compares the image of the banquet-room to theatrical environment; the point being made is that a symposium should not become a gaming-establishment or a stage or a dancing-floor, and it is the symposiarch’s duty to make sure this does not happen: “εὐκρατον δέ μοι δοκεῖ τοιοῦτος ὢν τὸ συμπόσιον διαφυλάξειν ἡμῶν καὶ μὴ περιόψεσθαι

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Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, Speusippus, Epicurus, Prytanis, Hieronymus, and Dio of the Academy as authors of symposiac works (612D-E) – cf. Teodorsson, ib. Since we only have the titles, and in some cases also a few fragments of these works, it is very difficult to extract safe conclusions as to the degree of their influence on Plutarch’s *Table Talk*. In other authors of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D., such as Gellius and Athenaeus, the mix of the two genres seemed a comfortable one, too; in Gellius there is a great variety of topics in philosophy, history, law, as well as literary and textual criticism, and Athenaeus displays a mass of disparate material together with a conversational style (cf. Pelling (2000b), 172).

<sup>3</sup> See Scarcella (1998), 14 ff., esp. p. 18, and Vetta (1992), 177 ff. on the particularity of Plutarch’s symposium.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Cannata Fera (1996), 419.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Paul (1991), 157.

νῦν μὲν ἐκκλησίαν δημοκρατικὴν νῦν δὲ σχολὴν σοφιστοῦ γιγνομένην αὖθις δὲ κυβευτήριον εἴτα που σκηνὴν καὶ θυμέλην. ἥ γὰρ οὐχ ὁρᾷτε τοὺς μὲν δημαγωγοῦντας καὶ δικάζομένους παρὰ δειπνόν, τοὺς δὲ μελετῶντας καὶ ἀναγιγνώσκοντας αὐτῶν τινα συγγράμματα, τοὺς δὲ μίμοις καὶ ὀρχησταῖς ἀγωνοθετοῦντας;” (621B-C – cf. 713F). In this context the vocabulary related to performance and spectacle (“σκηνήν”, “θυμέλην”) is of central importance. The words “σκηνήν” and “θυμέλην” point to the stage and set an image of conduct which should not be applied to the banquet-room. Significantly, at 621C Plutarch gives a definition of the symposium: ‘the drinking-party is a passing of time over wine which, guided by gracious behaviour, ends in friendship’. There is also a less obvious use of theatre at 621B-C, quoted above; one notices, for example, the words “μίμοις” and “ὀρχησταῖς” in a disapproving reference to people who organise shows with dancers and mimes (621C – cf. 672B). The governing principle is propriety. Plutarch rejects what he considers as improper (undignified shows with mimes and dancers) for the purposes of a banquet and defining the limits which such a gathering should not exceed.

Yet at 715D, where the point is solely about technical skill and its quality, dancing and music, as parts of a drinking-party, are thought of as resembling and being of the same quality as in theatre (“ὁρῶντας ὀρχηστάς τε καὶ κιθαριστάς οὐδέν τι χεῖρον ἐν συμποσίοις ἢ θεάτροις πράττοντας”). One notes that in that case theatre has no bad connotations as such; just the opposite: it is used as a term of comparison which should prove the high quality of similar activities taking place at a symposium.<sup>6</sup> Here, as we have already seen especially in our chapter on *How to tell a flatterer from a friend*, Plutarch sways between two sides of theatre, the one that suggests acceptable kinds of entertainment and displays educational objectives, and the other one which, if transferred to real-life contexts, implies disingenuous behaviour, and therefore requires higher levels of judgement in order for it not to become dangerous for the reader. This double use of ‘theatre’ is evident not only in theatrical allusions or metaphors, but also in tragic quotations, as will be shown.

<sup>6</sup> See Scarcella (1998), 262, who also compares the image of the banquet-room at 621B-C and at 715D, with that in Xenophon’s *Symposium* (II, 1 ff.), where the judgement is quite different.

Quotations in this essay are chosen for their appositeness and efficiency in their immediate context, or for their ‘economical’ way of processing an argument, in the sense that poetical sayings often offer a good summary of what a person of the dialogue wants to argue. Apart from the authority which tragic quotations offer Plutarch, they are frequently employed as embellishment, just as a stylistic adornment, embedded in the discussion.<sup>7</sup> The focus on the immediate effect in the use of literary quotations is also reflected in the absence of a detailed discussion of the text cited. The point is reinforced if we take into consideration the fact that in this essay Plutarch refers to tragic poets or tragedy as a genre, and only seldom to tragic characters – a small but significant pointer to the way that readers or listeners are not encouraged to contextualise the quotation in the original play. Moreover, quotations are here quite specific, in the sense that they are used to highlight individual issues and each of them is distinctive in itself; there is often no thematic or dramatic link between them.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Plutarch appears less agonistic concerning his ‘competition’ with the tragic poets, yet in his, as in every, symposium, the competitive spirit is an important element.<sup>9</sup> Participants exchange views on various and random issues, while trying to defend and establish their opinion by citing a well-known poet; thus they occasionally may seem to be engaged in a dramatic *agon*.<sup>10</sup> In this way tragic quotation becomes part of, or, rather, contributes to the epideictic character of their conversation – one can talk of a ‘capping’ competition which naturally takes place in *symposia*, between participants.<sup>11</sup>

The last remark becomes even more interesting, if we compare the *Table Talk* with other essays of Plutarch, such as *On Exile* (discussed in chapter 3). In the latter – as in other, more focused essays as well – quotations have a structural role. This means that the understanding of the argument presupposes a close reading of quotations; the readers can

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. e.g. Di Gregorio (1976), 168, and de Wet (1988), 19-20.

<sup>8</sup> The topics of discussion are diverse and can change abruptly, as can also the place where the dialogue takes place, and of course the dramatic *personae*, too.

<sup>9</sup> Singing and drinking competitions as well as various games like the *kottabos* (κότταβος) used to take place at drinking-parties; cf. Athenaeus, *Deipnos*. 15.665d-668c. See also Sparkes (1960).

<sup>10</sup> On the different parts and the structure of the symposium see Scarcella (1998), 14 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Other parallels for ‘capping’ e.g. in Aristophanes’ *Wasps* (1224-1248, and 1309 ff.) – cf. MacDowell (1971) – and *Birds* 803-808, and in Seneca’s *Apocol.* 5.4. Also in Plato: *Men.* 80a-c, *Symp.* 215a4-b4 – cf. Dover (1980), 164.

follow Plutarch's reasoning only if they pause to reflect upon the role of the quotations cited and engage critically with text and intertext. In essays with a coherent subject and a conspicuous philosophical (*On exile*) or literary approach (*How a young man...*) Plutarch demands that his reader should be more flexible and responsive. Therefore, unsurprisingly, in *On exile* Plutarch is more prone to engage critically, for example, with what Jocasta or Polyneices says about exile (cf. 605F-606A, 606D, 606E-F), and the actual quotations are here substantial for the argument which he goes on to make. In contrast, the sympotic setting, with all its particularities, does not favour either the development of a coherent sustained argument or a systematic treatment of a topic, hence in this essay a sequence of quotations does not serve a single strategic function.

In each book ten questions are posed and the interlocutors (Plutarch, his relatives, and friends), who vary in each case, attempt to answer them.<sup>12</sup> The *Table Talk* is presented by Plutarch; he is the person who tells the story, reporting the discussions held at each instance, but, apart from the use of reported speech and of the first person, actual dialogue (or, rather, what is supposed to have been a true dialogue) between different characters is also present. As one would expect, the use of dialogue, as well as the different *personae* at each conversation make the narration more vivid and add to it a certain amount of theatrical value and staginess – the point is also made by Lukinovich in the opening passage of this chapter (p. 94).<sup>13</sup> Thus we have two levels which are interlinked: the banquet as context for the discourse and the discourse as concerning the banquet.<sup>14</sup> It is important to notice here that the various tragic citations are not all put in the mouth of Plutarch but are uttered by the various dramatic *personae*.<sup>15</sup> So, sometimes we come across the use of a 'quotation within quotation' – quite a common pattern, e.g. Plutarch quotes, for example, Theon on quoting Euripides (622A). The use of multiple

<sup>12</sup> The only exception is book 9, which is devoted to the Muses and contains fifteen questions.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Lukinovich (1994), 266, where she points out that the dialogue form, in contrast to the simple narration without dialogue, may give the fictional impression that a variety of voices has been recorded 'live', in a given context which is itself included in the narrative. Both Zanetto (2000a) and Van der Stockt (2000b) discuss the dialogue as a dramatic element in the *Corpus Plutarcheum* – cf. also Ziegler (1949), 253-255, Barigazzi (1988), Bracero (1996), and D'Ippolito (1996b). About the use of dialogue in Plato and its (general) advantages, see R. B. Rutherford (1995), 7-15.

<sup>14</sup> Lukinovich (1994), 266.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, 643F, 655A, 657D, 665C, 718A, 737A, 741A etc. Nikolaidis (1991) points out that we cannot always be certain which of the *dramatis personae* represents Plutarch's opinion (p. 154).

speakers and multiple perspectives may be responsible for the lack of a more sustained use of tragedy in building arguments – unlike, for example *On Exile*, which has a single voice.

Euripides is the most often quoted tragedian in Plutarch's work, twice as often as any other tragedian; this is also the case in this specific collection.<sup>16</sup> Yet surveying who is less quoted and why produces some striking results, even if we cannot always offer definite explanation for Plutarch's patterns. One is surprised by the rare references to comedy and lyric poetry in this collection.<sup>17</sup> Why is Aristophanes practically absent from these talks?<sup>18</sup> At 712B ff. one participant, Diogenianus, lists all good reasons for Menander to be present at a symposium. He emphatically expresses the view that it is possible for a symposium to be carried out without wine, but not without Menander (“οὕτω γὰρ ἐγκέκραται τοῖς συμποσίοις [sc. ἡ νέα κωμῳδία], ὥς μᾶλλον ἂν οἴνου χωρὶς ἢ Μενάνδρου διακυβερνήσῃ τὸν πότον”, 712B). Menander is also highly valued for his educational and edifying power, as well as for the positive influence it has on people's *ethos* over drinking (712D: “ἐν δὲ τῇ πίνειν οὐ θαυμάσαιμ' ἂν εἰ τὸ τερπνὸν αὐτῶν καὶ γλαφυρὸν ἅμα καὶ πλάσῃ τινὰ καὶ κατακόσμησιν ἐπιφέρει συνεξομοιοῦσαν τὰ ἥθη τοῖς ἐπεικέσι καὶ φιλανθρώποις” – ‘but over the wine-cups, I cannot regard it as surprising that Menander's polished charm exercises a reshaping and reforming influence that helps to raise morals to a higher standard of fairness and kindness’) – a remark, however, which is not reflected in the actual use of the comic poet in the *Table Talk*, since this is quite meagre.<sup>19</sup>

Similar is the case with lyric poetry. Despite the sympotic origin and focus of much lyric poetry,<sup>20</sup> and its congenial character for convivial conversations, lyric poets are much less

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<sup>16</sup> See Helmbold and O'Neil (1959). Actually, as the survey shows, in the *Table Talk* there are twice as many citations from or references to Euripides (twenty-two in total) as to Aeschylus and Sophocles together (twenty-one quotations).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *ib.*

<sup>18</sup> He is only cited twice (631D, 730B).

<sup>19</sup> In total we have nine references to Menander, but only three cases where he is actually quoted (666F, 706B, 739F).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Stehle (1997), who discusses examples from archaic lyric poetry (e.g. Alcaeus, Archilochus, Hipponax, Bacchylides, Anacreon), where the sympotic character is obvious.

quoted than tragic poets.<sup>21</sup> However, at 706B of the seventh book there is a significant reference to Euripides, Pindar and Menander; they are all used as model examples for good art, and praised for their educational value.<sup>22</sup> In the same book, at 711D, Philip, one of the participants, expresses his admiration for two lyric poets, Sappho and Anacreon (“ὅτε καὶ Σαπφούς ἂν ᾄδομένης καὶ τῶν Ἀνακρέοντος ἐγὼ μοι δοκῶ καταθέσθαι τὸ ποτήριον αἰδούμενος” – ‘Even when Sappho’s poems are sung, and Anacreon’s, I am moved to put down my cup respectfully’).<sup>23</sup> Both passages are part of a contradiction, or at least of a paradox: Menander, Sappho and Anacreon, who are here clearly shown much appreciation and admiration for their poetic value (together with Euripides and Pindar) and for their appropriateness for the sympotic context, are hardly cited in the *Table Talk*. The paradox emerges even more strikingly when a few lines later, at 711E, tragedy is considered to be highly inappropriate for a symposium due to ‘its majestic elocution and its elaborate representation of events that are moving and sorrowful’;<sup>24</sup> yet it is tragedy, and not comedy or lyric poetry, that is the genre which is so popular in the *Table Talk*.<sup>25</sup>

It comes to the reader’s surprise that tragedy (mainly Euripides), and not comedy, is preferred as the most appropriate material for one to refer to, no matter if, as already noted, discussions in this essay are often focused on convivial and trivial matters (drinking, food, arranging of the seating at a drinking-party, etc.). Plutarch locates his work within the didactic tradition of sympotic literature, and tragedy has certainly an

<sup>21</sup> Some references: Pindar: 617C, 623B, 643D-E, 704F-705A, 705F-706A, 706E, 745A, 746B, 747D; Sappho: 646E-F, 681B; Alcaeus: 647E, 726B; Alcman: 659B; Archilochus: 658B; Ibycus: 722D, 748C; Simonides: 722C, 743F. Apart from Pindar, all the other lyric poets are rarely called on; of the forty quotations from or references to lyric poetry, half concern Pindar – cf. de Wet (1988), 20-21 about Pindar’s popularity among all other lyric poets in both the Lives and the Essays. In contrast to the restricted use of lyric poetry, epic poetry, and especially Homer, is used in more than hundred cases.

<sup>22</sup> In the whole of the seventh book, and in particular in the discussion of the eighth question, preference is given to New Comedy and its main representative, Menander, over Old Comedy and Aristophanes – see esp. 712B above, where Diogenianus expresses his, rather exaggerated, admiration for Menander’s educational and moral contribution as well as charm. About the reasons for Plutarch’s preference for New Comedy over Old Comedy, see Van der Stockt (1992), 154-161. For an overview of the role of comedy in Plutarch (and about all the comic poets he quotes) see e.g. Zanetto (2000b).

<sup>23</sup> The two poets are also mentioned as dinner entertainment by Aulus Gellius (19.9.4) – C. P. Jones (1991), 192.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. C. P. Jones (1991), 192. It is Diogenianus who makes this remark; he is the one who more than anybody else in this dialogue supports comedy (Menander) against tragedy (712B ff.).

<sup>25</sup> For the importance of tragedy in the post-classical period see Garland (2004), esp. pp. 1-11, and 57-67, where Euripides’ popularity among all tragedians is stressed.



important part to play towards achieving the didactic goals of his symposium. The fact that in the opening book we have more quotations from tragedy than in any other book may also give a further importance to tragedy and to the role which Plutarch has reserved for theatre in this essay. It seems that Plutarch has an agenda, as it were, and tragedy fulfils the purposes of his agenda in this first book of the *Table Talk*, which, because of its position has inevitably a programmatic character. Thus apart from its importance concerning the scene setting, the opening book is also the place where Plutarch builds both his authority by using the tragedians, and his communication with the audience/reader through erudition. It is then perhaps part of his strategy that it is mainly he who in the first two books employs tragedy, whereas in all the other books it is mainly his interlocutors in whose mouth tragic quotations are put. This may be understood as an attempt of Plutarch both to emphasise himself the use of tragedy, already from the first books of the *Table Talk*, and to set himself and his own use of tragedy as an example which then others follow.

## Tragic quotations and theatrical imagery

Due to space limits I will only discuss two of the books of the *Table Talk*; book 1 has been chosen for the great number of tragic quotations employed in it, greater than in other books, and book 7 for its extensive use of theatrical metaphors. However, theatrical metaphors are also employed in book 1, and will be discussed below to show Plutarch's use of theatrical imagery to explore sympotic propriety.

### Table Talk, Book 1

In the introduction of this book Plutarch wishes to justify the task he undertakes, namely to recall, write down, and send to Sosius Senecio the discussions held in various places, both in Greece and in Rome, on various occasions, and at which Plutarch was present (612E). The fact that Plutarch chose Sosius Senecio as his dedicatee has its own significance.<sup>26</sup> He is a political figure who, presumably like many other educated men of his times, may display a great interest in a symposium, and generally in literary education – in a great range of topics, which however are not to be systematically and thoroughly examined. So, one could see in Sosius Senecio two worlds being brought together, the political and the cultural, exactly as those two worlds merge into one in the discussions of the *Table Talk*; thus the profile of the dedicatee mirrors the profile of the symposium.

The argument which Plutarch develops concerning the value of those conversations over dinner is a programmatic indication of didactic aim. On one hand one should forget the improprieties committed over drinking, but on the other hand one should remember the table conversations for they seem to be worthy of some attention, since important topics are discussed over them. The quotation at 612D from Euripides' *Orestes* (v. 213: "ὦ

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<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Athenaeus' *Deipnosophistae* is dedicated to Timocrates. Senecio was probably one of Plutarch's best Roman friends, to whom Plutarch dedicated his *Lives* and *Progress in virtue*, and who is an active participant of the *Table Talk* I 1, 5, II 1, 3, and IV 3. He was also a close friend of Trajan and one of the most eminent magistrates of his time. About Senecio see C. P. Jones (1970), 103, and (1971), 54-57, Puech (1992), esp. p. 4883, Swain (1996), 426-427, Stadter (2000), 496, and (2002), Stadter and Van der Stockt (2002), and Pelling (2004b), 407-408.

πότνια Λήθη τῶν κακῶν, ὡς εἶ σοφή”)<sup>27</sup> is adapted and is meant to support the first part of the argument, since Orestes also calls Lethe a wise goddess.<sup>28</sup> In this instance – in contrast to some other instances – the quotation is at least partly identified; the name of the tragic poet is provided by Plutarch (“κατ’ Εὐριπίδην”) and brought in to confirm his own view. The Plutarchan context does not make anything of any parallel or contrast; the more the reader thinks of the original context of the paraphrased quotation, the more he/she will be distracted from its point here. Plutarch’s actual words are:

(612D) ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ σοὶ δοκεῖ τῶν μὲν ἀτόπων ἢ λήθη τῷ ὄντι σοφὴ κατ’ Εὐριπίδην εἶναι, τὸ δ’ ὅλως ἀμνημονεῖν τῶν ἐν οἴνῳ μὴ μόνον τῷ φιλοποιῷ λεγομένῳ μάχεσθαι τῆς τραπέζης...

Since you too, Senecio, believe that forgetfulness of folly is in truth ‘wise’, as Euripides says, yet not to speak at all about all that occurs at a drinking-party is not only opposed to what we call the friend-making character of the dining-table...(612D).

Plutarch quotes Euripides to rebut him – following the established rhetorical procedure of *refutatio sententiae*.<sup>29</sup> In this case the more the reader thinks of the original context of the paraphrased quotation, the more he/she may be inclined to agree with Teodorsson who argues that this citation sits rather uneasily in the Plutarchan context here, as well as in the other instance when it is quoted, in *On curiosity* (522D).<sup>30</sup> First of all, Lethe was brought to Orestes not because of wine – as Plutarch implies by regarding wine as the cause of forgetfulness – but because of sleep; and secondly, the kind of Lethe, of which Plutarch speaks, concerns the forgetfulness of absurd things said over drinking, which the playful mood of a banquet allows (“τῶν ἀτόπων ἢ λήθη”), whereas the Lethe that came to Orestes was meant to make him forget shameful acts of the past (“λήθη τῶν κακῶν”).<sup>31</sup> Yet, if one considers the strategy which Plutarch follows by using tragic *gnomai* to claim for himself poetical authority,

<sup>27</sup> The line is fully quoted at 522D of *On curiosity*, where Plutarch describes curiosity as a disease, whereas the man who is freed from it and ignorant of something unpleasant is, he says, in a position to utter Orestes’ words (at v. 213) with contentment.

<sup>28</sup> An indirect reference to Dionysus, who was believed to be the son of Lethe (Forgetfulness). Cf. 705B, and the following pages for the position of Dionysus in the *Table talk* (pp. 105-106).

<sup>29</sup> More on this rhetorical feature in Easterling (1982), 72.

<sup>30</sup> The same opinion is shared by Scarcella (1998), ad loc.

<sup>31</sup> Teodorsson (1989), 34-35.

then the quotation-allusion fulfils its purpose. It all also goes hand in hand with his general desire to display his erudition, and thus enhance the authority of his programmatic statement, which is reinforced by the prominent use of tragic quotations in this first book of the *Table Talk* (cf. p. 101 above). Plutarch applies a ‘filtering’ process to tragic sayings ‘de-contextualising’ them and adapting them to the needs of their new context.

Early in the discussion of the first question, Plutarch presents the opinion of some men who think that it is inappropriate to introduce philosophy into a drinking-party, and therefore only allow music and performance in it:

(613A) καὶ τοὺς Πέρσας ὀρθῶς φασὶ μὴ ταῖς γαμεταῖς ἀλλὰ ταῖς παλλακίσι συμμιθέσκεσθαι καὶ συνορχεῖσθαι· ταῦτό δὴ καὶ ἡμᾶς ἀξιούσι ποιεῖν εἰς τὰ συμπόσια τὴν μουσικὴν καὶ τὴν ὑποκριτικὴν ἐπεισάγοντας φιλοσοφίαν δὲ μὴ κινούντας, ὥς οὔτε συμπαίξειν ἐκείνην ἐπιτήδειον οὔσαν οὔθ’ ἡμᾶς τηνικαῦτα σπουδαστικῶς ἔχοντας·

They commend the Persians for doing their drinking and dancing with their mistresses rather than with their wives; this they think we ought to imitate by introducing music and theatricals into our drinking-parties but not disturb philosophy. For they hold that philosophy is not a suitable thing to make sport with and that we are not on these occasions inclined to seriousness. (613A)

The anecdote presents the argument against which Plutarch and his interlocutors will argue in their discussion of ‘whether philosophy is a fitting topic for conversation at a drinking-party’.<sup>32</sup> It serves as the starting point for further discussion about the character of philosophical debates at drinking-parties (613A-C), the character of the guests (613D-E), etc. This statement could thus be suggestive that theatre (or, generally, performance – “ὑποκριτική”) is in a way ‘inferior’ to philosophy, or at least of more entertaining value, as

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<sup>32</sup> Given Plutarch’s views on marriage (in *Marriage Advice*) Plutarch would not approve of the custom, as he does not approve of the argument here either (613A) – cf. *Marriage Advice* 140B, and *Artaxerxes* 5.5, 26.6. On the relationship between philosophy and symposia see Schenkeveld (1996). Teodorsson (1989) points out the strange attribution of the custom to the Persians, and not to the Greeks, although Greeks did the same (p. 40); cf. Scarcella (1998), 262. He also remarks that Plutarch’s statement contradicts Hdt. 5.18, where it is said that both wives and mistresses took part in Persian banquets – however, he mistrusts Herodotus in this. For more on this Persian custom and on the role of wives and concubines at royal feasts see Brosius (1996), 94-104, esp. p. 94, and Schmidt (1999), 262 n. 12.

clearly music is, too.<sup>33</sup> But perhaps there is even more in this reference to ὑποκριτική; given that the argument is seen as wrong-headed it could be a hint that there are good and bad kinds of performance which, respectively, should or should not be brought into a symposium. So, again here the theatrical vocabulary allows Plutarch to make his point about propriety concerning a banquet. Moreover, taking into account that the word has also implications of pretence and falsehood,<sup>34</sup> Plutarch makes a further point, namely that one should not be pretending among friends, at gatherings of friends, as is the occasion of a symposium.

As the discussion of the role of philosophers at a drinking-party progresses, Plutarch uses tragic imagery for programmatic purposes, to describe their task and show the importance of their contribution to the banquet, while at the same time he makes a reference to Dionysus, who is a central figure at the symposium:<sup>35</sup>

(614A) ὥς γὰρ αἱ παρ' Εὐριπίδῃ μαινάδες ἄνοπλοι καὶ ἀσίδηροι τοῖς θυρσαρίοις παίουσαι τοὺς ἐπιτιθεμένους τραυματίζουσιν, οὕτω τῶν ἀληθινῶν φιλοσόφων καὶ τὰ σκώμματα καὶ οἱ γέλωτες τοὺς μὴ παντελῶς ἀτρώτους κινουῖσιν ἀμωσγέπως καὶ συνεπιστρέφουσιν.

Just as the Maenads in Euripides, without shield and without sword, strike their attackers and wound them with their little thyrsos, so true philosophers both<sup>36</sup> with their jokes and laughter somehow arouse men who are not altogether invulnerable and make them attentive. (614A)

The allusion is here to Euripides' *Bacchae*, where exactly this activity of the Maenads is described.<sup>37</sup> Plutarch draws here a simile between true philosophers and the Maenads of

<sup>33</sup> Plato is an obvious influence here. The question of what is appropriate to be discussed in a symposium and what kinds of entertainment should be allowed, including a reference to the role of women in entertainment, is examined in Plato's *Symposium*, too. Plutarch aligns himself with the philosopher – claiming also part of his authority – to show that a symposium, exactly as *his* symposium, is an important event for philosophical discussions.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. *Timol.* 14.4, and *How to tell a flatterer from a friend* 53E.

<sup>35</sup> References at: 612E, 636E, 647A ff., 654F, 657B, 657E, 671B ff., 675F ff., 676E, 680B, 683F, 710F, 714C, 715E, 717A, 738B, 741A, 745A.

<sup>36</sup> “Καὶ” could be understood here as meaning ‘both’ or ‘even’.

<sup>37</sup> “ἡμεῖς μὲν οὖν φεύγοντες ἐξηλύξαμεν/ βακχῶν σπαραγμόν, αἱ δὲ νεμομέναις χλόην/ μόσχους ἐπὶ ἤλθον χειρὸς ἀσιδήρου μέτα./ καὶ τὴν μὲν ἂν προσεῖδες εὐθελον πόριν/ μυκαμένην ἔλκουσαν ἐν χερσὶν δίχα./ ἄλλαι δὲ δαμάλας διεφόρου σπαράγμασιν” (*Bac.* 734-9) (‘We ran away and thereby escaped being torn to pieces by the bacchantes. But they, with no iron weapons in their hands, attacked some grazing cattle. You should have seen one of the women tearing asunder a bellowing fatted calf with her hands, while others tore heifers to pieces’). Importantly, the idea of philosophy as passion also occurs in Plato's *Symposium*.

Euripides, without using a word-by-word quotation from the tragic poet but summarising his description of the Maenads. The simile is meant to suggest that philosophers do not need to proceed to discussions of important philosophical questions to stir the attention or the conscience of those present at a drinking-party for they are able to practise philosophy in a less obvious way, when joking, making fun of others – even when remaining silent, or jesting (cf. 613F). Likewise, Euripides’ Maenads did not need to use shields and swords to strike and wound their attackers; they achieved that just with their *thyrsos*<sup>38</sup> – interestingly, Plutarch uses the diminutive (“θυρσαρίοις”) to diminish the means which were available to the Maenads; yet they were very effective.<sup>39</sup> Here Euripides offers again to Plutarch a succinct tragic image (akin to a *gnome*) which can make his programmatic statement about the role of philosophers more persuasive, although the reader is not meant to reflect upon the details of the original tragic context, but rather to understand the purposes of the simile for the discourse. Concerning Dionysus, the reference is here to his gentle side. Similarly, earlier, at 613D, and later, at 615A, Dionysus figures again as a gentle god. In him we can see a mirroring of the nature of tragedy, since he is, anyway, so closely connected with theatre. Dionysus can be the gracious, gentle god (*Meilichios*, and *Lysios* or *Eleuthereus* – cf. 716B) but also the furious, enraging god, exactly as tragedy can be good, educative and entertaining, but also dangerous if transferred, with all that it represents, to real-life contexts.<sup>40</sup>

The second question is about how should the seating of guests at a dinner-party be decided. There was an incident at one of Timon’s gatherings where a foreigner arrived after most of the guests had taken their places. Plutarch uses a theatrical image, taken from the context of comedy this time, to make a point about what is to be considered as appropriate or inappropriate behaviour in a symposium. The way the man entered the house was highly theatrical in a negative sense. He says, ‘he came to the door of the banquet room, like a grandee out of a comedy, rather absurd with his extravagant clothes and train of servants’ (“πολλῶν οὖν ἤδη παρόντων ξένος τις ὥσπερ εὐπάρυφος ἐκ κωμῆδίας, ἐσθῆτί τε περιττῇ καὶ ἀκολουθίᾳ παίδων ὑποσολοικότερος, ἤκεν ἄχρι τῶν θυρῶν τοῦ ἀνδρῶνος”,

<sup>38</sup> Cf. 655A and 672B for other references to the *thyrsos*.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Teodorsson (1989), 50.

<sup>40</sup> About a similar duality in meaning compare also *Antony* 24, discussed below, on p. 113.

615D). Theatrical imagery is employed here to signify the excessive and preposterous behaviour of the foreigner, with emphasis on his luxurious, extravagant clothes and on the large number of attendants.<sup>41</sup>

The image created by Plutarch has clearly a negative tone – note the language used, which has negative implications (“εὐπάρυφος” and “ὑποσολοικότερος”).<sup>42</sup> Not having found a seat worthy of him left, as the foreigner himself claimed, he decided to depart, even if some guests tried to convince him to stay. His attitude and final decision was greeted with joy and laughter; the Euripidean quotation, which is cited in the following lines, is carefully chosen by Plutarch, and we shall find reason to suspect that it is given new nuances in its new context:

(615D-E) ἐκεῖνον μὲν οὖν πολλῶ γέλωτι ‘χαίροντας εὐφημοῦντας ἐκπέμπειν δόμων’  
(Eur., *Cresphontes*, frag. 449.6) ἐκέλευον οἱ κατακείμενοι· καὶ γὰρ ἦσαν πολλοὶ  
μετρίως ὑποπεπωκότες.<sup>43</sup>

Thereupon the guests at table with much laughter urged them ‘With joy and cheering words send him from the house’, for there were many who had had a little something to drink. (615D-E)

There is a parallel incident in Plato’s *Symposium*, which may again be in Plutarch’s mind when he describes the scene with the foreigner – at 710C he explicitly refers to the scene. At 212c ff. Plato describes Alcibiades’ entrance into the gathering in a very similar tone; his extravagance and eccentric behaviour attracts suddenly the attention of all the participants. The parallel between this scene and Plutarch’s scene (described at 615D ff.) could be significant, since it offers, once more, evidence that Plato’s *Symposium* is generally at the background of the *Table Talk*. Yet Plato’s Alcibiades may also be a point of contrast with Plutarch’s foreigner (the protagonist of the incident) – almost a caricature-figure – since Alcibiades, despite his provocative entry, is eventually a

<sup>41</sup> For examples of disorderly conduct, excess and extravagance at banquets, as described in Plutarch’s *Lives* and in other historical writings see Paul (1991).

<sup>42</sup> Concerning the history of the word “εὐπάρυφος”, it is a word which initially denoted a fine robe with a purple border, and later described the very person who wore it. Cf. Teodorsson (1989), 65; he also rightly sees in the word “ὑποσολοικότερος” a deliberate understatement on Plutarch’s part.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Sen. *Apocol.* 4.2.

welcomed guest who has certainly an important contribution to make at the drinking-party.

The context in which the same quotation is employed becomes more challenging and significant at 36F of *How a young man...*, a programmatic essay where Plutarch attempts to guide the young people towards a careful reading of poetry. There, the line from Euripides' *Cresphontes* is quoted together with the two preceding lines (frag. 449.4-6: "τὸν φύντα θρηνεῖν εἰς ὅσ' ἔρχεται κακά,/ τὸν δ' αὖ θανόντα καὶ πόνων πεπαιμμένον/ χαίροντας εὐφημοῦντας ἐκπέμπειν δόμων" – 'To mourn the baby for the ills to which he comes; but him that is dead, and from his labours rests, to send from home with joy and cheering words'). So those two preceding lines are themselves enough to show that this context is very different from that of Timon's party, and that the party version turned some deep and sombre lines to a much more frivolous application. The citation does not serve any more just as part of an image, as at 615D-E, but instead signifies a substantial point of a more detailed and 'engaged' discussion, providing the reader with advice of particular philosophical value. Plutarch's argument there (36F) is that if a young man is already familiar with poetry, suggesting as it does general doctrines for life such as the ones implied in the quoted lines, then he will certainly be more perceptive of philosophical lessons later on in his life. In this specific case he will familiarise himself with the idea that death is not a misery – in Epicurus' words, 'death is nothing to us' (37A). Comparing it to the quotation in the *Table Talk*, it seems that in *How a young man...* the same Euripidean fragment attracts more of Plutarch's attention, and seems to play a structural role in his argument than to be just an embellishment, while emphasising the propaedeutic role of poetry towards a deeper understanding of philosophy. However one has to note the absence of clear identification of these lines in both essays.

A less 'neutral' theatrical reference, in the sense that it underplays the image of theatre, attracts our attention later, in the *Table Talk*'s same discussion of the second question. Plutarch's brother, when describing the role of the banquet host, refers, among other points, to the vanity of his task of allocating his guests, and to the ineptness, for the purposes of a dinner, of deciding who is more important than another, which is really as



if one were transferring empty fame from market-place and theatres to social gatherings (“ἀλλὰ τὴν κενὴν δόξαν ἐκ τῆς ἀγορᾶς καὶ τῶν θεάτρων εἰς τὰ συμπόσια μετέγοντα”, 616D). Although the reference to theatre comes into the discussion as only a term of comparison, it is suggestive that theatre is the place where conceit and selfishness are nourished. However, the phrase “κενὴν δόξαν” is ambiguous; is it referring to a somehow disingenuous attitude concerning the ‘placings’ in the audience, or is it suggestive of show and pretence on the actors’ side, while also making the point that there is pretence and emptiness in the agora, too (“τὴν κενὴν δόξαν ἐκ τῆς ἀγορᾶς”)?<sup>44</sup> Whatever the case may be, the phrase is pointing out what side of ‘theatre’ should certainly not be transferred into real-life contexts, thus emphasising the significant ambiguities and complexities of the usage of theatre and tragedy, in this essay and also generally.

In this long discussion of the second question another quotation, from Sophocles this time, is put into the mouth of Lamprias, and aims to highlight the mood and psychology of the participants at a banquet:

(619A) συνάγω δὲ καὶ ποτικούς εἰς ταῦτ’ καὶ ἐρωτικούς, οὐ μόνον “ὅσοις ἔρωτος δῆγμα παιδικῶν πρόσσεστιν” (TGF, frag. 841) ὥς φησι Σοφοκλῆς, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἐπὶ γυναιξὶ καὶ τοὺς ἐπὶ παρθένοις δακνομένους·

And I shall put together men who like to drink, – and lovers too, not only those

Who feel the bite of love for lads,

as Sophocles says, but also those bitten by love for women and for girls. (619A)

Lamprias makes his own contribution to the discussion about the seating of guests at a drinking-party. Among other points he suggests that it is good to place men who are temperate and gentle among contentious men, or to put together people who have something in common, not only lovers of young men but also lovers of women or girls, since these are expected to understand each other well. In their case the risk of strife is quite limited, as compared to poets or orators who are usually highly competitive, and whose discussions may therefore become problematic (618E-F). Sophocles’ words are

<sup>44</sup> Cf. 709C, where it is explicitly the actors who display a kind of empty fame. Cf. also a similar reference to the *agora* as a place of empty fame in *On Progress in virtue* (80A).

identified by Lamprias (“ὥς φησι Σοφοκλῆς”) and are completely integrated in his argument since he adopts them as his own.<sup>45</sup>

In the third talk of book 1 there are two things that strike the reader as curious; the one is its short length and the other the absence of dialogue, for Plutarch uses only reported speech. Yet, within this brief discussion, tragedy is present; a line from Aeschylus’ *Supplikes* (v. 770) is cited at 619E:

(619E) οὐ γὰρ μόνον “ὥδ’ ἴνα τίκτει νύξ κυβερνήτη σοφῷ” κατὰ τὸν Αἰσχύλον,<sup>46</sup> ἀλλὰ καὶ πότου πᾶσα καὶ ἀνέσεως ὥρα στρατηγῷ καὶ ἄρχοντι φροντίδος ἄξιον ἔργον.

For not only does ‘night bring anguish to a skilful pilot’, as Aeschylus says, but also every hour spent in drinking and in relaxation brings to a general or governor some business worthy of close attention. (619E)

Here the question is about the allocation of places at a banquet, and more specifically about the so-called ‘consul’s place’ (“ὑπατικός”). Aeschylus’ words are recalled to support the argument that for a consul or general there is no time for complete relaxation and entertainment; even at dinner-parties he has to take things seriously and remain alert at all times. Thus the poet’s line, which is quoted here, supports this argument since it asserts that night rightly stirs the feeling of fear in a governor’s actions or words. In addition, the application of the image is made easier by the general familiarity of ship-of-state figuring (“κυβερνήτη”, “στρατηγῷ”, “ἄρχοντι”). One notes that here, as well as in the preceding 619A, the poetic text is used as a starting point to make further thoughts; it is either corrected or extended with supplementary comments. It may also be noticed that the poet’s name, which here, exactly as in the previous quotation from Sophocles, is provided by Plutarch, may add some more gravity and importance to the argument.

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<sup>45</sup> The same line is again cited at 77B of *On Progress in virtue*, where it is employed as a metaphor to describe the growing love of a young man for philosophy. If he is made to stay away from philosophy after he has been introduced into the world of philosophy, he feels troubled and uneasy, exactly like a lover who is separated from his beloved. Pelling points out that Sophocles’ quotations and imagery are more embedded in that essay (2007).

<sup>46</sup> Cf. 1090A of *It is not possible even to live pleasantly according to Epicurus*. It is worth noticing that in Plutarch the *Supplikes* is by far the most popular of all Aeschylus’ plays, and generally of all tragedies – see Helmbold and O’Neil (1959).

In the fourth talk, Theon, one of the three interlocutors (with the other two being Plutarch and Crato), discusses the character and the role of the president of a drinking-party (“συμποσίαρχος”). According to him, the symposiarch must lead all participants to display their talents, so that the banquet may be both profitable and entertaining.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, every man, no matter if a philosopher, an orator, or a performer of arts, is (or, so one expects) gladly and eagerly led to that activity (“ἡδέως γὰρ εἰς τοῦθ’ ἕκαστος ἄγεται καὶ προθύμως”) ‘where each person is at his strongest’ (622A); in Euripides’ words:

ἴν’ αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ τυγχάνη κράτιστος ὢν. (Eur., *Antiope*, frag. 184.4)

The line is of general value and can serve different rhetorical purposes according to the context in which it is put; it is perhaps then for this reason that Plutarch repeats the same quotation in other essays, too: at 43B of *On listening to lectures* the line is adapted to make the point that each man likes to be asked and to talk about matters which he knows best, as is also the point at 630B of book 2 of *Table Talk*; however, at 514A of *On talkativeness* the context is different as it is meant to signify the general attitude of the chatterer which should be avoided: instead of displaying our knowledge in a specific topic, thus intimidating others, we should engage into conversations which can teach us new things. The quotation from Euripides above, at 622A, is apposite in its new context. We cannot recover the original, since we only have fragments of this Euripidean play, and so we cannot be sure whether (as so often in this essay) the original context is forgotten. Yet the poet’s wording seems to suit perfectly the general point made by Theon, thus offering to his argument a somewhat proverbial value.

The discussion of the fifth question of book 1 on why it is said that ‘love teaches a poet’ is introduced by the use of a Euripidean quotation, or, rather, the first part of the quotation offers the particular topic for conversation. The name of the poet is not provided but, still, the quotation retains its importance for it sums up the debate on the power of poetry – in that sense it is also of conclusive character:

ποιητὴν δ’ ἄρα

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. 621B-C, 713F, and 717A.

Ἔρως διδάσκει, καὶν ἄμιμος ἢ τὸ πρὶν<sup>48</sup> (Eur., *Stheneboea*, frag. 663)

Love instructs a poet then,  
though he before was songless (unmusical). (622A)

Beyond all changes which Love causes to man's character and behaviour, he inspires poets and makes them more creative. An interesting anecdote, which is mentioned as evidence for that view, says that Aeschylus wrote his tragedies under the influence of wine (622E).<sup>49</sup> Plutarch is here exploiting a cliché (γλυκύπικρος ἔρως),<sup>50</sup> according to which love brings both happiness and sorrow, joy and pain, and may evoke extreme feelings which, however, lead to poetic creativeness.<sup>51</sup>

There is a simile introduced here (623C: “ἀλλ’ ὥσπερ τὴν Σοφοκλέους πόλιν ἀνδρὸς ἐρωτικοῦ ψυχὴν”) to describe all that Love may contain. The image is taken from Sophocles' *OT*, where at the opening of the play Thebes is presented as a city filled ‘at the same time with incense and with the sound of paeans and lamentations’ (623C-D); in the tragedian's words:<sup>52</sup>

“ὁμοῦ μὲν θυμιαμάτων”  
γέμουσαν  
“ὁμοῦ δὲ παιάνων τε καὶ στεναγμάτων”.<sup>53</sup> (Soph., *OT* 4-5)

The simile compares, on the one hand the soul of a man in love, and, on the other hand, Thebes, and aims to show, on a first reading, the contradictory feelings that prevail in both places, namely, turmoil and relief, misery and happiness, lamentations and celebrations. Yet, as Pelling has pointed out, when discussing the very quotation in

<sup>48</sup> The same quotation is again cited at 405F of *Why does the Pythia no longer give oracles in verse*, and at 762B of *Dialogue on love*, where the power of love is exalted and discussed in depth – about the Euripidean citation in the latter essay and its parallel in Plato's *Symposium* (196e) cf. Billault (1999), 206.

<sup>49</sup> The same anecdote is repeated at 715D-E of book 7, with the remark that all of his tragedies are full of Dionysus – thus the connection between the god and wine is here straightforward. Cf. what Athenaeus says at 10.429a, namely that ‘Alcaeus the lyric poet and Aristophanes the comic poet also were drunk when they composed their works’ – see Sidwell (2000), 141.

<sup>50</sup> In lyric poetry it is a motif – see Campbell (1983).

<sup>51</sup> Earlier, at 623A-B Sossius (one of the participants of the conversation) quotes Theophrastus who similarly considers the sources of music to be sorrow, joy, and religious ecstasy for all those emotions make one's voice change. The example given here refers to oratory, as well as theatre. The orators, especially at the end of their speech (*peroratio*) raise their voices so that it resembles a song, exactly as actors do when weeping – reference here is obviously made to the members of a tragic chorus.

<sup>52</sup> There is an adaptation of Sophocles' “γέμει” into “γέμουσαν”, required by Plutarch's sentence structure.

<sup>53</sup> The same citation in *On having many friends* 95C, *On superstition* 169D, *On moral virtue* 445D, as well as in *Antony* 24.3.

*Antony*, the Sophoclean lines are misunderstood by Plutarch. Plutarch uses ‘paeans’ as triumphant hymns of joy, to counterbalance lamentations; thus he wants to draw a parallel between the contradictory sides of love and the (supposedly) contradictory feelings which prevail in Thebes, too. But clearly there are no contradictory feelings, there can be no celebrations in the city of Thebes in this play. Its citizens call upon the gods to end the plague, thus ‘paeon’, as Pelling has suggested, must obviously mean a hymn to Apollo for healing.<sup>54</sup> So, in both cases, at 24.3 of *Antony* as well as here, in the *Table Talk*, Plutarch interprets the quoted lines so as to suit the context of his argument. Once again tragedy simply offers the ‘tag’ in which the original context of the quotation is forgotten.

The seventh and eighth question of book 1 discuss rather trivial issues, the habits of old men. At the opening of the latter question there are two quotations, one after the other, the first from Aeschylus and the second from Sophocles. Their role is explanatory, but they also have a didactic hint. What they are trying to explain here, Plutarch and his interlocutors (however, notice that there is no dialogue in this question), is ‘why old men hold writing at a greater distance for reading’ – obviously this describes ‘presbyopia’ (long-sightedness). Both quotations are identified concerning their source (the name of the tragic poet is in each case provided – “καὶ τοῦτο παραδηλῶν ὁ Αἰσχύλος φησὶν...”, and “ἐνδηλότερον δὲ Σοφοκλῆς τὸ αὐτὸ περὶ τῶν γερόντων...” (625D):

σὺ δ’ ἐξ ἀπόπτου αὐτόν, οὐ γὰρ ἐγγύθεν

δύναίό γ’ ἄν· γέρων δὲ γραμματεὺς γενοῦ

σαφής.<sup>55</sup>

(Aesch., *TGF*, frag. 358)

But you must read it far away,  
for close up you could surely not,  
and you must be a lucid scribe,  
though old.

βραδεῖα μὲν γὰρ ἐν λόγοισι προσβολή

<sup>54</sup> Pelling (1988b), 178-179. Extensive material on what ‘paeon’ means now in I. Rutherford (2001).

<sup>55</sup> In Aeschylus: “σὺ δὲ ἄπω[θεν] αὐτόν, οὐ γὰρ ἐγγύθεν/ [βαλεῖς] γέρων δὲ γραμματεὺς γενοῦ σαφής”.

μόλις δι' ὧτ' ἔρχεται ῥυπαιμένου·

πρόσω δὲ λείσσω, ἐγγύθεν δὲ πᾶς τυφλός. (Soph., *TGF*, frag. 858)

The sound of words falls slowly,  
and hardly penetrates the stopped-up ear;

but each man sees far, is blind when from close distance. (625D)

The quotations are chosen for their aptness, since they both describe the weakness of the eyes, literally (first quotation) or metaphorically (second quotation), as man grows older, and thus introduce the subject of the discussion to follow, but they are of no special interest for Plutarch passes no comment on them.

To conclude, there is a kind of ‘paradox’ in the way Plutarch uses theatre and tragedy, both generally, and specifically in this essay. In the *Essays*, literary quotations are more frequent than tragic metaphors, thus we could say that there, the use of tragedy is more specific; on the contrary, in the *Lives* the ‘tragic’ is certainly more complex a term: it is more about theatrical atmosphere, people who behave at certain, usually important, moments in a theatrical way, and when that happens the signs of the disaster-to-come are felt even more strongly. The first book of the *Table Talk* includes both tragic quotations and metaphors, and thus offers a good example of the general ambiguity of the use of tragedy in Plutarch. Tragic citations are employed here mainly to elaborate and support Plutarch’s (or, at each case, the speaking person’s) point, to borrow some authority from the tragic poets or to sum up the argument, since tragic lines have a proverbial value, or, at least, offer an economical and effective way of presenting ideas or images – however, the poets’ sayings are not always accepted by Plutarch but adapted or interpreted so that they suit the context. Regarding the use of tragic imagery and the use of theatre as a metaphor, it rather implies preposterous behaviour, and we have already seen a few cases where Plutarch uses them to attack or castigate theatrical behaviour in a ‘real-life’ context – here, in the context of a banquet. Thus one could argue that in the *Table Talk* we can see Plutarch in microcosm, swaying between quoting tragedy for its economy and authority, and at the same time using it as a metaphor to indicate human behaviour which should be avoided – though this second use becomes more obvious in book 7, on which the following discussion focuses. The *Table Talk* is an essay where the convergence of

these two sides of the 'tragic' in Plutarch appears at its best, and, for that, it is certainly worthy of our attention when discussing Plutarch's relation to the tragedians and to theatre.

### Table Talk, Book 7

In the introduction of this chapter we saw why the seventh book is important concerning the role of tragedy and of other genres in a symposium (cf. pp. 99-100, on 706B, 711D-E, 712B ff.) – a kind of late programmatic statement, even if the programme may not be fulfilled in Plutarch's *Table Talk*. In addition, this book will contribute some further points to our discussion of tragedy, since it includes not only quotations from tragic poets but also theatrical metaphors and allusions. Those are worth a closer look.

In the first question of this book Plutarch and his friends argue 'against those who find fault with Plato for saying that drink passes through the lungs'. Euripides is quoted among others here (Eupolis, and Eratosthenes) as the one whose description of the lungs is more accurate for he seems the only one who has pictured the lungs as having cavities and channels through which they transmit the liquid (699A):

οἶνος περάσας πνευμόνων διαρροάς (Eur., *TGF*, frag. 983)<sup>56</sup>

Wine, traversing the channels of the lungs

The tragic quotation, as well as the lines by Eupolis and Eratosthenes quoted just before, are completely integrated into the discussion about the nature of lungs and their function; yet, interestingly, it is not important at all that the quotation comes from tragedy, in the sense that any genre could make the point provided that there was the right phraseology. The language which Plutarch uses to introduce each quotation indicates clearly which description of the lungs he regards as more truthful: "Εὐπολιν...πάρες ἐν Κόλαξιν εἰπόντα..., πάρες δὲ καὶ τὸν κομψὸν Ἐρατοσθένην λέγοντα..., Εὐριπίδης δὲ σαφῶς δήπου λέγων...δῆλος ἐστὶν Ἐρασιστράτου βλέπων τι ὀξύτερον" – 'disregard Eupolis who says in his *Flatterers*..., disregard the elegant Eratosthenes, too, and his expression..., but when Euripides speaks in plain terms of...he shows that he has keener eyes than Erasistratus' (699A).

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<sup>56</sup> Also cited at 1047D of *On Stoic contradictions*, where the discussion is exactly on the same topic and on the evidence which Plato takes from poets and physicians to support his view on the nature of the lungs.



A simile taken from the theatrical world attracts our attention in the sixth question of this book, where a quite long conversation takes place, focused on the so called ‘shadows’<sup>57</sup> and on whether one should go to one man’s dinner at another man’s invitation, and on what occasions, and to what kind of host. So the discussion is here again centred on dinner matters. Plutarch’s advice is not to accept just any invitation for dinner but to pay attention to who is the person who invites one and for what reason:

(709C) εἰ μὲν γὰρ οὐ σφόδρα συνήθης, ἀλλὰ τῶν πλουσίων τις ἢ σατραπικῶν, ὥς ἐπὶ σκηνῆς δορυφορήματος λαμπροῦ δεόμενος ἢ πάνυ χαρίζεσθαι τῇ κλήσει πεπεισμένος καὶ τιμῶν, ἐπάγεται, παρατητήτος εὐθύς·

If it is someone not very intimate who invites you, but some man of wealth or a stately man who wants a splendid retinue as if he were on stage, or one who thinks that he is doing a great favour and honour by his invitation, you must at once ask to be excused. (709C)

When wealthy people and people of power were presented on stage, they were usually accompanied by attendants who were characters of no importance who would stay mute (*κωφὰ πρόσωπα*).<sup>58</sup> The comparison between the wealthy person who invites people just for the sake of increasing the admirers of his wealth on one hand, and on the other hand the actor who needs mute attendants around him, casts the theatrical reality under an unfavourable light, since it emphasises a kind of pretentious performance taking place on stage. Again, the theatre here typifies a world which should not mix with the symposium if it is to be rightly organised.

We see something of the same at 710E, in the discussion of whether the music of flute-girls is proper after-dinner entertainment – the point is here made by one of Plutarch’s friends, Philip, and it is one of the rare cases of explicit evaluation of the tragic poet and his work as a whole.<sup>59</sup> Philip acknowledges that he is a great admirer of Euripides, yet he

<sup>57</sup> What is meant by this word is explained at 707A: ‘shadows’ are called the persons who are not personally invited but are brought along by the invited guests.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Teodorsson (1996), ad loc.: The comparison of insignificant people, who accompanied important people of power, to the *κωφὰ πρόσωπα* on stage was quite common. Plutarch himself uses similar wording (“ὁ δ’ ὥσπερ ἐπὶ σκηνῆς δορυφόριμα κωφὸν ἦν...”) when he talks about Aridaeus at 791E of *Whether an elderly man should engage in politics*, and, similarly, at 63A of *How to tell a flatterer from a friend* he alludes to the same image – cf. chap. 2, pp. 50-51.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Wardman (1974), 171.

does not agree with the rules which the poet has set concerning music, and according to which the importance of music is reduced to scenes of sorrow and depression (710E). According to Philip, music ought to be regarded, together with other kinds of pleasure, as part of the dinner-entertainment (710F), and theatre should be taken as just a means to amuse the audience and not as something more serious than that.

This was actually the point which a Spartan made when he came to Athens and saw how much preparation and competitive spirit, how many expenses and efforts were put in theatrical productions (710F). This specific reference is worthy of our special attention for another reason too, namely because it illustrates the contrasting, even contradictory, use that Plutarch can put the same citation to, when he uses it in different works or different trains of thought. For the same remark is given different implications in the essay *Were the Athenians...?*, where Plutarch uses the words of the Spartan to argue that the Athenians spent more time and money on theatrical performances than on political and military affairs which would bring them true, long-lasting fame and power (cf. 348F-349A, and the discussion of that passage in chapter 2, pp. 58-59).

Contrary to Philip's statement, Plutarch himself, in the *Advice to bride and groom* agreed with Euripides (*Medea* 190-204) in censuring those who employ the lyre as an accompaniment to wine rather than invoke music to mitigate turbulent emotions such as anger and grief (143D). Yet it has to be noted here that the view expressed at 143D of that essay is not Plutarch's sole and final view on music, which he does not exclude from parties (712F-713F).<sup>60</sup> Concerning music, what is mostly important for Plutarch is that it must always go together with words, that is, song – this is a necessary condition which he sets for music in order for it to be welcomed at parties. At the same time he also sees that music has a role to play in difficult moments at a dinner-party, when strife and rivalry are rising (cf. 713F). Apart from this, one of the general rules which Plutarch sets concerning entertainment is to combine music with discussion. The co-existence of *ῥῆμα* and *λόγος* at a party is necessary, *λόγος* not only as in a form of a song but also as reasoning. In this aspect even philosophical discourse can be a source of entertainment for the guests at a

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<sup>60</sup> Cf. Teodorsson (1996), ad loc., and also Nikolaidis (1991), 158.

party. The programmatic character of Plutarch's views expressed here is evident: apart from the opportunistic use of the tragic citation he uses, he sets the terms in which a symposium and elegant sympotic conversation ought to work, and makes recommendations about the character of the discourse at a symposium (what it ought to include and what not).

At 713D, a line by Euripides is introduced in favour of the opinion that the sources of entertainment should be sought first among the guests (e.g. philosophical discussions) and should not come from outside, in which case this could interfere with the guests' amusement, in the sense that it could put an end to the kind of entertainment already taking place and deriving from the joy and good mood of the guests themselves. Similarly, it would be unwise for those who are already safe at home to consent to take some other kind of safety from abroad – in the poet's words “ἄλλην θέλουσιν εἰσαγώγιμον λαβεῖν” (*TGF*, frag. 984). Thus the acknowledged quotation from Euripides (“ὡς Εὐριπίδης εἶπεν”) not only offers Plutarch a concise way of putting forward his argument but certainly also some of the poet's authority. It also gives to his point a wider aspect by adding new implications from a different context.

Closely connected to this question is the next discussion of what kinds of entertainment are most appropriate at dinner. The sophist, one of the four speakers in this dialogue, refers to the theatrical world suggesting that he would banish all the forms of entertainment to stage and orchestra (“ἔφη τᾶλλα μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν θυμέλην καὶ τὴν ὀρχήστραν ἐξελαύνειν”) – “θυμέλην” and “ὀρχήστραν” are terms directly connected to theatre – and introduce instead a new kind of entertainment, based on the dramatic character of Plato's dialogues (711B-C – cf. earlier, 621B, discussed on pp. 95-96).<sup>61</sup> Thus he seems to put forward a different kind of dramatic performance, which would obviously be of philosophical rather than of merely poetic character.

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<sup>61</sup> The sophist mentions that slaves were taught the easiest and lightest (Teodorsson rightly, I think, corrects the Loeb translation of the word “ἐλαφροτάτους” so as to mean ‘most easy/light to learn’, and not ‘most lively’) of those dramatic dialogues, so as to quote them by rote (711C). The interesting detail that Plato's dialogues were performed in Rome (and not, for example, in Athens) (711B) makes their dramatisation an event of even greater importance. Cf. Teodorsson (1996), pp. 109-110.

Euripides is again quoted (“ὥσπερ Εὐριπίδης εἶπεν”), freely this time, in the final lines of this book, when the discussion is on whether it was a good custom to deliberate over wine (716B-C). However at this instance the poet is brought into the discussion, not to confirm a statement but as a point of disagreement. In his effort to try to explain why Dionysus was given the names *Eleuthereus* (Liberator) and *Lysios* (Releaser), Nicostratus – and perhaps also Plutarch himself, by using Nicostratus as his mouthpiece – claims that such attributes were given to the god not because of his ‘bacchic and mad element’ (“οὐ διὰ ‘τὸ βακχεύσιμον καὶ μανιώδες’ ὥσπερ Εὐριπίδης εἶπεν” – 716B)<sup>62</sup> but because he frees the soul from its slavish, timorous and suspicious nature, and makes humans more truthful and open to each other.<sup>63</sup> The concluding part of the discussion, both with its eloquent style and the tragic quotation, becomes a good example of Plutarch’s rhetoric. Plutarch exploits the resonant rhetorical impact of tragic quotation, placing it at the conclusion of a discussion for maximum emphasis.<sup>64</sup>

Although the use of tragedy and theatre in this book is less extensive than book 1, our parallel examination shows that even in this book (book 7), Plutarch uses the tragedians in multiple, flexible ways and exploits metaphorical aspects of dramatic vocabulary according to the needs of the highly theatrical setting of a symposium and according to the questions which the different interlocutors address. Plutarch never ceases to recast and reinterpret tragic lines and theatrical vocabulary to reinforce the authority of his speakers and beyond them his own.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Bac.* 298-299 (“τὸ γὰρ βακχεύσιμον καὶ τὸ μανιώδες μαντικὴν πολλὴν ἔχει”). The lines are quoted verbatim at 432E of the essay *On the obsolescence of oracles*.

<sup>63</sup> Compare the reference to the gentle side of Dionysus at 613D, 614A, 615A – see the relevant discussion on pp. 105-106. Plutarch provides his reader with a full profile of the god, by referring as much to his gentle as to his bacchic sides.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Teodorsson, ad loc. It is not uncommon for Plutarch to open or close a discussion with a quotation; there are abundant examples in this essay: 612C, 619A, 622C, 623C-D, 625D, 627E-F, 644D, 671B-C, 672D, 700C, 701D, 739E, 741A, etc.

## **5. Theatrical aspects of Pompey**

οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο χωρὶς ἐσθλὰ καὶ κακά,  
ἀλλ' ἔστι τις σύγκρασις.

(Eur. *Aeolus*, frag.21.3-4)<sup>1</sup>

The good and the bad are always commingled, says Euripides. The same applies when talking about the great men that Plutarch described in his *Lives*. Apart from all their distinctive qualities that brought them success and fame, there are also some darker sides in their character; apart from their achievements, it is worth noticing their failures. Their virtues and vices are interrelated, and qualities which make them great can equally destroy them.<sup>2</sup> Plutarch is particularly interested in discussing not only his heroes' natural flaws (or, potential weaknesses),<sup>3</sup> but also the possible change of qualities into flaws, which inevitably leads them to less glamorous moments and to misfortunes in their public as well as private life. These kind of moments are valued highly by Plutarch, and are at times more worth noticing than the big events and the obvious virtues of these men, since they are not only indicative of their ethos but often also prepare the path to the end of their career and life, which is often tragic and stands in clear contrast to all their achievements.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Plutarch quotes the lines at 25C-D of *How a young man should listen to poetry* (and again at 369B of *On Isis and Osiris*, and at 474A of *On tranquillity of mind*). He has previously argued that sometimes theory may be different from action, that what we learn in schools is not all necessarily right or wrong; now he seizes the opportunity to defend the co-existence of 'good' and 'bad' in life, and expand his thoughts on this matter: he believes that neither in men's nor in gods' lives can we find 'good' or 'evil' separately, and this is also how poets present both men and gods – cf. above, chapter 1, p. 42. 'Good' and 'bad' are commingled, as is success with failure, the expected with the unexpected. See also in the *Lives*, *Cim.* 2.4-5, *Agis-Cleom.* 37(16).8.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. e.g. Pelling (1997a)=(2002a), 398; also, id. (1986)=(2002a), 351, (1990d)=(2002a), 131 (on Nicias' self-destruction), and (1997c), 215-216, 218, and Duff (2004); about 'great natures' gone wrong (and about the reasons of their downfall) see Duff (1999b).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in Pompey's case his passivity may at times be a sign of modesty and mild character, and at other times, especially at crucial political or military moments, detrimental.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the well-known 'programmatic statement' of Plutarch's general aim in his *Lives*, as phrased in the prologue of *Alexander* (1.1-3); cf. also *Nic.* 1.1-5.

*Pompey* is certainly not one of the most ‘popular’ biographies of Plutarch for modern scholarship; moreover, the work which has been done has had a pronounced historical emphasis. Matthias Gelzer in his monograph of 1949 on Pompey focused more on the historical background of his era, and drew a portrait of the general and politician Pompey.<sup>5</sup> Van Ooteghem in 1954 discussed in chronological order all the important steps in the career of the general and conqueror Pompey.<sup>6</sup> Many years later, in 1979, Robin Seager, too, wrote a political biography,<sup>7</sup> discussing in detail all the different phases of his career and all his achievements; he thus followed the path of Gelzer without deviating much from his historical analysis. The commentary by Herbert Heftner,<sup>8</sup> largely based on material used for his Ph.D. thesis, is not only, explicitly and exclusively, devoted to matters of historicity and reliability of sources,<sup>9</sup> but it also stops at chapter 45, leaving out the second half of the biography, which is rich in material which is essential to get a full picture of Pompey, and in dramatic movement and motifs, a most important aspect for the purposes of the present analysis. This part is also left out in Watkins’ unpublished Ph.D. thesis, another commentary on the first 46 chapters of *Pompey*, dated a few years earlier than the most recent by Heftner.<sup>10</sup>

This chapter will not examine *Pompey* from a historical point of view, or offer a comparative analysis of this Life and discuss its place among the Lives in general – this would be beyond the scope of the chapter, not to mention that it would replicate the work done so far by the scholars mentioned above and by others. Instead, the present discussion aims to show how rich in tragic images and patterns the Life is so that it genuinely invites a theatrical reading. Different versions of the ‘tragic’ and of what is reminiscent of theatre appear in this Life. There is not only a direct use of tragic material, but also patterns and themes recurrent in tragedy – but not always exclusively connected to tragedy. A closely related question which is raised here is to see how Plutarch used his source-material to create a network of theatrical imagery, and also how that works in the

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<sup>5</sup> Gelzer (1949).

<sup>6</sup> Van Ooteghem (1954).

<sup>7</sup> Seager (1979).

<sup>8</sup> Heftner (1994).

<sup>9</sup> On the sources used in *Pompey* see Pelling (1980), and on the sources used only for the first half of the Life see Watkins (1984), i-ix, and Heftner (1994), 44-62.

<sup>10</sup> Watkins (1984).

Life as a whole. Of course, it may be particularly telling if in some cases we are in a position to know that what Plutarch describes in a theatrical light did not necessarily happen in that way: in such instances we may be able to trace more sharply Plutarch's technique of creating theatrical atmosphere out of his non-theatrical material. This is exactly the point when we see Plutarch at work, and this makes it all the more interesting, both to understand his methods of work and to evaluate his personal way of presenting things. In addition, the theatrical atmosphere of the Life is emphasised by the visual setting of scenes, which transfers events and characters to the context of a theatrical performance.

Like other Lives – *Antony, Demetrius, Alexander, Pyrrhus, Marius, Crassus*<sup>11</sup> – *Pompey* is replete with tragic themes, subversions and dramatic tension. It is not just Pompey's personality which is rich in tragic conflicts (at which Plutarch hints straight from the beginning of this Life in the anecdotes about his personal life), but there is also a theatrical atmosphere created by all those instances which Plutarch stages as if putting on a play, that makes *Pompey* so rich in theatrical moments and dramatic power, especially in its second half.<sup>12</sup> There, self-destructive actions and external adverse factors co-operate in a nexus which leads Pompey to disaster. In Plutarch's pairs of Lives one usually sees common themes and patterns being repeated, or being used in similar ways. And it is quite common in Plutarch that the first Life sets a pattern for the second Life. It is also often the case that the first of the two Lives in a pair is more simple, whereas the second more complex.<sup>13</sup> That may also apply to the *Agesilaus-Pompey* pair of Lives. *Pompey* is a more intricate Life than its pair in many ways, one of which is also the theatrical aspect.

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<sup>11</sup> Those Lives have been discussed from various angles, with a special focus on their dramatic/tragic perspective by many scholars, e.g. by De Lacy (1952), 168-171, Wardman (1955) and (1974), 168-179, Bucher-Isler (1972), 80-82, Russell (1973), 135, Mastrocinque (1979), Mossman (1988) and (1992), 100 and 103, Pelling (1988b), 21-22, (1999b) and (2002b), Andrei and Scuderi (1989), 78-82, Braund (1993) and (1997), Zadorojnyi (1997), and Duff (2004).

<sup>12</sup> As de Wet puts it, Plutarch exhibits a strong desire to write dramatically ((1981), 119).

<sup>13</sup> See Pelling on *Synkrisis* (1986)=(2002a), 349-363 *passim* – esp. pp. 357-359 and (2005b), 337, and Stadter (1992). Also: Duff (1999a), 250-252, and esp. pp. 275-278 on *Agesilaus-Pompey Synkrisis*, as well as id. (2000).

Already in the prologue of *Pompey* (1.1) the reader realises that the tragic mindset is going to be important in the Life, since in the very first lines Plutarch uses a tragic quotation from Aeschylus, from the lost *Prometheus Unbound*:

ἐχθροῦ πατρός μοι τοῦτο φίλτατον τέκνον.

I hate the father, but dearly love this son of his. (TGF, frag. 201)

The line belongs supposedly to Prometheus who hated Zeus, the father of Heracles for having fastened him to a rock, but was most grateful to Heracles for freeing him. Plutarch wants to present Pompey as a popular figure, loved by the Romans in contrast to his father who was a most hated general, and the tragic quotation helps him to make this point. However the line will sound strongly ironic at the end of the Life, when Pompey will meet the same end as his father (80.1-2, see p. 156 below).

Tragic images, created by Plutarch either by explicit tragic quotations such as the one above or by tragic metaphors, form the background of many important incidents in the Life, and contribute to a fuller outline of Pompey's character. At 31.10 Plutarch describes Pompey's enmity to Lucullus, which drove him to extreme action in many cases. He wanted either to show that Lucullus had no authority at all, or just to satisfy his base ambition that he could interfere with Lucullus' settlements and even subvert them (31.2).<sup>14</sup> He also used to belittle Lucullus' achievements, declaring that he had waged war against kings from dramas and paintings, whereas the real enemy, Mithridates, was left to him to fight:<sup>15</sup>

(31.10) διασύρων τὰ ἔργα ἐμφανῶς ἔλεγε τραγωδίαις καὶ σκιαγραφίαις πεπολεμηκέναι βασιλικαῖς τὸν Λεύκολλον, αὐτῷ δὲ πρὸς ἀληθινήν καὶ σεσωφρονισμένην τὸν ἀγῶνα λείπεσθαι δύναμιν...

The explicit reference to tragedy and painting ("τραγωδίαις καὶ σκιαγραφίαις") to signify the fake danger which Lucullus sees and fights, makes the reader recall the dramatic context, and think about the dispute between Pompey and Lucullus in theatrical terms.

<sup>14</sup> The harshness which Pompey showed towards Lucullus can easily be paralleled to Agesilaus' treatment of Lysander. In *Ages.* 7 Plutarch stresses how annoyed and irritated Agesilaus was about Lysander's popularity among the people and success as a commander in Asia Minor before him. He was also too ambitious and competitive not to fear that any success he might achieve would be easily attributed to his popular predecessor, Lysander (7.4). See also *Lys.* 23, and the relevant discussion of Meriani (2000).

<sup>15</sup> On Pompey's command against Mithridates and the reallocation of the East see Seager (1979), 44-55, Kallet-Marg (1995) and Hoff (2005).  
popular predecessor



The kings of the tragic myths are juxtaposed to the real enemy, king Mithridates and his troops. The former can only be a fictitious danger, but Mithridates is the true, lurking danger. Lucullus' reply is in the same spirit; he reverses the charges objecting that it is Pompey who goes out to fight the image and shadow of a war appropriating to himself the victories and the glory of others (31.11). 'Tragedy' for the moment is contrasted with Pompey's reality; but it will soon come to invade and take over that reality. Pompey at first resists anything 'tragic' but then his life offers the right stage, as it were, for a true tragedy to be presented on.

In the second half of the Life, and as the signs of Pompey's downfall become clearer, the tragic atmosphere is intensified, theatrical scenes are created and theatrical vocabulary is more often employed to describe Pompey's course to his end. After Caesar had decided to confront Pompey's troops, we are told that his men were enthusiastic at his decision and were eagerly drawn up for battle, like the members of a chorus:

(68.7) ὥσπερ χορὸς ἄνευ θορύβου μεμελετημένως εἰς τάξιν καὶ πρῶως καθίσταντο.

They took their places in the line with practised ease and composure, as if in a chorus. The simile is lucid, and the theatrical image ("ὥσπερ χορὸς") efficient and vivid. Pelling rightly remarks that the whole image is close to tragedy, with Plutarch's style and imagery adopting an appropriate tone.<sup>16</sup> A visual image is combined with theatrical vocabulary to produce a theatrical effect that transposes theatre into real-life.

Chapter 70, too, where bystanders (Roman and Greeks) are reflecting on human blindness and greed and are deeply concerned about their future even if they are not actively engaged in the war (70.1: "ὀλίγοι δὲ Ῥωμαίων οἱ βέλτιστοι καὶ τινες Ἑλλήνων παρόντες ἔξω τῆς μάχης, ὡς ἐγγὺς ἦν τὸ δεινόν, ἐλογίζοντο τὴν πλεονεξίαν καὶ φιλονικίαν ὅπου φέρουσα τὴν ἡγεμονίαν ἐξέθηκεν"), is very much in the manner of a choral ode, although here there is no explicit use of theatrical vocabulary.<sup>17</sup> A group of onlookers that ponders on flaws of human nature can be compared to a chorus who is making reflections on similar issues on stage, and invites the audience to do the same. The parallel becomes

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<sup>16</sup> Pelling (1980)=(2002a), 101.

<sup>17</sup> Pelling, ib. More on chapter 70 on pp. 144-145.

even more explicit if one thinks that typically a tragic chorus is less closely involved in the emotions than the principals, but directly affected by the outcome of what is happening on stage.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Plutarch presents his personal view as the one supported by the *οἱ βέλτιστοι*, thus conveying intellectual and moral authority.

The same simile taken from the theatrical world (“ὥσπερ χορός”) is again used in an earlier instance. When Clodius accused Pompey of devoting much of his time to his wife and neglecting public affairs, Clodius used both his popularity at the time and the opportunity offered to him at a court case where Pompey was also present to reproach him publicly with several accusations.<sup>19</sup> He posed questions such as: ‘Who is a licentious *imperator*?’, and ‘What man seeks a man?’. Such questions would fill people with anger against Pompey. The people did not fail Clodius; they gave him the answers he was expecting. The crowd, like a chorus trained in responsive song (*amoebaea*),<sup>20</sup> shouted out to each question the same answer: ‘Pompey’:

(48.12) οἱ δ’ ὥσπερ χορός εἰς ἀμοιβαῖα συγκεκροτημένος, ἐκείνου τὴν τήβεννον ἀνασείοντος, ἐφ’ ἐκάστῳ μέγα βοῶντες ἀπεκρίναντο· “Πομπήιος”.

Before more on this is said, a small but important point. It may be true that some of the incidents which Plutarch describes – like the one discussed here – relate to what historically happened. That is to say, it is likely that some stage-managing (as we might call it) and orchestration of situations and audiences by people in public life actually went on. But it is perhaps only due to Plutarch’s literary technique that the reader is invited to think that politicians of that time saw their public life as a performance.<sup>21</sup> The explicit

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. J. Gould (1996), who explains how this particularity of the marginalised tragic chorus allows them to see the truth and develop more appropriate views on different issues than those who are too close to the events to see clearly.

<sup>19</sup> By this time Clodius had started using his own power and popularity to destroy Pompey, whereas before he was his companion. Examples of the action he took against him are listed in the paragraph preceding this incident described: he sent Cicero to exile and Cato off to Cyprus, thus interfering with Pompey’s eastern settlement; he took away Tigranes, Pompey’s prisoner, by force; he prosecuted some of Pompey’s friends, and tried to repeal a part of his political measures which were taken to please the people (48.9-10). See again Pelling (1980)=(2002a), 98-100, who remarks that Plutarch’s treatment of Clodius is a further aspect to Pompey’s tragedy (p. 98).

<sup>20</sup> On the function of the *amoebaea* as a lyric exchange between an actor and the chorus see e.g. Burton (1980).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. here Cicero, *Ad Q. fr.* 2.3.1-4, where there is a quite different account of the same incident with no reference to theatrical imagery (compare the “ὥσπερ χορός” by Plutarch), which proves that the theatrical dimension of the incident is a Plutarchan touch.

theatrical pointers earlier in the Life may make it more legitimate to think of this string-pulling and manipulation in distinctively theatrical terms.

Such an instant of stage-management and orchestration is the passage quoted above (48.8-12), where Clodius manipulates the public reaction in order to achieve his political goal. Plutarch stages the scene vividly; one person, in this case Clodius, urges the crowd to respond to his questions which he asks in a provocative and stirring way. The 'dialogue' as the means which Plutarch uses here to reproduce the scene could be considered as one further element that makes the picture more theatrical, both verbally and visually. People react unanimously ("ὥσπερ χορός") at this attempt of Clodius to ridicule Pompey and hurt his pride and prestige as *imperator*, perhaps also urged and carried away by the show that Clodius puts on in front of them by shaking his toga, undoubtedly another theatrical effect which works against Pompey here. However, Plutarch seems to play down the effect of the (people's) unanimous response, by stressing that the crowd, which Clodius had gathered and incited to support him against Pompey, consisted of disreputable and contemptuous people, people of no respect for anyone or anything ("ἔχων ὑφ' αὐτῷ πλῆθος ἀνθρώπων ἀσελγείας καὶ ὀλιγωρίας μεστὸν") (48.11). It is at the end rather a travesty of proper theatre than a reproduction of authentic tragic atmosphere; the reaction of the crowd is prearranged and directed by Clodius ("ἔχων ὑφ' αὐτῷ"). In relation to the scene described before, with the people reflecting on human flaws (70.1), we find here one sort of set-up performance giving way to another. The joyful chorus directed for political purposes by Clodius will turn into a tragic chorus pondering in a tragic manner about the war. The link between the two scenes becomes telling, with the metaphor from the theatrical world ("ὥσπερ χορός") drawing a parallel between real life and stage life.

At the Clodius-incident the reader realises that there is a change of public attitude towards Pompey. But Plutarch has already earlier (chap. 46) prepared the reader for that change. Chapter 46, a clear turning point in this Life, divides *Pompey* into two parts and marks the change of *tyche* in Pompey's life. Plutarch tacitly sides at this point with the

opinion of those people who saw in Pompey another Alexander,<sup>22</sup> having so much in common with the greatness of the famous leader. But he goes further than this, expressing the wish that Pompey had ended his life at this moment of his career, when he had achieved the maximum he could, and also before he would become hated and his decline would start.<sup>23</sup> Plutarch's comment is a well-calculated injection of a negative tone at the peak of Pompey's career creating an unnerving atmosphere which forebodes, despite all appearances so far, a bad end. This makes us recall a recurrent theme which though not exclusive to tragedy is especially prominent there, namely the advice to 'call no man happy until you see his end'.<sup>24</sup> This pattern is particularly clear, for example, in Oedipus' case; he was considered to be the happiest of all men but the end of his life turned out to be most disgraceful and unhappy. In *OT* the chorus underlines this motif in their final words:<sup>25</sup>

ὥστε θνητὸν ὄντ' ἐκείνην τὴν τελευταίαν ἰδεῖν  
 ἡμέραν ἐπισκοποῦντα μηδέν' ὀλβίζειν, πρὶν ἂν  
 τέρμα τοῦ βίου περάσῃ μηδὲν ἀλγεινὸν παθῶν.

And so, waiting for that last day, don't rush  
 to call a man happy, before he reaches the end  
 of his life without suffering anything bad. (OT 1528-30)

<sup>22</sup> On Plutarch's different view on the similarities (this time, physical) between Pompey and Alexander (2.2) see below, p. 130.

<sup>23</sup> Plutarch's words here echo Cornelia's similar words towards the end of the Life, where she, seeing the demise of Pompey, wishes that she had died earlier (74.6) – Beneker (2005b), 79 n. 35.

<sup>24</sup> See, for example, the famous Croesus-anecdote in Hdt. 1.30-33. Croesus, after showing to Solon all his wealth, asks the wise man whom he regards as the happiest of all men. When Solon does not name Croesus as the happiest, he goes on explaining that he does not judge happiness by a person's wealth but by the way his life is ended. 'For he', says Solon, 'who is very rich is not happier than he who has enough for the day, unless fortune so attend him that he ends his life well, having all good things about him' ("...εἰ μὴ οἱ τύχῃ ἐπίσποιτο πάντα καλὰ ἔχοντα εὖ τελευτῆσαι τὸν βίον"). Plutarch seems here (chapt. 46) to have Solon's perception of happiness – and *tyche* – in mind. Cf. *Solon* 27.6-9, esp. 27.8: 'This wisdom, such as it is, observing that human life is ever subject to all sorts of vicissitudes, forbids us to be puffed up by the good things we have, or to admire a man's felicity while there is still time for it to change'. Cf. Pelling ((2004a), 98-100) about this passage and generally about how difficult it is for Plutarchan characters to teach or learn a (philosophical) lesson.

<sup>25</sup> Similar lines in Euripides' *Andromache* 100-102, *Phoen.* 1687-1689 and 1758-1763. However, the authenticity of the lines in *OT* is debatable. Dawe (1973b) suggests that it is possible that lines 1524-1530 were composed at some very late period; but we cannot say. Cf. also Duff (2000), 160.

Plutarch's point is along the same lines as these closing lines of Sophocles' *OT*. So far, Pompey had 'enjoyed the luck of Alexander' (46.2), Plutarch says, giving at the same time a hint that, since this is the best luck a general can enjoy, there is only the start of his downfall to be expected after this moment:

(46.2) ὥς ὠνητό γ' ἂν ἐνταῦθα τοῦ βίου παυσάμενος, ἄχρι οὐ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου τύχην ἔσχευ· ὁ δ' ἐπέκεινα χρόνος αὐτῷ τὰς μὲν εὐτυχίας ἤνεγκεν ἐπιφθόνους, ἀνηκέστους δὲ τὰς δυστυχίας.

How happy would it have been for him if he had ended his life at this point, up to which he enjoyed the good fortune of Alexander. For succeeding time brought him only success that made him odious, and failure that was irreparable. (46.2)

For, as Plutarch explains, thereafter he used the power he had gained in a legitimate way to favour other people illegitimately, a tendency that led him to his destruction, since he weakened his own power, while strengthening the power of his potential enemies (46.3). Plutarch describes this change of Pompey's luck emphatically and underlines the irony: his very effectiveness and power, which made him great, will finally ruin him (46.3-4). He also provides us with a reason for his downfall, when he says that it was only thanks to Pompey's compliance to his companions that Caesar gradually became more powerful than Pompey himself (46.4);<sup>26</sup> it seems that Pompey had granted him more than he actually should. As soon as the passivity which Plutarch had spotted earlier in his private life started to pervade his political life as well, Pompey turned into a viewer of his own life, not being able to control it.<sup>27</sup> Pompey, as Alexander (and Demetrius, and Antony) too, is destroyed, partly due to his own weaknesses and wrong decisions.<sup>28</sup> Mossman's analysis of Alexander's end, that he is led to his downfall by himself (internal factor) rather than by others (external factor) applies, to a certain level, to Pompey, too, but in

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Pelling (1995b)=(2002a), 226 n. 10, and Beneker (2005a), 317.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Pelling (1980)=(2002a), 112 n. 32, and pp. 96-102. Pelling notices that especially in the second half of *Pompey* great many of the leading themes carry on *around* Pompey without being directed by him: he is almost a passenger in his own Life. 'He is a man to whom things happen' (p. 100) – a remark which summarises all of Pompey's passivity. Harrison (1995) also sees chapter 46 as the thematic centre of the Life; after this point 'Pompey ceases to be the protagonist in his own life' (p. 102).

<sup>28</sup> Mossman ((1988), esp. p. 92). Marcone (1989/90) even calls Pompey a victim of himself (p. 56) – a familiar pattern in tragedy: a tragic character falls victim to his own decisions and failings (see e.g. Oedipus). It seems that the same model of self-destruction applies to Alcibiades as well – Duff (1999a) brings that out well in his analysis of the Coriolanus-Alcibiades pair (cf. pp. 205-240, esp. p. 239). He compares Alcibiades to Pompey, since Pompey, too, caused his fall by using his power to help his rivals (46.3-4).

the latter's case things are more complex. It is his internal weakness that lets Pompey become such a prey to external forces.

Significantly, the image of Alexander is introduced by Plutarch already at the beginning of the second chapter (2.1-4), where he gives us a detailed description of Pompey's appearance. His kingliness and kindness hint at a person who was born to become a true leader. He would win over his people not only by his qualities, but also by his noble look. To some people's eyes he even resembled Alexander the Great,<sup>29</sup> an indication that he was to gain this title ('Magnus')<sup>30</sup> for himself, too. Plutarch does not side with those people;<sup>31</sup> he thinks that the resemblance to Alexander 'was more talked about than actually apparent':

(2.2) ποιούσα μᾶλλον λεγομένην ἢ φαινομένην ὁμοιότητα πρὸς τὰς Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ βασιλέως εἰκόνας.<sup>32</sup>

But Plutarch does not leave us for long with that positive presentation of Pompey; immediately after (2.5 ff.), he gives us a sign of passivity, even though restricted here to the domain of his personal life: he conceded the woman he loved, Flora, to his close friend Geminius (2.7: "τὸν οὖν Πομπήιον ἐπιτρέψαι μὲν τῷ Γεμνίῳ...").<sup>33</sup> Pompey's passivity will later on play a significant role in his political career and will unsurprisingly be partly responsible for his fateful end. As Stadter has remarked, 'sexual behaviour

<sup>29</sup> Heftner ((1994), 69-70) remarks that Pompey's similarity to Alexander was not confined to his outlook; his whole life and career show that he wanted to succeed Alexander in every way. Heftner rightly underlines that at this point Plutarch undermines this last aspect, and gives no hint for Pompey's later gained title 'Magnus', directly reminiscent of Alexander's title (cf. 46.1-2). Cf. also here Antony's resemblance to Heracles, mentioned at *Ant.* 4.1.

<sup>30</sup> All his life Pompey dreams of being given the title 'Maximus', and, ironically enough, he is only given that title in his death by an anonymous Roman, who calls him 'the greatest *imperator*' (80.5).

<sup>31</sup> See also the discussion of onlookers below, pp. 138-139, and n. 51; cf. also pp. 125-126. Cf. Beneker (2005a), who is right in arguing that 'Plutarch, it appears, is highlighting the fact that Pompey fails to become an Alexander by beginning to construct a parallel *Life*, suggesting a possible pairing, and then demonstrating the reason for its rejection' (p. 318).

<sup>32</sup> Watkins ((1984), 18-19) argues that there is no proof of their physical similarity from the evidence we have available (surviving portraits, busts, and coins). Kleiner ((2005), 125) rightly speaks about an 'intended association'.

<sup>33</sup> Stadter (1995), discusses exactly this behaviour of Pompey in relation to the self-control theme. 'Nevertheless', Stadter remarks, later 'he will be accused by his enemies of abandoning the public good to please his wives' (p. 221) – a picture which stands in clear contrast to his portrayal in the Flora-anecdote.

reveals character flaws and strengths which surface in other areas as well, and so contributes to a full and complex portrait'.<sup>34</sup> And Pompey is no exception to that.

Later Pompey shows again some signs of passivity or of yielding to wrong advice and not defending his own will and opinion, a successful and most experienced general's opinion; this time it will be in his political career and not in his private life. The motif of a commander yielding to bad advisers is one found in tragedy – for example, Xerxes is led to his ultimate destruction because he yields to bad advice (*Pers.* 750-755) – but also common in historiography (cf. *Hdt.* 7.5-9, 8.100-102: Mardonius is not a good adviser for Xerxes either). Pompey had decided to go out in pursuit of Caesar, but not to wage war against him; instead, his plan was to keep him under siege, so that he would finally surrender through lack of supplies (67.1-2). But again he was influenced by the views of others, who were less experienced in war affairs and, moreover, accused him of love for command and for always having attendants and guards who would rule the world in his name.

Tragedy is also involved in the the name that Domitius Ahenobarbus always called Pompey by, namely 'Agamemnon', and 'King of Kings', that made him even more hated among people:

(67.5) Δομίτιος δ' αὐτὸν Ἀηνόβαρβος Ἀγαμέμνονα καλῶν καὶ βασιλέα βασιλέων,  
ἐπίφθονον ἐποίει.

The theme of *εὐτυχία* and *φθόνος* going together, picks up again on 46.2; happiness and misfortune are indeed so close: the absence of the one confirms the existence of the other. Here, at 67.5, we also note a transposition of a tragic – but not only tragic – idea from the divine (at 46.2) to the human level: it is not his divine *tyche* but the names that people like Domitius attribute to him that evoke the envy of his enemies. It is interesting that the

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<sup>34</sup> Stadter (1995), 233-236. Stadter's concluding statements that Pompey's 'lack of good judgement in a sexual relationship becomes a paradigm of his lack of judgement in the political arena' (p. 233), and also that 'self-control and excess, violence and nobility are revealed in sex life as in political life, by a person's actions' (p. 236) concisely explain why anecdotes as this one – even if only implicitly – include important hints toward a deeper understanding of the Life in its entirety. On Agesilaus' love-life see *Ages.* 11 and 20.7-9: in his case Plutarch emphasises his homoerotic abstinence rather than his homoerotic passion. Self-control in personal life is a manly virtue which suggests Agesilaus' self-control in public and political life, too.

connotation of Agamemnon's name is mainly, if not only, negative here, connected obviously to his authoritarian character as a leader. At the same time the name 'Agamemnon' hints at Pompey's expansionist policy and at his love to exercise power, which made him odious ("ἐπίφθονον ἐποίει"). The envy that his victories and office caused among his supposed 'friends' and supporters was at the end one of the most important external factors that led him to disaster. Interestingly, in the pair *Life of Pompey*, Agesilaus too is compared to Agamemnon (*Ages.* 6.7-11) in a dream – the two men were the only ones to whom the command of all Greece was given – but Agesilaus, in contrast to his predecessor, will not make any human sacrifice on taking up that office.

Pompey is gradually led towards the wrong decision, and to the battle at Pharsalus, where he would be defeated by Caesar. So, the picture of Pompey created here, which describes a man who knows what is right but is unable to carry out his decisions for his own as well as his country's benefit, backs up the tragic plot of the *Life*, and the argument about self-destruction.<sup>35</sup> His personal failings which are also reflected in his political (non-) decisions will bring him down at Pharsalus.<sup>36</sup> The imagery which Plutarch uses to prepare the reader for the disaster to come is indicative of the many internal combats taking place in the general's mind. 'Pompey himself approved of those physicians who never gratify the morbid desires of their patients, and yet he yielded to the diseased passion of his followers, for fear of offending if he tried to heal and save them':

(67.8) ὁ δὲ τῶν μὲν ἰατρῶν τοὺς μηδέποτε χαριζομένους ταῖς ἐπιθυμίαις ἐπήνεσεν, αὐτὸς δὲ τῷ νοσοῦντι τῆς στρατιᾶς ἐνέδωκε,<sup>37</sup> δείσας ἐπὶ σωτηρίᾳ λυπηρὸς γενέσθαι.

Pompey's compliance has reached here its climax, and, in contrast to the other occurrences described before (e.g. in his private life), in this case (battle at Pharsalus) it will be fatal.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> One thinks here of Medea's parallel: she, too, knows what is the right thing to do, but she cannot carry it out, overcome as she is by her passion for revenge and justice – as she perceives it (*Med.* 1079: "θυμὸς δὲ κρείσσων τῶν ἐμῶν βουλευμάτων").

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Pelling (1980)=(2002a), 101.

<sup>37</sup> The word ἐνέδωκε emphatically stresses Pompey's succumbing to others' opinions and diseased passions.

<sup>38</sup> Pompey's willingness to gratify his friends (cf. "ἄνδρα δόξης ἥττονα καὶ τῆς πρὸς τοὺς φίλους αἰδοῦς", 67.7), as also shown at e.g. 39.6 and 47.4-10, which was first introduced at 1.4, finally ruins him – thus Duff (1999a), 239 n. 100.



Although Plutarch presents at times Pompey as a leader who was not able to defend his name and carry out his own decisions, Plutarch never really lets us forget how exceptional he was. This is made clear, for example, earlier, at the ceremony where he was granted the right to move directly from a knight to a consul. Plutarch sees the ceremony as a spectacle and invites the reader to see the scene as such – the word “θέαμα” at 22.4 explicitly suggests that Pompey’s way of entering the forum was itself spectacular and unexpected, since the people, we are told, were very impressed to watch a general who had achieved two triumphs coming back as an ordinary man, obeying the laws and being even prepared to disband his army in order to show his devotion to the people (see 21.7):

(22.4) ἥδιστον δὲ θέαμα τῷ δήμῳ παρέσχεεν αὐτὸς ἑαυτὸν τὴν στρατείαν παραιτούμενος.

But the most agreeable of all spectacles was that which he afforded the people when he appeared in person and solicited his discharge from military service. (22.4)

Theatre is not explicitly involved here; one could rightly ask, at 22.4 as well as in the passages that follow, whether strong visuality is itself enough to suggest theatricality. Yet in a text so rich in theatrical allusions the *theama*-language naturally suggests the notion of public life as theatre. By implicitly making us think of tragedy, the passage suggests an important point: all these other sorts of ‘spectacle’ will give way to tragic *theamata* at the end of the Life (chap. 73 ff.), where Pompey appears as a tragic hero, who has suddenly lost everything, a very sad *theama* indeed.

Plutarch introduces the scene by presenting in full detail what was customary in such a procedure. Pompey makes a triumphal entry into the Roman forum; he does not follow the usual course of a Roman knight, leading his horse into the forum. Instead, he leads his horse by hand himself up to the rostra:

(22.5) ἔθος γάρ ἐστι Ῥωμαίων τοῖς ἵππευσιν, ὅταν στρατεύσωνται τὸν νόμιμον χρόνον, ἄγειν εἰς ἀγορὰν τὸν ἵππον ἐπὶ τοὺς δύο ἄνδρας οὓς τιμητὰς καλοῦσι [...]. (22.6) τότε δὴ προεκάθηντο μὲν οἱ τιμηταὶ Γέλλιος καὶ Λέντλος ἐν κόσμῳ, καὶ πάροδος ἦν τῶν ἱππέων ἐξεταζομένων, ὤφθη δὲ <καὶ> Πομπήιος ἄνωθεν ἐπ’ ἀγορὰν κατερχόμενος, τὰ μὲν ἄλλα παράσημα τῆς ἀρχῆς ἔχων, αὐτὸς δὲ διὰ χειρὸς ἄγων τὸν ἵππον.

(22.5) It is customary for a Roman knight, when he has served for the time fixed by law, to lead his horse into the forum before the two men who are called censors [...]. (22.6) At this time, then, the censors Gellius and Lentulus were sitting in state, and the knights were passing in review before them, when Pompey was seen coming down the descent into the forum, otherwise marked by the insignia of his office, but leading his horse with his own hand.

This is what usually happens, says Plutarch. But Pompey does not keep to the beaten track; he goes against the *ἔθος*. Although Plutarch offers no explicit comment, the reader might think, again at this point, about Pompey's end, since acting against normality and customs may imply imminent danger. Pompey's deviation from 'ethos' could, of course, have positive implications, but in this case it actually turned against him, highlighting at the same time the contrast between good and bad revisions of normality, as well as their contrasting results. What the passage undoubtedly demonstrates is Pompey's sense of theatre; he sees his life as a performance and stages himself in front of onlookers.

The scene which follows is interactive and strongly resembles a theatrical spectacle with a person in performance and an audience responding to him. The crowd watches the scene in complete silence, astonished at Pompey's daring (22.7), while the two censors in charge, Gellius and Lentulus, ask him whether he thinks that he has accomplished his assigned duty. Pompey replies positively and very confidently, in a loud voice; he says that he has performed all the military services, and all under himself as *imperator* (22.8).<sup>39</sup> The crowd bursts into cries of joy, whereas the censors escort Pompey home, a gesture which pleases the applauding crowd even more. So, in this case life merges with theatre favouring Pompey's popularity and power.

The vocabulary used underlines the theatrical impact of the scene (22.6-9) – one notices the word “*παρόδος*” (referring to all the knights – one of which was Pompey – who presented themselves in front of the censors), which is reminiscent of the theatrical *parodos*, the entrance of the chorus on stage. The word is used again in the *Political*

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<sup>39</sup> On how accurate this statement of Pompey is, see Heftner (1994), 171-172. After examining the historical evidence, Heftner concludes that Pompey exaggerates here while perhaps also hinting at his future image as *imperator*.

*precepts*, referring to the entrance of a person upon the stage of public life.<sup>40</sup> The most glorious entrance, Plutarch says, is achieved when one revolts against a bad man who by shameless audacity and cunning has made the city subject to himself:

(805C) τὸ μέντοι φαῦλον ἄνθρωπον, ἀπονοίᾳ δὲ καὶ δεινότητι πεποιημένον ὑφ' αὐτῷ τὴν πόλιν (805D) [...] ἐπαναστάντα καθελεῖν καὶ ταπεινῶσαι λαμπρὰν ποιεῖται τὴν πάροδον ὥσπερ δράματος τῆς πολιτείας.

On the other hand, to revolt against a bad man who by shameless audacity and cunning had made the city subject to himself [...] and to pull him down and humble him provides a glorious entrance upon the stage of public life. (805C-D)

Just before that Plutarch had used a simile from the theatrical world. He said that often the masses accept the 'beginner' in public life with enthusiasm, 'just as spectators at a show are glad to accept a new performer' (804D: "καὶ γὰρ δέχονται προθυμότερον οἱ πολλοὶ κόρῳ τινὶ καὶ πλησμονῇ τῶν συνήθων τὸν ἀρχόμενον, ὥσπερ ἀγωνιστὴν θεαταὶ [...]").<sup>41</sup>

So, the theatrical vocabulary used at 22.6, exactly as in the passage at 805C-D, transfers us from the real (here, political) world to the world of theatre. The transferred use of *parodos* occurs elsewhere in the Lives, too. For example, when Plutarch refers to Alcibiades' first entry into public life, he, strikingly, uses again the theatrical term *parodos* for 'entry': (*Alc.* 10.1): "πρώτην δ' αὐτῷ πάροδον εἰς τὸ δημόσιον γενέσθαι λέγουσι".<sup>42</sup> Alcibiades' significant entry into politics is compared to the first appearance of the tragic chorus on stage. In all these passages the use of '*parodos*' for 'entry' powerfully creates a visual image which presents a political procedure, that of the entrance of a person onto the political 'stage' or, generally, into public life, in theatrical terms. The parallel drawn here between a theatrical image and public life reveals all the more clearly another piece of the network of theatrical allusions which Plutarch constructs.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Fuhrmann (1964), 241-242.

<sup>41</sup> For the antithesis cf. *Pomp.* 14.4: at Sulla's refusal of Pompey celebrating a triumph, Pompey replied that, 'More people worship the rising than the setting sun', implying that Sulla's power was fading away whereas his own power was increasing. Cf. *Political precepts* 804F.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. *Demetr.* 34.6. Alcibiades' entry into public life is described as accidental, as he becomes part of an assembly of the Athenian people (cf. the Athenian assembly in theatre at theatrical contests). On 'tragic' in this Life, see Duff (1999a), 221 and 236-240.

Quite early in the Life it is mentioned that Pompey had already started to behave in a very authoritarian way, and the fear of a tyranny was spread among the people (“τὴν δὲ δύναμιν τοῦ Πομπηίου βαρέως φέροντες ὡς τυραννίδα καθισταμένην”) (30.3).<sup>43</sup> Especially after he had managed to drive away piracy from the sea (chap. 24-29),<sup>44</sup> he had gained even more power, and it was proposed (by a popular tribune, called Manilius) that he should be given all the territory and forces which Lucullus commanded up to that point. Although everybody could see the danger arising from this, the law was passed unanimously and Pompey was assigned new powers but, surprisingly, he did not react with delight. But people knew already about his thirst for power, and this is probably why they were not taken in by Pompey’s ostensible reluctance to take on more responsibilities (30.6-7). They all, even his closest friends, regarded Pompey’s reaction as disingenuous, and Plutarch himself, in the way he recounts the incident, reinforces the impression created, although he distances himself from it by introducing the scene with the impersonal “λέγεται” (‘it is said’, 30.6).<sup>45</sup>

The implications are once again theatrical. Plutarch presents Pompey as an actor, a very bad one indeed, since he cannot even convince his closest friends that he is being honest and genuinely modest when uttering the following words:

(30.7) “φεῦ τῶν ἀνηνύτων ἄθλων, ὥς ἄρα κρεῖττον ἦν ἓνα τῶν ἀδόξων γενέσθαι, εἰ μηδέποτε παύσομαι στρατευόμενος μηδὲ τὸν φθόνον τοῦτον ἐκδῶς ἐν ἀγρῷ διατῆσθαι μετὰ τῆς γυναικός”.

‘Alas for my endless tasks! How much better it were to be an unknown man, if I am never to cease from military service, and cannot lay aside this load of envy and spend my time in the country with my wife’. (30.7)

The use of direct speech – which by nature has scenic value – makes the scene more dramatic and vivid at this instance.<sup>46</sup> Pompey’s attempt to apply to himself the image of

<sup>43</sup> For the role of the *demos* and its political power in Plutarch see de Blois (1992), Pelling (1995b), Prandi (2005), and Said (2005).

<sup>44</sup> For more on piracy and Pompey’s command to fight it see Gelzer (1949), 74-86, and Seager (1979), 28-43, esp. pp. 32-39.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Heftner (1994), 218-219.

<sup>46</sup> As Watkins remarks, Plutarch ‘combines detail of Pompey’s expression, action (“καὶ τὸν μηρὸν πατάξαι”) and the use of direct speech so as to make his narrative more immediate’. Cassius Dio (*Rom. Hist.* 36.45.1)

an ordinary man who does not really enjoy his greatness any more because he evokes in other people envy and hatred, but rather prefers the family life instead, is so simplistic and rhetorical at the same time, that it makes him appear quite preposterous. The scene is most pointed for another reason, too: behind Pompey's disingenuousness there is a version of the truth hiding. The readers know that Pompey speaks the truth, for he was indeed devoted to his family, as they can also see that he is unable to use the family-man argument in the right way. Plutarch is consistently referring to Pompey's family or personal life, when he wishes to strengthen his positive image, especially when this may well serve as an effective counterbalance to a negative image concerning other activities (military, political affairs, etc.).<sup>47</sup> Yet here the correct dynamics of *oikos* are somehow travestied, and the image of a good family-man, instead of acting in his favour, finally works against him.

The exaggerated *pathos* which Pompey shows here is negatively charged by Plutarch, and described as a sign of falsehood and pretence.<sup>48</sup> Plutarch suggests that Pompey acts as if putting on a play; he is wearing the mask of modesty in order to hide his love for power and not excite greater animosity and anger among the people. But he is not convincing in his role. The false play-acting is for the moment the dominant sort of 'theatre' in Pompey's life, but this will change by the end of the Life, where he will become a true tragic character in his own life. Plutarch's choice of vocabulary is revealing concerning his own view on the incident and on Pompey's attitude towards power. He says that his friends knew about his innate ambition ("ἐμφύτου φιλοτιμίας",

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also describes this scene, but with far less emphasis, which indicates that it is Plutarch's own choice to embellish their common, less dramatic source (Watkins (1984), 258).

<sup>47</sup> Chap. 53 could serve as an example of this pattern. After castigating the enmity developed between Pompey and Crassus and the beast fights which Pompey organised in his theatre (52.5) (for more on this, see p. 142 below), Plutarch changes the focus-point in the next paragraph, putting aside, for a while, his political mistakes and emphasising his conjugal devotion and love for his wife Julia. 'Even those who found most fault with Pompey's friendship for Caesar could not blame him for his love for his wife' (53.5) – Plutarch leaves no space for criticism of Pompey's successful marital life.

<sup>48</sup> Exaggerated *pathos*, falsehood, theatrical ostentation, tragic or melodramatic twists, and the unreal, all describe here – as much as elsewhere, too – various forms of the 'theatrical' element, while at the same time their negative implications prepare for the downfall; cf. De Lacy (1952). For examples where the word 'tragic' describes something false or contrived see Di Gregorio (1976), 170-172, O'Donnell (1975), 2, 24-29, 69, 73 and *passim*; and generally about the negative tinge which 'tragic' and 'theatrical' may have see e.g. Wardman (1974), 170-173, Mossman (1988), 84-85 (esp. n. 6), Zadorojnyi (1997), 169-170, Duff (1999a), 123-126, Pelling (1999b); cf. also Most (2000), 20-21.

30.8) and love for power (“φιλαρχίας”, 30.8),<sup>49</sup> and that his enmity to Lucullus fuelled his ambitions and made him all the more delighted. Plutarch passes his own comment reproaching Pompey with *innate* ambition.<sup>50</sup> He sides with the opinion of the public, and at the same time alludes to Pompey’s tragic end which is presented implicitly as inevitable, since his love for honour was part of his nature. In this incident, on one hand we have the charge of over-ambition and uncontrollable love for power, and on the other hand we see Plutarch expressing his personal opinion through the voices of the internal audience, a very theatrical device indeed. It is not an uncommon technique for Plutarch to introduce into his narrative personal thoughts on various matters using a group of onlookers as mouthpiece, as he does in the passage discussed above, where he sides with those people who disapproved of Pompey’s reaction.<sup>51</sup>

A similar use of crowd as a group of onlookers is found in *Marius*, where again the issue about Plutarch’s own place among them comes into play. Plutarch’s phrasing tells us much, both about Marius himself, and about the people’s attitude towards him:

(34.6) ἐνίοις μὲν οὖν ἤρεσκε ταῦτα πράττων, καὶ κατιόντες ἐθεῶντο τὴν φιλοτιμίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰς ἀμύλλας, τοῖς δὲ βελτίστοις ὁρῶσιν οἰκτίρειν ἐπὶ τὴν πλεονεξίαν καὶ τὴν φιλοδοξίαν ὅτι πλουσιώτατος ἐκ πένητος καὶ μέγιστος ἐκ μικροῦ γεγονώς, ὅρον οὐκ οἶδεν εὐτυχίας, οὐδὲ θαυμαζόμενος ἀγαπᾷ καὶ ἀπολαύων ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ τῶν παρόντων [...].

<sup>49</sup> At 31.4 Lucullus himself charges Pompey with love for power – φιλαρχία. Cf. Watkins’ comment on both of these traits of Pompey’s character ((1984), 259), and Gelzer (1949), 186-187.

<sup>50</sup> *Philotimia* may take various forms and become a dominant motif in the Lives, as Muccioli (2005) has demonstrated for the case of *Lysander*. For the role which *philotimia* should or should not play in the life of a politician see the *Political precepts*, and also Roskam’s discussion of the essay (2004/05, esp. pp. 93-98 and 102-103). See Frazier (1988b) for an analysis of all the good and bad implications of *philotimia* in the Lives. She argues that *philotimia* can become a *pathos* and lead a person to base actions (p. 121). She also discusses the term in relation to *philonikia*, which is usually negatively charged by Plutarch (p. 120). On various interpretations of ‘ambition’ and ‘contentiousness’ see Pelling (1989), 212, and (2002a), 182, 242-247, 292-297, 341 ff., and *passim* (cf. Index, s.v.); cf. also Wardman (1955), 105-107, Bucher-Isler (1972), 12-13, 54-55, 58-59, for a list of all the vocabulary connected with arrogance, boast, and ambition, Scardigli, (1995b), 9, and Duff (1999a), 83-87, 179-180, 214-215, 229-230, 267, 308. The term is very common in the Lives: see e.g. *Demosth.* 2.2 and 4.1.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. pp. 125-126 above. It is usually the ‘sensible’ onlookers with whom Plutarch sides (cf. *Mar.* 34.6: “τοῖς βελτίστοις”) – I borrow the term from Duff (1999a), 55. Onlookers also serve as mouthpiece for Plutarch and as guide on how the reader should react – see again Duff (1999a), 55, 120 (on *Marius*), and *passim*; cf. Pelling (2005a), 289-290. The onlookers offer a different focus on events. Thus the readers see things happening not only as described by the narrator but also through somebody else’s eyes; on narrators and focalisers cf. de Jong (1991) and (2004).

Some people were pleased to see him doing this, and they used to go down and watch his ambition and struggles. But the best people, when they saw him, were moved to pity at his greed and love of glory, because, although he had become very rich from being poor and very powerful from being powerless, he did not know how to set a bound to his good fortune. He was not content to be admired and to enjoy in peace and quiet what was present.<sup>52</sup> (34.6)

On a first reading we see that Plutarch divides the people watching Marius going out on new expeditions into two groups with different, if not opposite, reactions to his decision. However, his choice of words to distinguish the two groups reveals much about his own view. He says that some (“ἐνίοις μὲν”) were happy about Marius’ decision, whereas others, the best people (“τοῖς δὲ βελτίστοις”) felt pity for him. One notices the stark contrast between the two views (μὲν – δέ). Plutarch clearly sides with those who think best and can see further in future. He is one of those (the ‘best people’) who feel sorry about Marius’ insatiable love of glory, and whose fears are not far from reality. It is interesting to notice Plutarch’s short comment on the formers’ view, and his much longer comment on the latters’ view, which he favours as wiser and closer to the facts.

The connection between ‘love for power’ and a bad end of life is not uncommon in Plutarch’s Lives.<sup>53</sup> Again Marius offers a good parallel here. He is clearly another similar case who sought glory and honours and was not happy with what he had achieved in life, when he admittedly had achieved so much. He becomes the object of criticism, too, for his unfulfilled ambitions and his love for power, which were never enough to make him stop asking for more. Already at 2.2–4 there is foreboding of Marius’ ill end. He would not have ruined himself if it were not for the influence of passion, an untimely love of office (φιλαρχία)<sup>54</sup> and uncontrollable greed, and if he – and this is quite an interesting point – had not showed contempt for, and therefore rejected, Greek education.<sup>55</sup> Later Plutarch again points to Marius’ love for power and honours. Whereas he had achieved

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<sup>52</sup> Duff’s translation is used here ((1999a), 120).

<sup>53</sup> Cf. e.g. *Alc.* 2.1–7, 6.4, 23.8, 27.6 and 34.3.

<sup>54</sup> The word is again used shortly before Marius died, while he was on his deathbed (45.11): Marius is in great suffering, as his love for office (φιλαρχία) makes him strive to obtain, even in the last minute, the Mithridatic command.

<sup>55</sup> For more on 2.2–4 see Duff (1999a), 109–110 and 120.

many military victories, he was, evidently, never quite satisfied. The quest for power is a common theme in tragedy and regularly leads to disaster – see, for example, Creon in *Antigone*, Xerxes in the *Persians*, Clytemnestra in *Agamemnon*, Lycurgus in Aeschylus' *Edonians*,<sup>56</sup> Pentheus in the *Bacchae*, and of course the famous strife for kingship between Eteocles and Polyneices in the *Seven*, as well as the debate about justice and power between the two brothers in the *Phoenissae*. In all these cases, excessive ambition and desire to exceed the human limits, often together with neglect of divine warnings, lead the characters to their personal – but not only personal – ruin. Though the theme is not exclusive to tragedy, the tragic antecedents are brought to the fore when the idea of the overreacher is combined with the presentation of politics as spectacle and the phenomenon of the internal audience.

In another incident Pompey shows another side of his character, not his ambition and quest for power but his kindness and pity. King Tigranes arrives at Pompey's palace to surrender, after being defeated by Lucullus, helped by Tigranes' own son. The scene displays strong visual similarities with the consulship scene before (33.2-5~22.6); they are like tragic 'mirror-scenes', both underlining Pompey's wish to present himself as an ordinary man.<sup>57</sup> King Tigranes, defeated and humiliated, not only obeyed the instructions of Pompey's lictors to dismount and approach on foot, but he also, out of his own will, surrendered his sword to them, a clear sign of complete allegiance to Pompey. Moreover, he took off his royal tiara, and was ready to lay it at his feet, throw himself down and clasp his knees in supplication. Pompey, however, did not let Tigranes go as far as that, but treated him almost as a friend, by seating him next to himself, and offering him a fair

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Cropp (2005), 275-276: he describes how Lycurgus incurred divine punishment by trying to suppress the worship of Dionysus.

<sup>57</sup> For more on 'mirror-scenes' see Taplin (1978), 122-139, where he discusses typical examples of 'mirror-scenes' in tragedy, and remarks: 'The mirror-scenes are individual within the complex, and of shifting significance; and by being single and well-marked they are, in fact, much more effective as drama than any unaccentuated regularity would be' (p. 123). From his discussion it becomes obvious that 'mirror scenes' have a special dramatic effect; cf. also id. (1977), 100-103. It is then perhaps for this reason that Plutarch uses them, too. For mirror-scenes in Plutarchan context see Pelling (1990c)=(2002a), 159-160, (1990d)=(2002a), 126, 138 n. 33, (1995a)=(2002a), 243, and (2002a), 403-406. However, mirror-scenes are not of course confined to tragedy; they are as early as epic and historiography – see e.g. Hdt. 1.8 ff. and 9.110-113 about Candaules' wife versus Masistes' wife.



military settlement.<sup>58</sup> Again we see Plutarch adding some dramatic colouring to his description of an important scene. The scene shows how respected Pompey was by the famous King Tigranes, while proving how lenient and gentle Pompey was (“ἡμερον δέ τινα τῷ τρόπῳ καὶ πρῶτον”) (33.2). At this instance Pompey shows pity to the former king, remembering his past and refusing to let Tigranes humiliate himself.<sup>59</sup> Plutarch’s vivid narration transposes into theatrical boundaries, as it reveals traits of a theatrical scene, where the regal paraphernalia makes it *τραγικόν* in a more Plutarchan sense.

Theatre as physical building – not as imagery as we have seen so far – plays a further role in the Life of Pompey, especially after his third triumph, as the celebrations which took place to honour him and to welcome him back as the only *imperator* who had achieved three triumphs in three different continents (Europe, Asia, Africa) were of unique magnitude and generosity. The triumphal procession also included the parade of banners presenting all the countries and nations over which he triumphed (chap. 45). It was as if all his expeditions and extensive conquests unfolded on those placards. Pompey, some time after his third triumph in 61, started building the famous and beautiful theatre of Rome (40.9). The design and plan of his theatre was based on the theatre in Mitylene, which he had visited when he gave the city its freedom.<sup>60</sup> He was so impressed by this theatre that he decided to build his Roman theatre in the same style, only in a much larger scale and more impressive. He also had the chance to attend the traditional poetic contest, which took place in this theatre and had as its one theme his exploits. Pompey’s life has become a theme of dramatic art, and this while he is still alive.<sup>61</sup> It is impressive that a great, living personality offers material (his actual life and career) for such a theatre, exactly as big mythical families were the basis for the material used in Greek tragedies and in much Greek art before.

<sup>58</sup> A very similar scene at *Aem.* 26.9-12: Interestingly, Perseus’ self-abasing is not welcomed by Aemilius Paullus either, because it undermines his victory over him.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. *Aem.* 26.7-12. Pelling ((2005a), esp. pp. 286 and 296-300) gives a full analysis of all the different dimensions and forms of pity in Plutarch.

<sup>60</sup> The city had been harshly punished by Lucullus for aiding and supporting Mithridates. Cf. *Luc.* 4.

<sup>61</sup> Another example of the stage-management theme made earlier in this chapter – see pp. 126-127.

There is an interesting detail at the opening of Pompey's theatre in Rome. Apart from the athletic and musical contests which Pompey held, there was a combat of wild beasts.<sup>62</sup> The most terrifying spectacle was an elephant duel (52.5). Cassius Dio (*Rom. Hist.* 39.38.2) mentions eighteen elephants, not two. Plutarch's deviation from Cassius Dio may not be accidental. The battle between two elephants may be understood as a hint for the upcoming personal conflict between Caesar and Pompey, a truly terrifying conflict.<sup>63</sup> Already from its opening day Pompey's theatre itself is not presented as the place for celebrations and performances only, but as a place for battles, too. Thus the reader may see in this battle-picture something dark and ominous which is connected to Pompey's fate at the tragedy of Pharsalus.

Apart from the allusion to Pompey's fate, the battle-image includes a cross-Life hint to the killing of Caesar, too. At the end of the *Caesar* Plutarch describes in every detail the scene of Caesar's murder (66.1 ff. – see pp. 167-168): it all happened in front of a statue of Pompey, in a building which was attached by him to his theatre. In fact, Plutarch says, it seemed that a higher power was responsible for what happened there. There are two striking details in Plutarch's description of Caesar's murder; the one is that Cassius, just before the attack started, looked at Pompey's statue as if invoking his approval and aid; and the other one is that, after being violently struck by his assassins, Caesar fell to the ground by the pedestal of the statue of Pompey, drenching it with blood, so that it seemed that Pompey himself was leading the attack and taking revenge on his rival. Notably, still at this point Plutarch obviously thinks about the battle between beasts, for he describes the fall of Caesar as similar to the fall of a wild beast: “διελαυνόμενος ὥσπερ θηρίου ἐνείλειτο ταῖς πάντων χερσίν” (66.10: driven this way and that way like a wild beast he was entangled in the hands of all). The link between theatre and death is certainly one to keep in mind.

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Pelling (2004c), pp. 325-326, where he suggests that all these athletic and other contests add to the ostentatious behaviour of Pompey and link with theatre which is important for the tragic texture of his fall – cf. also 69.5, where Pompey's troops are described as *πυρριχισταί*: dances like these might naturally take place as part of a contest or festival or theatrical display.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Beneker (2005a), 320.

Much later, just before the battle at Pharsalus,<sup>64</sup> the theatre represents again a bad sign for Pompey. This time it was in a dream that Pompey had. He entered his theatre, the dream goes, as the audience was applauding, and decorated the sanctuary of Venus Victrix with many spoils (68.2-3). Although he might have been encouraged by some aspects of the dream, he was generally disturbed;<sup>65</sup> for he interpreted the dream as indicating that Caesar, whose descent was traced back to Venus, would soon receive glory and splendour through him.<sup>66</sup> Dreams play a significant role as hints for what is going to happen in the future in tragedy, too. Tragic dreams may guide or encourage conduct, but like oracles they also tend to suggest disasters that will happen anyway, no matter if the characters try to avoid them – and indeed it is often the case that the attempt to avoid them will bring them on (cf. the oracle in *OT*); or they can portend impending disasters (Atossa's dream in the *Persians*, Hecuba's ominous dream for Polyxena's end in *Hecuba*, Clytemnestra's dream in the *Choephoroi*).<sup>67</sup> Appian provides us with another important detail, for he mentions that Caesar's password at Pharsalus was actually 'Venus Victrix' (*Bell. Civ.* 2.11.76). The learned reader is able to realise at the end that the dream is ominous of Pompey's defeat by Caesar, and that his theatre does not stand here for a sign of victory for Pompey. However, one has to acknowledge that, again, the dream would be even more significant if the reader recalled at this point that this theatre was also the location of Caesar's own death. Later, in the *Synkrisis of Agesilaus and Pompey*, the talk is again about theatre, this time the theatre (θέατρον) being Pharsalus (84.4-6), 'a theatre which Pompey should have avoided'.<sup>68</sup> In this case 'theatre' is used as a metaphor for the 'battlefield', where Pompey was to be defeated by Caesar. Plutarch strengthens in a way the negative charge of theatre for Pompey; in his dream theatre was at the end a bad sign, and now it describes the very place of his defeat.

<sup>64</sup> More on the actual battle and its different stages in Gelzer (1949), 228-263.

<sup>65</sup> For a discussion of Lucan's recount of the dream (7.7-7.28), which is explicitly described as ambiguous (in contrast to Plutarch's recount, where the ambiguous nature of the dream is only vague) see Pelling (1997b), 204-205 and 210.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Beneker (2005a), 320. See also Brenk (1977), 225, and (1998), 115, who, moreover, gives other examples of 'demoralizing dreams which at first sight seem propitious and uplifting, but are quickly seen as ill-boding and crush the dreamer'.

<sup>67</sup> See also in the chapter on *Caesar*, pp. 165, 172-173, and 183-186.

<sup>68</sup> Thus Pelling (1980)=(2002a), 101-102, 112 n. 36, where he remarks that 'the θέατρον image is also woven into the texture of the *athletic* imagery which pervades the *Life* (cf. esp. 8.7, 17.2, 20.2, 51.2, 66.4, 84(4) *passim*): Pharsalus is 'the stadium and theatre for the contest''. See also Harrison (2005), 59, Pelling (2004c), 325, and n. 33, and Beneker (2005a), 320.

In the last chapters of *Pompey* (chap. 70-80), and as we are approaching Pompey's end, theatrical imagery runs through all the important moments of the general's life and of the circle of people around him.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, what might have been sensed before as ominous and as a sign which was foreboding disaster, now comes true. Tragedy invades and pervades Pompey's reality. The narrative from this point onwards is dense in the use of theatrical motifs. Plutarch here, more frequently than before,<sup>70</sup> is narrating the events from a viewer's point, as it were, passing more often personal comments (such as the one discussed below) and evaluating conditions and characters.

At 70.1-3 Plutarch describes some of the effects of the internal conflict between Caesar and Pompey: the city was divided into two parties, families fought against each other, and hatred developed among members of the same family.<sup>71</sup> Plutarch's comment that 'it only proved how blind and insane human nature is when passion reigns' (70.2: "ἐπιδεικνυμένη τὴν ἀνθρωπίνην φύσιν ὡς ἐν πάθει γενομένη τυφλὸν ἐστὶ καὶ μανιώδης") is of general value. The question of how people think or act under the influence of passion (of love, or for justice) is also central for tragedy (see *Phaedra-Hippolytus*, *Orestes*, *Medea*, *Philoctetes*,

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Harrison (2005), 56 and 59.

<sup>70</sup> Very selectively I list here some representative passages of narratorial interventions: 2.11 ("τῆς δὲ περὶ τὴν διαίταν εὐκολίας καὶ λιτότητος ἐν ἀπομνημόνευμα λέγεται τοιοῦτον") ('as regards his simplicity and indifference in matters pertaining to the table, a story is told as follows'), 8.7 ("πράξεις...αὐτὰς καθ' ἑαυτὰς ὑπερφυεῖς οὔσας, πλήθει δὲ καὶ μεγέθει τῶν ὑστερον ἀγώνων καὶ πολέμων κατακεχωσμένας, ἐδεδιέναι κινεῖν, μὴ περὶ τὰ πρῶτα πολλῆς διατριβῆς γενομένης, τῶν μεγίστων καὶ μάλιστα δηλούντων τὸ ἦθος ἔργων καὶ παθημάτων τοῦ ἀνδρὸς ἀπαλειφθῶμεν") ('deeds...which were extraordinary in themselves but were buried away by the multitude and magnitude of his later wars and contests, and I am afraid to revive them, lest by lingering too long upon his first essays, I should leave myself no room for those achievements and experiences of the man which were greatest, and most illustrative of his character'), 10.9 ("ἀλλ' Ὀπίῳ μὲν...σφόδρα δεῖ πιστεύειν μετ' εὐλαβείας") ('but when Oppius discourses about the enemies or friends of Caesar, one must be very cautious about believing them'), 14.9 ("θῆλον δ' ἐστὶν ὅτι καὶ βουλῆς ἂν ἐβελήσας τότε ῥαδίως ἔτυχεν"), 17.4 ("...ὡς ἀμφοτέρους τοὺς τόθ' ὑπατεύοντας οὐδενὸς ἀξίους ὄντας") ('...implying that both the consuls of that year were good for nothing'), 23.6 ("ἐδήλωσε δ' αὐτὰ τὰ πράγματα μετ' ὀλίγον χρόνον") ('how true this is, events themselves soon showed'), 28.5-6 (philosophical reflections on human nature and on man's change of habits under specific circumstances), 42.13 ("ἐν δ' ἐπιστολαῖς Κικέρωνος ἡ αἰτία γέγραπται") ('but the reason is stated in Cicero's letters'), etc. Plutarch's comments serve to clarify something, to give a hint to what is expected to happen next, to communicate his personal attitude to an event, behaviour or uttering, or even to create a more immediate and dramatic 'dialogue', as it were, with his readers.

<sup>71</sup> On the outbreak of the Civil War of 49 B.C. and its background as well as its results see Gelzer (1949), 193-227, and Seager (1979), 164-184.

Antigone). A little later (70.6-7), Plutarch again castigates the Romans' over-ambition for leadership, which led them to a Civil War:

(70.6) τότε δ' ἀλλήλοις μαχοῦμενοι συνῆσαν, οὐδὲ τὴν δόξαν αὐτῶν, δι' ἣν τῆς πατρίδος ἠφείδουν, οἰκτίραντες, ἄχρι τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ἀνικήτων προσαγορευομένων. (70.7) ἡ μὲν γὰρ γενομένη συγγένεια καὶ τὰ Ἰουλίας φίλτρα καὶ γάμος ἐκεῖνος εὐθὺς ἦν ἀπατηλὰ καὶ ὑποπτα κοινωνίας ἐπὶ χρεῖα συνισταμένης ὁμηρεύματα, φιλίας δ' ἀληθινῆς οὐ μετέσχευ.

But now they were about to join battle with one another, nor were they moved even by compassion for their own glory to spare their country, men who up to that day had been called invincible! For the family alliance which had been made between them, and the charms of Julia, and her marriage, were now seen to have been from the first suspicious and deceptive pledges of a partnership based on self-interest; there was no real friendship in it. (70.6-7)

The partnership between Caesar and Pompey, two great leaders, lacked in true friendship and love for the common good, says Plutarch. In addition, the passage raises the point that political matters are interlinked with family matters. The same point about the *oikos* and its relation to the state is made at *Caesar* 23.5-6, where Pompey's mourning for Julia's death and the consequent break of the link between himself and Caesar (which was achieved via Julia) becomes a sign of the political upheaval to follow and of their personal conflict.

Towards the end of *Pompey*, where everything seems to lead to his tragic end, the biographer Plutarch tries to gauge more Pompey's psychology and thoughts, sharing at the same time his personal reflections with his readers – more openly than before. After the defeat of Pompey's infantry (72.1), Plutarch tries to understand why Pompey just walked away from the camp.<sup>72</sup> He says, 'it is very difficult to say what thoughts passed through his mind' at that very moment (“ὅ μὲν ἐχρήσατο λογισμῷ χαλεπὸν εἰπεῖν”). To the reader's surprise, a few lines further down (73.1-2), Plutarch speaks as if he knew what crossed Pompey's mind – one notices the repetition of the word *λογισμός* here, referring to his calculations, as is also the word *ἐννοούμενον*. The full passage reads as follows:

<sup>72</sup> Contrast here Agesilaus' attitude: although wounded, he refused to retire to his tent (*Ages.* 19.1).

(73.1) Πομπήιος δὲ [...] ἀπῆει καθ' ἡσυχίαν, ἐν διαλογισμοῖς ὧν οἶους εἰκὸς λαμβάνειν ἄνθρωπον ἔτη τέτταρα καὶ τριάκοντα νικᾶν καὶ κρατεῖν ἀπάντων εἰθισμένον, ἥττης δὲ καὶ φυγῆς τότε πρῶτον ἐν γῆρᾳ λαμβάνοντα πείραν, (73.2) ἐννοούμενον δ' ἐξ ὧσων ἀγώνων καὶ πολέμων ἠϋξημένην ἀποβαλὼν ὥρᾳ μιᾷ δόξαν καὶ δύναμιν, [ἦ] πρὸ μικροῦ τοσούτοις ὅπλοις καὶ ἵπποις καὶ στόλοις δορυφορούμενος, ἀπέρχεται μικρὸς οὕτω γεγονὼς καὶ συνεσταλμένος, ὥστε λαυθάνειν ζητοῦντας τοὺς πολεμίους.

But Pompey [...] went quietly away, indulging in such reflections as a man would naturally make who for thirty-four years had been accustomed to conquer and get the mastery in everything, and who now for the first time, in his old age, got experience of defeat and flight; he thought how in a single hour he had lost the power and glory gained in so many wars and conflicts, he who a little while ago was guarded by so many arms and horses and naval resources, but was now going away so insignificant and humbled as to escape the notice of the enemies who were in search of him. (73.1-2)

However, apart from Pompey's reflections, Plutarch tries to understand Pompey's psychology and feelings, too. So, the words "μικρὸς οὕτω γεγονὼς καὶ συνεσταλμένος" are actually meant to describe how he must have felt when he was at some distance from the camp, completely humiliated and insignificant (cf. *Caes.* 45.8). Pompey must then have felt as every man would feel if, after thirty-four successful and glorious years of leadership, he were to lose so much in so little time.<sup>73</sup> At this point the reader is encouraged to make an overall assessment, as it were, of the general's life and see in him the man who best incorporated the two extremes, the maximum glory and the utter defeat. Pharsalus marks the most dramatic turn of fortune for Pompey.<sup>74</sup> This sudden change of luck in one's life is also common in tragedy (and is singled out by Aristotle (*Poet.* 1452a 22 ff.; cf. 1453a 7-10, 13-17) as an essential element in the tragic plot), the most striking example perhaps being that of King Oedipus, whose status changed dramatically in one day: from the king and saviour of his people he became the city's most cursed man and an exile, or rather, self-exiled.

<sup>73</sup> See Marcone (1989/90), 59-60, who reasonably infers that it is Plutarch himself who introduces and sustains this picture of the extremes in Pompey's life.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. de Wet (1981), 129.

Plutarch's use of vocabulary relating to emotions and thoughts confirms his general concern about understanding in depth his characters' psychology and reasoning (see here: "ἐν διαλογισμοῖς" and "ἐννοούμενον"). The reader may understand the use of such vocabulary as another indication of Plutarch's suffering together with his character, reaching perhaps at this point the climax of (narratorial) empathy. Especially the sense of the loss and Pompey's change of status among his army as well as the sudden, extreme change of his fortune in one single moment (cf. the tragic *peripeteia*) make the narrative more intense and his fateful end unavoidable. The dramatic turning of the story is reflected in Plutarch's style. Reflections here, at a critical moment, are reminiscent of tragedy. Plutarch shares his interest in looking into the human soul with the great tragedians. By describing the inner thoughts of Pompey, Plutarch draws his audience deeper into his character and his psychology, rather as happens in tragedy. There a character's soliloquy might be the natural tragic mode of articulating something similar to Pompey's reasoning, while at the same time the soliloquy might be a direct way for a character to share his thoughts and dilemmas with the audience, and talk about himself (cf. e.g. *Ajax* 430-480, 646-683, where the hero articulates thoughts about his fate; *Medea* disclosing her evil plans (364-409, 764-810); *Choeph.* 269-305, where Orestes in a monologue similar to a soliloquy decides to take revenge hoping to receive help from Apollo).

In the passage quoted above (73.1-2) what seems to trouble Plutarch is the reason why Pompey withdrew without saying anything and without being able to do what the situation required. However, the situation does not concern only Pompey the Great and his failure to behave as somebody who deserves his title. The issue involves all those great leaders and epic heroes, like Ajax, who failed to act as such. The example of Ajax is explicitly mentioned by Plutarch in the following lines (72.2),<sup>75</sup> offering a direct parallel to Pompey's decision to withdraw, since Ajax, too, was taken by fear at the sight of the Trojan troops and retreated, unable to defend both his name and fame. Appian (*Bell. Civ.* 2.11.81) refers to Ajax too, when describing this moment, but, interestingly enough, he

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<sup>75</sup> The quotation is verbally reproduced from Homer, *Il.* 11.544-546. Between epic and tragedy there is a strong link – Mossman (1988), 85 (and the relevant n. 11) and 86; so, even the epic element in the *Life* may point to tragedy.

only mentions that Pompey resembled Ajax, and not that Pompey quoted Homer on Ajax. Possibly, as Anderson points out, ‘the whole scene is a *topos* with no historical basis, a means of emphasising the dramatic poignancy of the moment.’<sup>76</sup> To return to a point made earlier (see p. 129 n. 28, and pp. 130-132), Plutarch creates the image of a tragic hero, as it were, who self-destructs. However, Pompey’s entourage is significant, too, later on (chap. 74 ff.), and, in this, *Pompey* shares more common points with Sophocles’ *Ajax*. For, exactly as Ajax fails to realise how dependent both the chorus, consisting of his fellow sailors, and Tecmessa are on him, and heads towards his death, in a similar way Pompey can do little to support and understand fully the feelings and the fate of his wife and friends. However, in the final scenes his last meeting with Cornelia will show that Pompey and Cornelia are emotionally closer than the Sophoclean Ajax and Tecmessa – so, *Ajax* as a point of valid intertextual background which reveals parallels but also points of contrast may be here a choice of Plutarch to encourage the reader to think ‘tragic’.

Not only does Plutarch so often towards the end of the Life implicitly invite us to think of *Pompey* in tragic terms but he also quotes directly from tragic plays. Pompey’s withdrawal both offers another example of passivity and signals the course towards his end. The defeated *imperator* was finally taken on board by a man called Peticius, who provided him with all he needed. It is the same man whose ominous dream forecasts the sad end of Pompey, for it happened that in his dream, just the night before, he had seen Pompey, not as he had often seen him, but as a humble and downcast man, addressing him (73.4-8). Ironically, as he was finishing telling his dream to his fellow sailors he saw Pompey in a boat, exactly the way he had appeared in his dream, thus making the scene which takes place in reality seem to have been brought on by Peticius’ dream (cf. above p. 143, with examples of the pattern of tragic dreams which are fulfilled despite the effort of tragic characters to avoid them).

Moreover, one of Pompey’s attendants, Favonius, who was a free man, behaved to him as if he were his slave, letting Pompey live the illusion that he was still his master (73.4-11).

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<sup>76</sup> W. S. Anderson (1963), 61 n. 16.



It seems that a kind of acting on both sides is going on here. The attendant is playing the role of Pompey's slave, and Pompey himself pretends to be still the king. The role-playing transposes the scene from the real world into the theatrical world. The attendant even washed his feet and prepared his meals, thus confirming in a way that 'to generous souls every task seems noble' ("φεῦ τοῖσι γενναίοισιν ὥς ἅπαν καλόν" – 73.11) (frag. 961),<sup>77</sup> a tragic verse which Plutarch quotes from Euripides, and which gives at this stage an even stronger tragic texture to Pompey's life and career. The downfall of Pompey, though, is definitive. Direct quotations from tragic plays, used at critical junctures like this one, reinforce the tragic element in *Pompey* which is created by strong theatrical patterns and metaphors.

Anderson makes a similar point when he notices that, 'Both Plutarch and Appian describe Pompey as quoting Greek poets to himself at certain highly dramatic occasions'.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, Pompey cites Sophocles at one of the most crucial moments of his life, when he sees his wife for the last time, thus effecting a direct comparison between the two characters. The lines are from an unknown play of Sophocles:

ὅστις δὲ πρὸς τύραννον ἐμπορεύεται,

κείνου ὅστι δοῦλος, καὶ ἐλεύθερος μὲν ἔσται. (Soph., *TGF*, frag. 873)

Anyone who goes to traffic with a tyrant

is his slave, even if he goes there free. (78.7)

Although the formerly powerful *imperator* finds, at last, shelter – however, in words only – in Ptolemy's land, and freely decides to embark on his boat,<sup>79</sup> he realises that, after he will have done that, he will be a slave in Ptolemy's hands, and a pawn in the hands of Fate.<sup>80</sup> As Pompey approaches his tragic end, he resembles tragic heroes (like Ajax) more often than before and sets himself, with his words and actions, into a Greek tragedy

<sup>77</sup> The same line is again quoted at 85A of *On progress in virtue*, where Plutarch gives examples of virtuous people and argues that such people always need to be honoured.

<sup>78</sup> W. S. Anderson (1963), 61.

<sup>79</sup> 'Freely', in the sense that nobody really forces him to do so, but in reality he is forced by the circumstances; it seems that he has no other choice.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. 75.4, where he is taken by metaphysical fears, as it were, and expresses his worries on philosophical matters, such as the role of Providence, and complains about his fair treatment by Providence in a friendly discussion with the philosopher Cratippus. Cf. Pelling (2004c), 322. On *tyche* and providence in Plutarch see, among others, Swain (1989b).

context. It is within this context that he remembers the Sophoclean lines quoted above, which reveal his inner conflicts and feelings at that moment. It is certainly not without importance that his last words to his friends and wife are quoted from Sophocles. Pompey is clearly aware of the tragic implications of his ‘submission’ to Ptolemy.

Plutarch, too, encourages us to think about this moment as the start of the last ‘act’ of *Pompey*, firstly, by putting in some tragic lines, and secondly, by describing Cornelia as already lamenting Pompey’s death, fully aware of the approaching end: “προαποθρηνοῦσαν αὐτοῦ τὸ τέλος” (78.7). One notices the mirroring of the story-denouement in Plutarch’s choice of words. Cornelia is lamenting in advance, as Plutarch is disclosing Pompey’s end in advance. This ‘lamenting in advance for somebody who is still alive’ alludes to a common *topos* in tragedy, or epic, which Plutarch’s learned reader can easily recognise: Hecuba (*Il.* 24.200-216) is weeping for Priam while he is still alive; Andromache does the same for Hector (*Il.* 6.405 ff.); Antigone (*Ant.* 839-851, 858-871, 891-928), or Polyxena (*Hec.* 402 ff.), too, lament for their own death in advance.

The downfall of Pompey has a strong impact on the political state, as it also has an impact on those closest to him. So, Plutarch engages in describing Pompey’s downfall from the angle of the circle of people surrounding him, since those are equally affected. His wife, Cornelia, after finding out from a messenger about Pompey’s sufferings, throws herself onto the ground and laments, thus generating an authentic tragic scene, since the same reaction of a character occurs in tragedy as well, as is shown below. The scene is rich in emotions, and the characters involved are overwhelmed by their feelings for the disaster which has struck them. Even the messenger – whom Plutarch here turns into a character of dramatic dimension – delivers his speech in tears (74.3). He reminds the reader of the messenger who appears in tragedies towards the end of the play to give details of something, usually bad, which happened off stage and which the characters on stage (here, Cornelia) are ignorant of.<sup>81</sup> Cornelia cannot believe her misfortunes and the

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<sup>81</sup> (74.3): “ἐν τούτοις οὖσαν αὐτὴν καταλαβὼν ὁ ἄγγελος, ἀσπᾶσθαι μὲν οὐχ ὑπέμεινε, τὰ δὲ πλεῖστα καὶ μέγιστα τῶν κακῶν τοῖς δάκρυσι μᾶλλον ἢ τῇ φωνῇ φράσας [...]” (‘The messenger, finding her in this mood, could not bring himself to greet her, but indicated to her the most and greatest misfortunes by his tears rather than by his speech [...]'). De Jong (1991) in her book on the Euripidean messenger-speeches

serious impasse to which her husband has come, and remains speechless for quite a long time (“ἡ δ’ ἀκούσασα προήκατο μὲν αὐτὴν χαμᾶζε, καὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἔκφρων καὶ ἄναυδος ἔκειτο”) (74.4).<sup>82</sup>

This first part of the scene, in which Cornelia throws herself to the ground, presents significant analogies to tragedy. Plutarch helps us understand the scene in theatrical terms by the vocabulary he employs in his vivid description of Cornelia, evoking feelings among his readers, partly by the stirring visual image and partly by the actual disaster that has caused Cornelia’s laments.<sup>83</sup> A parallel which comes to mind is Euripides’ *Hecuba*. There the protagonist also throws herself to the ground, covers her head with her clothes as a way of lamenting (486-7: (chorus) “αὕτη πέλας σου νῶτ’ ἔχουσ’ ἐπὶ χθονί, / Ταλθύβιε, κεῖται συγκεκλημένη πέπλοις”), and lies there for some time (from v. 438 to v. 500), overwhelmed by the new misfortune that has fallen upon her. Hecuba laments over her daughter’s fate (Polyxena), and over her own fate, bereft of children and of any divine or human (here, Odysseus’) mercy. She will raise herself from the ground only to find out the details of her daughter’s brave death, which Talthybius, a Greek herald, reports to her. Cornelia, too, in the second part of the scene, regains her senses after some time, realising that this is not the time for tears and lamentations but time to proceed to action.<sup>84</sup> The connection may be not explicit, yet the Cornelia-scene echoes the Hecuba-scene, the link between the two being the (tragic) pattern of lamenting.

Concerning this second part of the image, which refers to the change of Cornelia’s mood from passive into active, the words used by Plutarch are again reminiscent of other tragic plays, such as Sophocles’ *Electra* or Euripides’ *IT*. Cornelia realises by herself that crying is of no use and comes to her senses again: “μόλις δέ πως ἔμφρων γενομένη, καὶ

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demonstrates how important the messenger’s presentation and own reaction are and how they may influence the reaction of other characters on stage. The messenger-speech, as ‘narrative’ and ‘drama’, awakens emotions in other characters and also among the audience; see pp. 77-78, 105, 108-110, 115, 136-139 and 173-177.

<sup>82</sup> The word *χαμᾶζε* is again found in a genuine tragic context, in Euripides’ *Bacchae*, v. 633.

<sup>83</sup> For more on ritual lament see Alexiou (1974).

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Foley (1993) on lament as stimulus to action, especially vengeance, e.g. in the *Choeph.* Electra and the chorus stir the returning hero Orestes to complete his revenge for his father through their lamentations at the hero’s grave (p. 107); and Sophocles’ *Electra* uses lamentation to stir up others to desire revenge on Agamemnon’s behalf (p. 113).

συννοήσασα τὸν καιρὸν οὐκ ὄντα θρήνων καὶ δακρύων, ἐξέδραμε διὰ τῆς πόλεως ἐπὶ θάλατταν”  
 (‘However, and with difficulty, she regained her senses, and perceiving that the occasion was not one for tears and lamentations, she ran out through the city to the sea’) (74.4).<sup>85</sup>  
 In the tragic plays mentioned above the main characters need somebody else to incite them to action. In *Electra* it is the paidagogos who incites Orestes and Electra to act quickly, without any further delay (1326-1335, and 1364-1371)<sup>86</sup> – Clytemnestra and Aegisthus must be killed if the brother and sister do not want to get into danger. In *IT* it is Pylades who takes up that role, inviting Orestes and his sister back to reality to do what is needed (902-908). What links the tragic scenes with Plutarch’s scene is the common acknowledgement that there is no time for tears and lamentations, and that the situation requires action. Although it may be impossible to know whether Plutarch employed theatrical imagery and vocabulary with Euripides or Sophocles’ play in mind, Cornelia’s reaction shows significant similarities with that of the tragic characters. Plutarch’s reader is again made to recall the authentic tragic context which resembles Cornelia’s situation.

In addition, the extended dialogue between Pompey and Cornelia makes the scene all the more ‘theatrical’. In that dialogue Cornelia blames herself for the bad fortune which has now fallen on her husband, and wishes that she had died after the death of her first husband, Publius, or even killed herself (74.6). The sense of *sophrosyne* and shame which drives Cornelia’s words and behaviour reminds the reader of e.g. Phaedra in Euripides’ *Hippolytus* (or, even Creon’s wife in *Ant.* 1301 ff.).<sup>87</sup> When Phaedra could not fight any longer her passion with her reason and good sense (*sophrosyne*), she thought it would be best to commit suicide (*Hip.* 398-402). So, in her case too, it is *sophrosyne*

<sup>85</sup> Note here the word ‘lament’ (“θρήνος”) which reinforces the tragic element – cf. 78.7: “προαποθρηνοῦσαν αὐτοῦ τὸ τέλος”.

<sup>86</sup> “καὶ νῦν ἀπαλλαχθέντε τῶν μακρῶν λόγων/ καὶ τῆς ἀπλήστου τῆσδε σὺν χαρᾷ βοῆς/ ἔσω παρέλθ’, ὡς τὸ μὲν μέλλειν κακὸν/ ἐν τοῖς τοιούτοις ἔστ’ ἀπηλλάχθαι” (‘And now get clear of your long speeches and of the cries of joy of which you are never weary, and come, since on such occasions delay is dangerous, and it is the moment to make an end of it’ – *Elec.* 1335-1338), and: “ἀρκεῖν δοκεῖ μοι [...]. σφῶν δ’ ἐνέπω ’γὼ τοῖν παρεστῶτον ὅτι/ νῦν καιρὸς ἔρδειν/ νῦν Κλυταμνήστρα μόνη/ νῦν οὔτις ἀνδρῶν ἔνδον/ εἰ δ’ ἐφέξετον,/ φροντίζεθ’ ὡς τούτοις τε καὶ σοφωτέροις/ ἄλλοισι τούτων πλείοσιν μαχρούμενοι” (‘I think that is enough [...]. But I say to you who stand here that now is the time to act; now Clytemnestra is alone; now none of the men is inside; but if you hold back, consider that you will have to fight with these and with others more numerous and better skilled’ – *Elec.* 1365, 1367-1371). Note the emphatic repetition of “νῦν” in the verses quoted above (1335, 1368, 1369), that puts the sense of present (‘now’) at the centre of interest and marks the starting-point for further action.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Loraux (1987), 23.

which leads her to suicide. Pompey's reply to Cornelia's words is calm, and his thoughts have a philosophical value: we are human, and good fortune can be followed by bad fortune, in which case we should bear it and hope for good fortune to return (75.1-2). Pompey courageously receives his *tyche*, and hopes for a change towards better:

(75.2) “ἀλλὰ καὶ ταῦτα δεῖ φέρειν γενομένους ἀνθρώπους, καὶ τῆς τύχης ἔτι πειρατέον. οὐ γὰρ ἀνέλπιστον ἐκ τούτων ἀναλαβεῖν ἐκεῖνα τὸν ἐξ ἐκείνων ἐν τούτοις γεγόμενον.”

‘But this reverse also we must bear, since we are mortals, and we must still put fortune to the test. For I can have some hope of rising again from this low estate to my former high estate, since I fell from that to this.’ (75.2)

The fall will come after the culmination of success and good luck. That human nature is changeable and that people who have reached the highpoint of happiness may soon meet unhappiness and vice versa is a recurrent theme in Greek tragedy (*peripeteia*). Being mortal means that you will experience both good and bad *tyche*. Moreover, this is what the inscription written on the inside of the city gate of Athens and addressed to Pompey reminded him of, when he was achieving the one success after the other: ‘To the extent that you are aware of your mortality, you are divine’ (27.5): “ἐφ’ ὅσον ὦν ἄνθρωπος οἶδας, ἐπὶ τοσούτον εἶ θεός”.

How wrong the decision of Pompey to ask for Ptolemy's help was, is already shown by the fact that people with less experience and inferior to him directed him towards this path of action, as Plutarch suggests (76.7 ff.). One clear example of bad influence was Theophanes, a friend of Pompey, but a person with poor judgement, whom Plutarch, both here (76.7-9) and before (37.4: “κακοήθευμα τοῦ Θεοφάνους”, 49.13-14: “ἡ Θεοφάνους μοχθηρία”) counts among the untrustworthy, cunning, and malicious advisers.<sup>88</sup> It is not only at this final stage that Pompey trusts his friends for what is best to do. Earlier Plutarch had found another opportunity to stress the former *imperator*'s passivity and at the same time point to a factor that would lead to his downfall. Pompey, as he had rushed away after his defeat at Pharsalus, was even ignorant of Cato's success at sea (76.2). He now blames himself for having listened to others and having joined battle on land, and for

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<sup>88</sup> One must not forget that Theophanes was also a historical source for Plutarch when he came to write the *Life of Pompey*. Cf. Meriani and Gannattasio Andria (1998), 544.

neglecting his powerful fleet which could have served as a backup for the infantry in case something went wrong on land, as it actually did. ‘This was his worst mistake’, says Plutarch, ‘but also Caesar’s best piece of tactics’: “οὐδὲν γὰρ ἁμάρτημα Πομπηίου μείζον οὐδὲ δεινότερον στρατήγημα Καίσαρος” (76.3). The contrast is remarkable: Pompey’s propensity to self-destruction becomes the strongest advantage for his enemy. He is not acting as an *imperator* but as a soldier who obeys others’ orders, making his passivity appear not only as a personal shortcoming but as a military and political shortcoming which provokes Fate – and catastrophe will not be slow in coming.

But it is not just Pompey’s weaknesses that bring him more misfortunes and lead him to self-destruction; other people’s mistakes will also partly contribute to his bad end, and he can do little to avoid them. At 77.3-5 it is implied that on the other side, Ptolemy’s side, the decisions are also taken by the wrong people. Ptolemy, too young to take decisions by himself, asks the men of his court for advice:

(77.3) ἦν οὖν δεινὸν περὶ Πομπηίου Μάγνου βουλευέσθαι Ποθρινὸν τὸν εὐνούχον καὶ Θεόδοτον τὸν Χίον, ἐπὶ μισθῷ ῥητορικῶν λόγων διδάσκαλον ἀνειλημμένον, καὶ τὸν Αἰγύπτιον Ἀχιλλᾶν· κορυφαιότατοι γὰρ ἦσαν ἐν κατευνασταῖς καὶ τιθηνοῖς τοῖς ἄλλοις οὗτοι σύμβουλοι. (77.4) καὶ τοιοῦτου δικαστηρίου ψῆφον Πομπήιος ἐπ’ ἀγκυρῶν πρόσω τῆς χώρας ἀποσαλεύων περιέμενεν, ὃν Καίσαρι σωτηρίας χάριν οὐκ ἦν ἄξιον ὀφείλιν.

It was certainly a dreadful thing that the fate of Pompey the Great was to be decided by Pothinus the eunuch, and Theodotus of Chios, who was a hired teacher of rhetoric, and Achilles the Egyptian; for these were the chief counsellors of the king among the chamberlains and tutors also gathered there. And it was such a tribunal’s verdict which Pompey, tossing at anchor some distance off the shore, was waiting for, a man who was not worthy to be under obligations to Caesar for his life. (77.3-4)

The full title of Pompey is not accidentally mentioned here, and it certainly adds some more emotional tension to the passage. It also stands in contrast to Ptolemy’s counsellors, men of no experience in war, as the brief description of them shows. The course of things concerning Pompey seems to be highly dependent on Ptolemy’s non-experienced advisers, who will however play an important role towards his tragic end. Theodotus’

suggestion that the safest plan for them was to send for Pompey and kill him (77.7) is finally approved, and Achillas is chosen to execute Pompey (78.1).<sup>89</sup> As soon as Ptolemy adopts the views of those people who are much inferior to him to find out what is the best thing to do concerning Pompey's petition for refuge in his land, the future of Pompey the 'Great' can be nothing but adverse – “ἡν οὖν δεινὸν” (77.3) are the actual words which Plutarch used at the start of the passage quoted, offering by this personal comment a clear hint at what the reader should expect for Pompey thereafter.

Pompey's murder is particularly charged with a theatrical tone.<sup>90</sup> As the boat with Pompey, a few attendants, and his future killers is rowed in silence to the shore, the former general tries to be friendly breaking the silence and addressing Septimius – an old familiar and comrade-in-arms – but gets no response. So he takes his roll with the speech he had prepared to deliver to Ptolemy, written in Greek (79.2-3). The irony is evident; the dark atmosphere prevailing gives the reader a hint that the speech will not be used (cf. *Caes.* 65; see below, p. 167). Silence and anxiety together, mainly on the side of the viewers, illustrate that the situation is beyond control. Cornelia, naturally chosen by Plutarch as the most important person among the viewers to focus on, is full of anxiety about what is going to happen next. For a minute the anxiety gives its place to hope, when she notices all those people of the king gathering at the shore, as if they were to give an honourable welcome to Pompey. But soon the positive picture is again reversed – a kind of tragic *peripeteia*.<sup>91</sup>

The time for the final act in Pompey's life has come. Septimius approaches Pompey and runs him through with his sword; Salvius, and then Achillas also stab him. Ironically enough, now that he has lost all his power and committed serious tactical errors, Pompey behaves as a true *imperator*. He endures their blows with patience and in silence, 'without an act or a word that was unworthy of himself, but with a groan merely',

<sup>89</sup> Cf. *Brut.* 33.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. Pelling (1980)=(2002a), 111 n. 24. Pelling remarks that in describing Pompey's death Plutarch uses an extremely visual technique, 'describing events from the viewpoint of Cornelia and the rest of Pompey's followers, still at sea'. Cf. also Hamilton, who remarks that Plutarch has generally 'a remarkable power of visualizing a scene and a keen sense of dramatic effect' ((1969), lxviii).

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Pelling (1988a), 273-274 about the reversals which generate *peripeteia* (as well as about other aspects of tragedy) in *Lysander*.

remarks Plutarch, ‘after drawing his toga down over his face with both hands’, a very theatrical scene: “ὁ δὲ ταῖς χερσὶν ἀμφοτέραις τὴν τήβεννον ἐφελκυσάμενος κατὰ τοῦ προσώπου, μηδὲν εἰπὼν ἀνάξιον ἑαυτοῦ μηδὲ ποιήσας, ἀλλὰ στενάζας μόνον, ἐνεκατέρησε ταῖς πληγαῖς” (79.5). The move of Pompey to pull his toga over his face bears striking similarities with Caesar’s final move on the Ides, at his assassination – they are indeed mirror-scenes: *Caes.* 66.6: “ὁ μὲν Τίλλιος τὴν τήβεννον αὐτοῦ ταῖς χερσὶν ἀμφοτέραις συλλαβὼν ἀπὸ τοῦ τραχήλου κατήγευ”, and later, at 66.12: “ἐφειλκύσατο κατὰ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ παρήκεν ἑαυτόν” – ‘he pulled the toga down over his head and sank’. In their death the two men appear so similar. The scene has also its tragic parallel in *Hecuba*, where Polyxena covers her face and silently follows Odysseus to her death (*Hec.* 432-7: “κόμιζ’, Ὀδυσσεῦ, μ’ ἀμφιθεῖς κάρφ’ πέπλους...” – ‘Muffle my head, Odysseus, and lead on...’). The parallel may not extend beyond these details but if the initial tragic context of the scene is recalled, then Pompey’s end is cast under a tragic light that presents him as a Euripidean character, as it were.

That is the expected end of Pompey, for which Plutarch has already prepared us. His tragic death is followed by the abuse of his corpse, as the Egyptians even cut off Pompey’s head and throw the naked body into the sea (80.2). It was a terrible spectacle – “θέαμα” is the word that Plutarch uses, setting the viewers of the scene into a theatrical context. What is more ironic is that Pompey, a man who was much loved by the people for all his qualities, as stressed in the prologue – a full list is given: his modest and temperate way of living, his training in the arts of war, his persuasive speech, his trustworthy character, his tact in meeting people (1.3-4)<sup>92</sup> – had the same end as his father, who was one of the most hated commanders due to his greediness for money (1.2-4), and whose body was abused both by people and by nature itself, as it were, since his body was struck by a thunderbolt – perhaps a sign of divine vengeance?

There is an interesting detail in the burial of Pompey’s body. As Philippus, one of his close attendants who were with him at the time of his murder, pays to Pompey his last

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<sup>92</sup> More about Pompey’s qualities listed here and about Plutarch’s motives in advertising them already at the beginning of the *Life*, as well as about their historical basis, see Watkins (1984), 8-12, and Heftner (1994), 67-69.



rites, an old man comes up to him and offers to help him. The Roman man remains anonymous, but we are told that he was an old comrade-in-arms of Pompey. The person who took Pompey's life, Septimius, had also been his comrade-in-arms in the past. The coincidence puts more emphasis on the tragic texture of the Life's end. And it is the same anonymous Roman who attributes to Pompey the title which he had sought most in his life: 'Maximus'.<sup>93</sup> Whereas a few minutes ago he had asked Philippus who he was to give burial rite to Pompey the Great ("τίς ὢν ὁ ἄνθρωπ' θάπτειν διανοῇ Μάγνον Πομπήιον;" – 80.4), now he acknowledges him as the greatest Roman *imperator* ever ("κάμῃ δ' ὥσπερ εὐρήματος εὐσεβοῦς δέξαι κοινωνόν [...] ἄψασθαι καὶ περιστεῖλαι ταῖς ἐμαῖς χερσὶ τὸν μέγιστον αὐτοκράτορα 'Ρωμαίων") ('Let me too share in a pious privilege thus offered [...] to touch with my hands and array for burial the greatest of Roman *imperators*') (80.5).<sup>94</sup>

*Pompey* closes with a series of deaths – a common pattern in Greek tragedy too (cf. e.g. *Antigone*, *Hippolytus*):<sup>95</sup> Lucius Lentulus the next day, after Pompey's burial, happened to be sailing along the coast, when he noticed the funeral pyre – again here a visual image; shortly after approaching the scene he was arrested and put to death; Achilles and Pothinus are put to death by Caesar; Ptolemy mysteriously disappeared after a battle he lost along the Nile; Theodotus is put to death by Marcus Brutus, Caesar's murderer (80.8-9).

The tragic end is just the final touch to a Life which is rich in theatrical atmosphere, tragic texture, and dramatic incidents, as a close reading of *Pompey* proves. For in this Life Plutarch shares with tragedy common material and also exploits material that is reminiscent of theatre. Themes and figures that in themselves may not be distinctively or exclusively 'tragic' can nevertheless be seen in this light, as the insistent theatrical figuring encourages a reader to adopt a tragic mindset and think in dramatic terms. Visuality and tragic language which at the beginning of the Life point to phenomena which we might rather describe as merely theatrical are gradually overtaken by a true

<sup>93</sup> Cf. the anonymous Roman onlooker in *Philop.* 1.

<sup>94</sup> Vaguely similar to *Ant.* 84, where Cleopatra makes libations for Antony.

<sup>95</sup> Pelling discusses in detail the closure in Plutarch's Lives, which is often marked by a series of deaths ((1997a)=(2002a), 365-386).

tragic feeling. That feeling emerges from human misfortunes and passions, so that Pompey presents, at points, strong similarities to tragic heroes – and this is perhaps the image which Plutarch wants his readers to have in mind when reading the *Life of Pompey*.

## 6. Theatrical imagery in *Caesar*

The *Lives of Caesar* and *Pompey* are not only rich in cross-references, but also reveal many ways in which the careers and lives of those two great men actually crossed. Their friendship developed into a fatal rivalry and into no less a danger for the Roman constitution itself. Their parallel ambitions, the many triumphs which they achieved in their career, the circle of advisers who surrounded and influenced them at crucial moments, the contradictory feelings of the people towards them at various points, the intense rivalries and paucity of friendships – especially if one thinks of the much questioned friendship between Caesar and Brutus, who later became the former's assassin – which affected their political success as well as their life: all these sides of their character and different stages of their career show how fundamental the relation between Pompey and Caesar was, the former being the great *imperator* (*Magnus*), and the latter the figure which is paired by Plutarch with Alexander the Great, although probably one would expect Pompey and not Caesar to be paired with Alexander.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the *imitatio Alexandri* is one of the most important aspects of Pompey's politics, more in the first half of his Life where he figures as the most successful Roman conqueror,<sup>2</sup> and clearly less in the second half where his tactical errors or personal failings lead him to his destruction. So, though not formerly paired with it, *Caesar* offers a good parallel to *Pompey* in many ways, and especially in the tragic atmosphere and theatrical moments which those two Lives share. *Caesar* may be poorer (than *Pompey*) in direct references to and quotations from tragic plays, yet the theatrical background (strong visuality and theatricality of some passages, tragic texture and tragic parallels), even if less explicit, emerges as equally important.

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<sup>1</sup> *Pompey* is dated later than *Caesar*, as it is referred to in the future tense at *Caes.* 35.2 (“ὡς ἐν τοῖς περὶ ἐκείνου γραφισμένοις τὰ καθ’ ἕκαστον δηλωθήσεται”). Yet, if Pelling's assumption is right ((1979) and (1980)) that the Lives of *Crassus*, *Pompey*, *Caesar*, *Cato Minor*, *Brutus* and *Antony* were prepared as a single project, then Plutarch would still have the option of choosing Pompey and not Caesar to pair with Alexander.

<sup>2</sup> This is attested by Greek historiography: see, for example, the work on Pompey (or a section of his *Historiai*?) by Posidonius and book XL of Diodorus of Sicily (with the fragments concerning Pompey, e.g. 38/39.9-10, 20; 40.2, 40.4); Appian, too, gives an extensive comparison between Alexander and Caesar (*Civil Wars* 2.149.619-2.154.649) but he does not mention Pompey (Pelling (2006b), 265); cf. Carsana (2005). About the *imitatio Alexandri* see, *inter alios*, Michel (1967), Weippert (1972), 56-104, and Bellen (1988).

As will be shown, in this Life Plutarch uses theatrical imagery at important moments in Caesar's life and career in a way which adds dramatic tension to the biography and draws parallels to tragedy. One such important point in Caesar's career was certainly the battle at Pharsalus, which may have been the darkest moment in Pompey's career, but it was one of the most glorious moments for Caesar. Although at that crucial battle – during the time of preparation (chap. 39 ff.) and in war – Caesar showed impressive confidence and determination in confronting a much bigger army than his own and in winning a battle against heavy odds, he perhaps behaved with over-confidence or ill-judged generosity to some people who came in his way. Either way, Plutarch makes it clear that it was a wrong move, not in the moral sense but in the sense that it was against his own interest:<sup>3</sup>

(46.4) πολλοῖς δὲ καὶ τῶν ἐπιφανῶν ἄδειαν ἔδωκεν, ὧν καὶ Βρούτος ἦν ὁ κτείνας αὐτὸν ὕστερον, ἐφ' ᾧ λέγεται μὴ φαινομένῳ μὲν ἀγωνιάσαι, σωθέντος δὲ καὶ παραγενομένου πρὸς αὐτὸν ἡσθῆναι διαφερόντως.

And to many men of prominence he granted immunity. One of these was Brutus, who afterwards slew him. Caesar was distressed, we are told, when Brutus was not to be found, but when he was brought into his presence safe and sound, he was pleased beyond measure. (46.4)

Irony is prominent in the passage and is intensified by Plutarch's emphasis on Caesar's feelings. Plutarch reminds us that Brutus is the least suitable person to be granted immunity. As in tragedy on stage, tragic irony emerges from the cognitive divide between participants and viewers (the disparity between the knowledge of the protagonist and that of the audience),<sup>4</sup> here too, the fact that the reader knows more than, obviously, Caesar does produces the feeling of tragic irony. His comment, that Brutus was going to be Caesar's murderer at the end, is rich in irony.<sup>5</sup> Plutarch presages Caesar's tragic end and at the same time intensifies the dramatic texture of his Life and shows to his readers how the qualities of the person – here, his famous *epieikeia* – can ruin him.

<sup>3</sup> A similar wrong move was made by Brutus when sparing Antony on the Ides; see *Ant.* 13.2-3, and *Brut.* 18.4-5, 29.10, together with the ad loc. comment by Pelling (1988b), with reference also to *Cic.* 43.1.

<sup>4</sup> On tragic irony see e.g. the examples which Kitto (1973) gives for Aeschylus (pp. 51 and 75), Sophocles (pp. 123, 133, 139 and 163-164) and Euripides (pp. 254, 275 and 327).

<sup>5</sup> This is what is called *prolepsis* in narratology – see Genette (1980), 33-85, esp. pp. 40 and 67-79; cf. de Jong (1999), 451, 459 n. 44, and (2004), 81-87.

*Epieikeia* is a recurrent theme in this Life, and it often describes Caesar's character and treatment of friends who no longer treat him in an honest or fair way. In chap. 34, for example, *epieikeia* is combined with *philanthropia* (34.7: “μετ’ ὀλίγον δ’ ἀκούσας τὸν Καίσαρα θαυμαστῇ τινι φιλανθρωπίᾳ χρῆσθαι πρὸς τοὺς ἐαλωκότας” – Caesar showed incredible clemency to his prisoners) when Caesar shows his kindness and magnanimity to Domitius, who had betrayed him to Pompey. Later again, after the end of the Civil War, Caesar pardons Brutus and Cassius among others who had fought against him. Moreover, he goes one step further than that: not only does he pardon them, but also grants them honours and offices (57.5: “καὶ γὰρ ἀφῆκε πολλοὺς τῶν πεπολεμηκότων πρὸς αὐτόν, ἐνίοις δὲ καὶ ἀρχὰς καὶ τιμὰς, ὡς Βρούτῳ καὶ Κασσίου, προσέθηκεν”) – Brutus and Cassius become praetors. While we are gradually led towards the betrayal of Brutus and his planning of the conspiracy against Caesar, Plutarch intensifies the tragic irony (62.2-5): it was Brutus whose life was spared by Caesar together with many other friends of his at Pharsalus; it was Brutus who always stood high in Caesar's trust;<sup>6</sup> it was he who had been given the most honourable of the praetorships for that year; it was he who was chosen by Caesar to become consul three years later in preference to Cassius; and yet it was Brutus who set the conspiracy against his benefactor in motion. The irony emerges even stronger as the passage (62.2-5) is closer to the moment of Caesar's murder. But the pattern is the same: Caesar's clemency is not appreciated as it should be by the people whom Caesar repeatedly treats with generosity; instead, Brutus and Cassius will grow to become his future assassins.

However, Caesar is not totally ignorant of the danger at this stage, even if he is presented as fearing only Cassius (62.9: “εἶχε μέντοι καὶ δι’ ὑποψίας ὁ Καῖσαρ αὐτόν [sc. Cassius], ὥστε καὶ πρὸς τοὺς φίλους εἰπεῖν ποτε· ‘τί φαίνεται βουλόμενος ὑμῖν Κάσσιος; ἐμοὶ μὲν γὰρ οὐ λίαν ἀρέσκει, λίαν ὠχρὸς ὢν’ ”), and to refuse to see the danger coming also from Brutus: “καὶ ποτε καὶ διαβαλλόντων τινῶν τὸν ἄνδρα [sc. Brutus], πραττομένης ἤδη τῆς συνωμοσίας, οὐ προσέσχευ, ἀλλὰ τοῦ σώματος τῇ χειρὶ θιγὼν ἔφη πρὸς τοὺς διαβάλλοντας· ‘ἀναμενεῖ τοῦτο

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Brut.* 8-9. Compare here also *Caes.* 51, which suggests that Caesar recognised the dangers, not yet specifically those coming from Brutus, but felt forced to act in ways that made the dangers worse – on this see Pelling (2002b), 258.

τὸ δέρμα Βρούτος' ” (62.6). Nonetheless, Plutarch leaves no doubt as to the influence which Cassius had on Brutus: it was Cassius who urged him to betray Caesar, when he suspected a lack of confidence in Brutus to carry out the conspiracy plan (62.8: “μᾶλλον ἢ πρότερον ἐνέκειτο καὶ παρώξυνεν”). Although his friends see the imminent danger and try to warn him of a possible conspiracy against him, organised by Brutus, Caesar demonstrates his full trust in Brutus by defying the warnings and laying his hand on his body, obviously implying that Brutus would wait for his natural death and only then would he succeed him. But at the end of this chapter Plutarch makes it clear that Caesar came to sense that actually both Cassius and Brutus were plotting against him (62.10: “οὐ πάνυ φάναι ‘τούτους [sc. Antony and Dolabella] δέδοικα τοὺς παχεῖς καὶ κομήτας, μᾶλλον δὲ τοὺς ὠχροὺς καὶ λεπτοὺς ἐκείνους’, Κάσσιον λέγων καὶ Βρούτον”).<sup>7</sup>

Yet Caesar’s ‘ignorance’ as presented at 46.4 is important and points the reader towards a tragic context, as there, too, ‘ignorance’ may lead to error, *hamartia* (and may also contribute to the change of *tyche* – cf. *peripeteia*), a recurrent element of tragedy.<sup>8</sup> A particularly pertinent example, because it too projects mistaken lenience, may be found in Euripides’ *Medea*, when Creon decides to grant Medea permission to stay one more day in the city, showing pity to her and taking her words in good faith. He had good reason not to yield to her pleas for mercy, and at first would not let his feelings of pity and compassion take over his mind (*Med.* 282-291, 316-323 – Creon, here, only thinks of Medea as a dangerous and cunning woman who will harm him), but at the end he succumbed to Medea’s terms: “καὶ νῦν ὁρῶ μὲν ἐξαμαρτάνων, γύναι, ὅμως δὲ τεύξῃ τοῦδε” (‘And now, though I see that I am making a serious mistake, nonetheless, woman, you shall have your request’) (*Med.* 350-351). The phrasing is striking. Creon knows that what he is about to do is wrong and against his personal interest, and yet he does it. Caesar, on the other hand, can perhaps never imagine at this point that Brutus, his close associate, will be the one who will later plan his murder, but he gives him the ‘chance’ to

<sup>7</sup> The same story is told by Plutarch at *Ant.* 11.6 and *Brut.* 8.2; see Pelling (1988b), 143-144.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1452a 22 ff. (see p. 146); when discussing *peripeteia* (reversal), he refers to *OT*, where the messenger reveals Oedipus’ true identity thinking that in this way he will rid him of his fear but actually, and out of ignorance, he effects quite the opposite (*OT* 924-1085): interesting is here the focus on the messenger’s (instead of Oedipus’) perspective. For *peripeteia* as reversal of intentions arising from ignorance cf. Oedipus himself, and also Deianeira in the *Trachiniae*.

harm him – exactly as Creon does with Medea – by treating him with generosity and tolerance. Both Creon and Caesar fall victims to their kind and generous feelings. As soon as they stop behaving as kings, they start provoking their fate – although one must acknowledge here that *praotes*, together with *epieikeia*, *eleos* and *philanthropia*, are important qualities for a king, already in Greek archaic times, and onwards.<sup>9</sup>

A series of bad omens for Caesar's fate comes into play but he refuses to see them. Apart from the unusual natural phenomena (lights in the sky, crashing sounds, birds coming down to the forum, 63.1-3), there were also miraculous things happening to various people, and, most importantly, to Caesar himself.<sup>10</sup> For example, there was an incident where Caesar was performing a sacrifice and the heart of the victim was nowhere to be found, a very terrifying omen for Caesar (63.4). However, there was another even clearer sign that Caesar's ruin would not be long in coming. Namely, there was a story, told by many, that a seer warned Caesar to be on his guard against a great danger on the Ides of March (63.5-6). The seer, as Calpurnia too in the same chapter (63.9 – see below, p. 165), appears here as a kind of 'tragic warner' whose advice is defied.<sup>11</sup> When Caesar saw him on that day he told him sarcastically: 'Well, the Ides of March have come', and the seer replied: 'Yes, they have come, but they are not yet gone' – history proved how prophetic those words were. Caesar's fate seems to be both unavoidable and unexpected. Strangely,

<sup>9</sup> The literature on these qualities of the kings is extensive – as a starting point of the discussion about *praotes* see Martin (1960), about clemency see Schettino (2002), esp. p. 205, and concerning all these virtues see de Romilly (1979), 275-292, and esp. pp. 282-283 on Caesar's *epieikeia*, Frazier (1996), 231-239, and the recent discussion by Pelling (2005a).

<sup>10</sup> 63.3: 'Strabo the philosopher says that multitudes of men all on fire were seen rushing up, and a soldier's slave threw from his hand a big flame and seemed to the spectators to be burning, but when the flame ceased the man was uninjured'. The motif of portents and oracles, often foreboding something bad, is regular in both Greek and Roman historiography; see, e.g. Hdt. 1.34-44, 3.64, 7.16-19, 8.36-38, 77; Livy 1.7, 16, 19, 31, 43.13; Tac. *Ann.* 13.58, 14.12. In tragedy see e.g. Sophocles' *Ant.* 417 ff. (strange things happened while Antigone was burying Polyneices), 998-1032 (Teiresias warns Creon of the bad omens he saw: birds produced a strange sound), and Euripides' *Bac.* 585 ff. (that Pentheus is doing something bad provoking at the same time the rage of the god is shown by Zeus' lightning and by the earthquake which shatters Dionysus' prison).

<sup>11</sup> In tragedy as in epic, too, we often come across the pattern of people giving prophecies or strong warnings against an impending danger, but equally often their advice is ignored; cf., for example, the wise Teiresias in *OT* 316 ff., esp. 350-353, in *Bac.* 266-342, Cassandra in *Agam.* 1072 ff.; cf. also *Odys.* 2.157-207 (the old hero Halitherses warns the suitors about Odysseus' returning home soon but one of the suitors, Eurymachus, defies him), 20.351 ff. (the prophet Theoclymenus foretells the death of the suitors but they merely laugh at him), *Il.* 18.249 ff. (Polydamas wisely suggests to Hector that the Trojans return to the city and do not await dawn on the plain beside the ships), and 22.37-76 ff. (Priam tries in vain to dissuade Hector from fighting a duel against Achilles). Cf. below, p. 166 for wise advisers in historiography too.

the day before at a dinner at Marcus Lepidus' house, Caesar acknowledges that the best kind of death for him is 'that which is unexpected' ("ὁ ἀπροσδόκητος", 63.8) – and was this perhaps the reason why did Caesar not protect himself against all the bad signs pointing to his death?

Interestingly, Plutarch has already at 63.1 responded to Caesar's words by saying: "ἀλλ' ἔοικεν οὐχ οὕτως ἀπροσδόκητον ὡς ἀφύλακτον εἶναι τὸ πεπρωμένον"; destiny is not so much unexpected as it is unavoidable.<sup>12</sup> It is perhaps more difficult to say the same for Pompey, who is gradually led to self-destruction, yet in Caesar's case Plutarch suggests that he could do little to avoid his fate. All these bad omens foreboded his death, and many people around him, except for Caesar himself, could see it coming. So, to apply Plutarch's words to Caesar, his death was indeed not so much unexpected but inescapable. Caesar is trapped in his past, because it is his past politics, his past mistakes (cf. the tragic *hamartia*) that have led him to his present impasse.<sup>13</sup>

A protagonist being trapped by his past is a common theme in tragedy too: Agamemnon has to pay for having sacrificed Iphigeneia (*Agam.*); Oedipus suffers the consequences of his parents' decision to expose him, of the herald's decision to save him, and later of his own decisions to go to Delphi to consult the oracle and then to move to Thebes and kill Laius on his way there (*OT*); in *Trach.* Heracles is trapped in his past, too, since he is poisoned by the blood that the Centaur Nessos gave to Deianeira when he was killed by Heracles. Caesar may try to cure his current fears, yet he is not able to change his past mistakes – and he is aware of that. He is led to his downfall by external factors (troops, friends, popular reaction) rather than by his own vices.<sup>14</sup> Unlike in *Alexander*, or

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Pyr.* 30.2: "ἄφυκτον"; Pyrrhus' fate was inescapable (cf. also 16.14). Duff (1999a), 123-124 talks about tragic irony as a pre-eminent feature of this Life. Pyrrhus, as tragic heroes often do, ignores significant bad portents and, driven by extreme ambition, wages war against Argos declaring that 'One omen is best: to fight for Pyrrhus' ("εἰς οἰωνὸς ἄριστος ἀμύνεσθαι περὶ Πύρρου", 29.4), adapting Hector's words at *Il.* 12.243 ("εἰς οἰωνὸς ἄριστος ἀμύνεσθαι περὶ πάτρης"). The association with Hector is of some importance here, as it reminds the reader of the hero's foolhardiness in fighting with Achilles against all warnings (by Polydamas and Priam – *Il.* 22) and thus challenging his fate. Pyrrhus behaves in a similar way; Duff remarks that 'Pyrrhus has been so far in the Life linked consistently with Achilles; the change to Hektor is highly charged' (p. 124). Pyrrhus, like another Hector, is now walking to his fated end.

<sup>13</sup> Pelling (1997c), 218; cf. id. (2006a), 12 ff.

<sup>14</sup> See below, p. 165 n. 18 and p. 177 n. 41.



*Demetrius* and *Antony*, the tragic pattern of tragic heroes who self-destruct does not quite fit into Plutarch's conception of Caesar's downfall.<sup>15</sup> Tragic themes, however, are still an important influence on the narration.

Dreams, too, are added to this series of bad omens.<sup>16</sup> The night before his death, Calpurnia, Caesar's wife, dreamed that she was holding her murdered husband in her arms and weeping (63.9). In another version of the dream Calpurnia saw the gable-ornament, attached to their house by vote of the senate in order to give it adornment and distinction, torn down, and this is why she was weeping in her sleep (63.9). This is why she also asked him the next day to stay at home and not go to the senate-meeting. Her dream explicitly foreshadowed the bad end of Caesar, but it seems that at this stage it was too late for Caesar to act as to avoid his fate foretold by the dream.<sup>17</sup> So, although his first decision was to dismiss the meeting of the senate (63.12), at the end he was convinced by Decimus Brutus to go, who, moreover, minimised the importance of Calpurnia's dreams and considered it as a frivolous excuse for Caesar to abstain from the senate-meeting on that day (64.4). Although Decimus Brutus is undeniably motivated by his personal interests and acts as required by the conspiracy-plan, which he himself along with others have contrived, his words present to Caesar the truth of the situation at that moment, namely that it was Caesar himself who had requested the meeting, and that his possible absence would foster political enmities; it is then perhaps for this reason that they are so convincing. The tension between Caesar's fear for his future and his trust in Calpurnia's warnings intensifies the uncertainties of the moment. Cleverly, Brutus drew on the political argument, which he knew would certainly persuade Caesar: the senate would feel mocked, since Caesar himself had requested the meeting (64.3), and his friends would not be able to show that this was not all about slavery and tyranny (64.5).<sup>18</sup>

The image of a king or a commander being carried away either by short-sighted advisers or by people who give misleading advice because they serve personal interests is a

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<sup>15</sup> Mossman (1988), 92; cf. Pelling (1997c), 216.

<sup>16</sup> On other dreams in *Caesar* see also p. 183 ff.

<sup>17</sup> For the role of dreams in Plutarch in general see Brenk (1977), 16-27, 214-235, and (1998), 104-117, and esp. p. 105 on Calpurnia's dream; cf. also Pelling (1997b), 201.

<sup>18</sup> Pelling (1997a)=(2002a), 380. More on 'friends' in id. (1997c), 217 ff., and (2002b), 258.

recurrent motif in historiography (cf. e.g. Hdt. 8.67 ff., and 8.100 ff.) and is also found in tragedy. Xerxes, for example, in the *Persians*, as a weak commander, yields to bad advisers (*Pers.* 753 ff.); by exploiting Creon's good qualities and vulnerable nature (*Med.* 348-349: "ἥκιστα τοῦμὸν λῆμ' ἔφυ τυραννικόν, αἰδούμενος δὲ πολλὰ δὴ διέφθορα") Medea, again, finally manages to persuade Creon to grant her the crucial extra day which she needs to carry out her atrocious plan (*Med.* 291 ff.); Dionysus persuades Pentheus to dress as a bacchant so that he will be able to spy on the maenads (*Bac.* 821 ff.); in *Agamemnon* (906 ff.) persuasion plays a major role in the denouement of the story: Clytaemnestra, just like Brutus, uses political arguments – What will the demos think? (937) – to persuade Agamemnon to come into a doomed place, the palace, walking on the purple tapestries laid for him.<sup>19</sup> In Caesar's case his persuasion by Decimus Brutus marks a very crucial moment for his life, with Brutus manipulating the truth of the situation so that he may achieve his goal, namely to lead Caesar to his assassins. Having in mind the destructive effect which persuasion had for tragic characters, Plutarch's readers are perhaps expected here to think about all the possible implications of Caesar's persuasion by Brutus in tragic terms in order to comprehend fully the consequences which this moment will have for Caesar.

The 'inevitability' of Caesar's murder is emphasised at the scene where Artemidorus tried, by every means, to come close to Caesar and make him read himself the roll that he had written, and which warned him of the conspiracy planned against him (chap. 65).<sup>20</sup> Even if he finally manages to speak to Caesar pointing out to him how important the message is, and despite the fact that Caesar repeatedly tried to read it, the crowd was too big to let him do so. Artemidorus' ease of access to Caesar is finally not helpful here since it is counterbalanced by the ease of access to him of the crowd (among them the assassins) – yet approachability to people is generally a typical characteristic of a good king. However, Caesar entered the senate holding the roll in his hand and retained it

<sup>19</sup> On persuasion in Greek tragedy see Buxton (1982), esp. pp. 105-114 and 153-170. In *Agam.* Aeschylus plays with expectations, as Clytemnestra is tempting Agamemnon to walk on the red tapestries, and the audience's fear for the king's future is prolonged by his initial reluctance to yield to his wife's request and by the choral ode where the members of the chorus express their wish that their expectations may be false (998-1000).

<sup>20</sup> In a different version of the story, which Plutarch offers at *Caes.* 65.4, somebody else handed the roll to Caesar, since Artemidorus did not manage to come close to him because of the crowd pushing him aside.

throughout the meeting. The irony is striking; the importance of the message is certainly evident to both Caesar and the viewers/readers, yet the readers, unlike Caesar, know that he is never going to read that roll.

The scene has its close parallel in *Pompey*, where the protagonist, exactly like Caesar, shortly before his assassination, rehearses his speech (written in Greek), which the dark atmosphere of the moment shows that he is never going to use (79.2-3; cf. above, p. 155) – and this is only one of the many instances where *Caesar* and *Pompey* interact to prove that the two Lives complement each other and are meant to be read together (see below). Caesar came so close to being spared but it seems that nothing can stop him from walking to his death. The theme is well-known in literature;<sup>21</sup> in the *Iliad* Patroclus came so close to taking Troy (16.698 ff.), in the *Odyssey*, Odysseus' identity is almost exposed at the athletic contests of the Phoenicians when he throws the discus too far (8.186 ff.); in historiography, Athens was so close to winning in Sicily and yet lost; in tragedy, Medea was very close to sparing her children but she finally did not manage to control her rage, or resist the necessities which dictated her deed.

The Life's tragic register reaches its climax, as perhaps expected, towards the end. In describing the assassination-scene Plutarch also refers to Pompey, choosing the vocabulary very carefully, so that he does not really favour the one general against the other, but, instead, he leaves the scene open to various judgements on different levels (human *tyche*, divine providence, etc.). The scene is described as follows:<sup>22</sup>

(66.1) Ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν ἤδη που φέρει καὶ τὸ αὐτόματον· ὁ δὲ δεξάμενος τὸν φόνον ἐκεῖνον καὶ τὸν ἀγῶνα χῶρος, εἰς ὃν ἡ σύγκλητος ἠθροίσθη τότε, Πομπηίου μὲν εἰκόνα κειμένην ἔχων, Πομπηίου δ' ἀνάθημα γεγονὸς τῶν προσκεκοσμημένων τῷ θεάτρῳ, παντάπασιν ἀπέφανε δαίμονός τινος ὑφηγουμένου καὶ καλοῦντος ἐκεῖ τὴν πρᾶξιν ἔργον γεγονέναι.

<sup>21</sup> For the 'epic almost' see Kullmann (1956), 42-48, Reinhardt (1961), 107-110, Nesselrath (1992), esp. pp. 1-38, and de Jong (2004), 68-81 on what she describes as 'if-not situations'.

<sup>22</sup> Pelling (1997a)=(2002a), 381 comments extensively on this passage, and it is his translation that I am citing here; compare also (1997c) – see following note (p. 168 n. 23).

(66.12-13) εἴτ' ἀπὸ τύχης εἴθ' ὑπὸ τῶν κτεινόντων ἀπωσθεὶς πρὸς τὴν βάσιν ἐφ' ἧς ὁ Πομπηίου βέβηκεν ἀνδριάς. καὶ πολὺς καθήμαξεν αὐτὴν ὁ φόνος, ὥς δοκεῖν αὐτὸν ἐφεστάναι τῇ τιμωρίᾳ τοῦ πολεμίου Πομπήιον, ὑπὸ πόδας κεκλιμένου καὶ περισπαίροντος ὑπὸ πλήθους τραυμάτων.

All that [sc. the story of Artemidorus, and his failure to force his way through to Caesar with news of the conspiracy] might simply be the result of coincidence, but it is harder to explain the choice of the place where the senate had gathered on that day, the scene of the murder and the violence. For it had a statue of Pompey lying on the floor, and the whole building had been dedicated by Pompey as one of the additional decorations to his theatre. That gave an indication that there was some heavenly power directing events and guiding the plot into action at this very spot. (66.1)

He fell by the pedestal on which Pompey's statue stood, perhaps by chance, perhaps dragged there by the assassins. It was drenched in streams of blood, so that it appeared that Pompey himself had presided over the vengeance inflicted on his enemy, lying there beneath his feet, still writhing convulsively from his many wounds. (66.12-13)

In this scene which has a particularly strong visual impact there is a shift from the human level (cf. before, at 63.11 Caesar's fear caused by Calpurnia's reaction to the omens rather than by the omens themselves) to the acting of some divine power (more on the supernatural element below, p. 170 ff.).<sup>23</sup> The statue of Pompey presides over Caesar's murder. Caesar falls at the pedestal of Pompey's statue, thus making the scene seem like a duel between the two rivals – the word *ἀγῶνα* at 66.1 as part of the athletic imagery straightforwardly hints at the context of contest.<sup>24</sup> The fact that Pompey even if dead is presented as directly involved in Caesar's own death brings to mind a tragic parallel in *Ajax*. Standing in front of the corpse of Ajax after his heroic suicide, Teucer points out the irony that even if dead, Hector has finally become the killer of his brother, since Ajax

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Pelling (1997c), 227 and 229.

<sup>24</sup> Beneker discusses the terminology from athletic contests in *Caesar* ((2005a), 321). Generally, for the use of *ἀγών* and *ἀγωνίζεσθαι* as part of the athletic imagery see, for example, *C. min.* 10.3, 22.1, 26.5, 27.8, 41.3, 41.8, 45.7, 54.9, 67.3, 73.5, *Phoc.* 1.4, 3.4, 6.2 and 14.8 – Pelling (2004c), 324 n. 29; cf. also ib. 325, esp. n. 33, and id. (1980)=(2002a), 101-102, and p. 112 n. 36 on the more important role of athletic imagery in *Pompey* and its connection to theatre (see *Pompey*-chapter, p. 142 n. 62, and p. 143 n. 68).

killed himself with Hector's sword (*Ajax* 1026-1027: "εἶδες ὡς χρόνον / ἔμελλέ σ' Ἐκτωρ καὶ θανάων ἀποφθίσειν;"). The building attached to the theatre which Pompey had built offers the stage for the actual murder scene, although it seems to host just another gathering of the senate. One notices here that the theatre which in *Pompey* was often a bad omen and signified for Pompey disasters-to-come (cf. *Pomp.* 52.5, 68.2-3) now turns out to be a bad sign for his rival too, since it offers the place for Caesar's murder. The reader is certainly meant to pick up the cross-reference, one among the many which bring the two Lives closer and underline that the path to understanding *Caesar* goes through *Pompey*, and vice versa.

However, theatre does not have bad connotations only for Caesar. When Plutarch refers to Caesar's confronting Pompey's sons, who had meanwhile succeeded their father in fighting Caesar, we have a clear case of theatre acting as a good sign for Caesar (*Caes.* 56). He confronted them at a battle during his campaign in Spain. It was a hard battle for Caesar to win – Plutarch mentions that, after his victory, Caesar acknowledged that it was the first time he had fought for his life (56.4). There is an interesting detail concerning the time of that battle. It was fought and won for Caesar on the day of the festival of Bacchus, Plutarch remarks. On the same day, four years previously, Pompey had also gone out to war against Caesar. The god of theatre, Dionysus, thus becomes another bad omen for Pompey and a good one for Caesar (cf. the fall of the statue of Dionysus from the Acropolis down to the theatre as a bad omen, one among many, for Antony's imminent defeat by Octavianus in *Ant.* 60.4-5). The coincidence of events described above creates a feeling of closure, which furthermore implies that what follows will this time go to a different direction – Plutarch's words "τοῦτον ἔσχατον Καῖσαρ ἐπολέμησε τὸν πόλεμον" at the beginning of the following paragraph makes it explicit (56.7). Yet Plutarch does not see in Caesar's triumph in the Civil War a proper reason to celebrate, but instead, he presents it as a victory which was sadly against Rome itself rather than against an external enemy; and this was why it vexed Romans so much.

The Life does not end with a single death, that of Caesar. Pelling has pertinently questioned whether ‘death is the end’ in many of Plutarch’s Lives.<sup>25</sup> In *Pompey*’s end, apart from the principal’s death, we are also told about the tragic aftermath of people involved in Pompey’s murder: Achilles, Pothinus, as well as Theodotus were all killed by Caesar (80.7-9) – a kind of vengeance for Pompey’s undeserved death? It might well be so; yet things are clearly more complex than that in Plutarch’s epilogues, as Pelling has pointed out.<sup>26</sup> Caesar’s tragic end is followed by the death of others, too. Cassius meets a remarkable death, in Plutarch’s words: he commits suicide using the very same dagger he used to kill Caesar (69.3) – thus the dagger, apart from a common pattern in murders, hints perhaps at some supernatural power acting behind these deaths, some kind of divine punishment again. The use of the same instrument for killing reveals a kind of fateful power attached to the weapon and emphasises the ‘tragic’ element in this death, as in others too: Ajax killed himself with his enemy’s sword (*Ajax* 815-822; cf. 661-662), which he had received at the exchange of battle-gear with Hector before their single combat (*Il.* 14.379 ff.); after Orestes kills Clytemnestra he displays the cloak (*Choeph.* 980-1017), as she had also done after killing Agamemnon by using it as a net to trap him in (*Agam.* 1381-1383; cf. 1115-1129, and 355 ff.: even Troy was caught in an inescapable net).<sup>27</sup> Brutus, the assassin and former friend, meets an Ajax-like death by killing himself with his own sword, and, in contrast to Ajax, in his case, he is helped by a friend (“ἅμα καὶ φίλου τινὸς ὥς φασι συνεπιρρώσαντος τὴν πληγὴν” – 69.14).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Pelling (1997a).

<sup>26</sup> Pelling, *ib.*

<sup>27</sup> On the scenic repetition of the net-image see Taplin (1977), 314-315, 325 and 381. Cf. also McLeod (1983) about the various implications of the clothing in the *Oresteia*.

<sup>28</sup> Compare Soph. *Ajax* 826-834: “πέμψον τιν’ ἡμῖν ἄγγελον, κακὴν φάτιν/ Τεύκρῳ φέροντα, πρῶτος ὥς με βαστάσῃ/ πεπτῶτα τῷδε περὶ νεορράντῃ ξίφει,/ καὶ μὴ πρὸς ἐχθρῶν του κατοπτευθεὶς πάρος/ ῥιφθῶ κυσὶν πρόβλητος οἰωνοῖς θ’ ἔλωρ ... πλευρὰν διαρρήξαντα τῷδε φασγάνῳ” (‘I pray you send some messenger to bear to Teucer the sad tale, that he may come to lift me where I lie a bleeding corpse, fallen on this gory sword, lest I be first discovered by some enemy and cast forth, a prey to dogs and birds...when into my side I plunge this sword’).

There is something supernatural in Brutus' death;<sup>29</sup> it seems that he is caught in an inevitable divine plan, which he finally recognises and does little to escape. The passage is certainly worthy to be fully quoted here:

(69.6-14) Μάλιστα δὲ τὸ Βρούτῳ γεινόμενον φάσμα τὴν Καίσαρος ἐδήλωσε σφαγὴν οὐ γενομένην θεοῖς ἀρεστήν· ἦν δὲ τοιόνδε. μέλλων τὸν στρατὸν ἐξ Ἀβύδου διαβιβάσειν εἰς τὴν ἑτέραν ἡπειρον, ἀνεπαύετο νυκτὸς ὥσπερ εἰώθει κατὰ σκηνήν, οὐ καθεύδων, ἀλλὰ φροντίζων περὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος· λέγεται γὰρ οὗτος ἀνὴρ ἥκιστα δὴ τῶν στρατηγῶν ὑπνώδης γενέσθαι καὶ πλεῖστον ἑαυτῷ χρόνον ἐργηγορότι χρῆσθαι πεφυκώς· ψόφου δέ τινος αἰσθῆσθαι περὶ τὴν θύραν ἔδοξε, καὶ πρὸς τὸ τοῦ λύχνου φῶς ἦδη καταφερομένου σκεψάμενος, ὅψιν εἶδε φοβεράν ἀνδρὸς ἐκφύλου τὸ μέγεθος καὶ χαλεποῦ τὸ εἶδος. ἐκπλαγεὶς δὲ τὸ πρῶτον, ὡς ἑώρα μήτε πράττοντά τι μήτε φθεγγόμενον, ἀλλ' ἐστῶτα σιγῇ παρὰ τὴν κλίνην, ἠρώτα [ὅς] τίς ἐστιν. ἀποκρίνεται δ' αὐτῷ τὸ φάσμα· “ὁ σὸς ὦ Βρούτε δαίμων κακός· ὅψει δέ με περὶ Φιλίππους.” τότε μὲν οὖν ὁ Βρούτος εὐθαρσῶς “ὄψομαι” εἶπε, καὶ τὸ δαιμόνιον εὐθὺς ἐκποδὼν ἀπήει. τῷ δ' ἰκνουμένῳ χρόνῳ περὶ τοὺς Φιλίππους ἀντιταχθεὶς Ἀντωνίῳ καὶ Καίσαρι, τῇ μὲν πρώτῃ μάχῃ κρατήσας τὸ καθ' ἑαυτὸν ἐτρέψατο, καὶ διεξήλασε πορθῶν τὸ Καίσαρος στρατόπεδον· τὴν δὲ δευτέραν αὐτῷ μάχεσθαι μέλλοντι φοιτᾷ τὸ αὐτὸ φάσμα τῆς νυκτὸς αὖθις, οὐχ ὥστε τι προσειπεῖν, ἀλλὰ συνεὶς ὁ Βρούτος τὸ πεπρωμένον, ἔρριψε φέρων ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὸν κίνδυνον.

Οὐ μὲν ἔπεσεν ἀγωνιζόμενος, ἀλλὰ τῆς τροπῆς γενομένης ἀναφυγῶν πρὸς τι κρημνῶδες, καὶ τῷ ξίφει γυμνῷ προσβαλὼν τὸ στέρνον, ἅμα καὶ φίλου τινὸς ὡς φασὶ συνεπιρρώσαντος τὴν πληγὴν, ἀπέθανεν.

More than anything else, it was the phantom that appeared to Brutus which gave a particularly clear sign that Caesar's killing had been unwelcome to the gods. It happened like this. Brutus was about to transport the army from Abydus to the other continent: it was night-time, and he was resting as usual in his tent. He was not asleep, but deep in thought about future. They say that this man needed less sleep than any other general in history, and spent many hours awake and alone. He thought he heard a noise by the door, and looked toward the lamp, which was already burning low. He saw a terrifying apparition of a man, a giant in size and

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Brenk (1977), 62-63 on the credit which Plutarch gives to the visions of the principal characters' impending death in the *Brutus-Dion* pair.

menacing to look at. At first he was frightened, but then he saw that the apparition was doing and saying nothing, but just standing silently by the bed. Brutus asked him who he was. The phantom replied: 'Your evil genius, Brutus. You will meet me at Philippi.' For the moment Brutus calmly replied 'I will meet you there', and the phantom immediately went away.

In the following months Brutus faced Antony and the young Caesar in battle at Philippi. In the first battle he defeated and forced back the detachment stationed opposite himself, and drove on to destroy Caesar's camp. When he was about to fight the second battle the phantom visited him again at night. It said nothing, but Brutus recognised his fate, and plunged into danger in the battle. Yet he did not die fighting. After the rout he took refuge on a rocky prominence, and forced his breast against his naked sword, with a friend, they say, adding weight to the blow. So he met his death.<sup>30</sup> (69.6-14)

We saw earlier some supernatural power acting at the scene of Caesar's murder, when he fell by the pedestal of Pompey's statue (pp. 167-168). Divine powers suggest a fateful chain of events and in the passage quoted above we can see them taking control of Brutus' fate – Plutarch is here unusually explicit about divine involvement (69.6: “μάλιστα δὲ τὸ Βρούτῳ γινόμενον φάσμα τὴν Καίσαρος ἐδήλωσε σφαγὴν οὐ γενομένην θεοῖς ἀρεστήν”). The phantom which appears to Brutus gives the sense of impending doom and makes the scene more atmospheric; one could say that it incorporates his fate itself, while adding more dramatic tension to Brutus' encounter with supernatural powers.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the fact that Plutarch stresses that Brutus was not asleep creates a reality which merges with the dream, making the dream appear more real.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> The translation is again Pelling's ((1997a)=(2002a), 378-379), who quotes the passage when discussing death as an (non-)end in Plutarch's *Lives*. Plutarch tells the same story at *Brut.* 36.

<sup>31</sup> Brenk ((1977), 184-213), too, sees visions and dreams as part of Plutarch's technique to dramatise his *Lives* – he talks about 'subordination of the portents to the dramatic needs of the *Lives*' (p. 191). Brenk discusses Brutus' vision in (2002), 70-72.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. *Alex.* 50.2, where 'some inexorable divine plan' affects both Cleitus and Philotas – thus Mossman (1988), 88.



The pattern of mortals being caught in a divine plan, despite all effort they may make to avoid it, is a favourite theme of tragedy, though it is not confined to tragedy.<sup>33</sup> Hippolytus is controlled by Aphrodite; Oedipus in *OT* has to fulfil the prophecy;<sup>34</sup> Pentheus is punished by Dionysus in the *Bacchae*; Xerxes fulfils Atossa's ominous dream about his destruction, as also Darius' spirit portends the defeat of the Persians at Plataea (*Pers.* 176 ff., and 516 ff.). So, once again, at Brutus' encounter with the supernatural, Plutarch's reader may think about or compare it to tragedy, and understand Brutus as another tragic character who can do little to resist his fate – at least at this moment. There is an interesting detail in the narration of this strange encounter. Both times the phantom says nothing to Brutus (69.10: 'he saw that the apparition was doing and saying nothing'; 69.13: 'it said nothing'), until *he* asks him to speak. Thus, the fact that Brutus makes the apparition speak may signify that he is the one who – provoked in the past and still now – provokes his fate.<sup>35</sup> He evidently recognises his tragic fate, but does not hold back from battle (69.13: “συνεῖς ὁ Βροῦτος τὸ πεπρωμένον, ἔρριψε φέρων ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὸν κίνδυνον”), and consciously heads to his demise.<sup>36</sup> Exactly as Brutus, Caesar, too, faces the same kind of impasse; he, too, sees the danger but cannot act as to avoid it any longer (*Caes.* 63 ff.).

So much concerning the conspiracy, the assassination, and what followed thereafter, and on their analogies to tragedy and to theatrical performance. Yet, apart from tragic patterns in events there are also tragic patterns in Caesar's character, and therefore it is worth examining what other aspects of his personality Plutarch brings to the foreground and how those are related to what is 'theatrical' or 'tragic', at various levels and intensities, in this Life. At the beginning of the Life Plutarch draws a portrait of Caesar which illustrates his talented personality and charisma in gaining popularity and admiration

<sup>33</sup> The pattern is common in historiography (e.g. Hdt. 1.35 ff.: the story of Adrastus) (cf. Mossman (1988), 88), or epic poetry: epic heroes are also caught in divine plans, or act as their protecting deities want them to – cf. Gaskin (2001) and Lesky (2001).

<sup>34</sup> On how Oedipus meets his fate see, among others, Reinhardt (1979), 94-134, Winnington-Ingram (1980), 150-178 and 179-204, and Segal (2001).

<sup>35</sup> Apparition of ghosts, whether bidden to speak (cf. *Pers.* 619 ff., where Atossa, together with the chorus of Elders, summons the ghost of Darius to appear) or not (cf. the ghost of Clytemnestra in *Eum.* 94-139), is also a tragedy-theme.

<sup>36</sup> The prophetic words of the phantom, 'You will meet me at Philippi', bear a striking similarity to the parting words of Calanus, an Indian sage, who killed himself in *Alexander*. He says about Hephaestion, Alexander's closest friend, who has just died: 'He will meet Alexander soon, at Babylon' (*Alex.* 69.6) – thus Pelling (1997a)=(2002a), 379.

among the masses rather than his bad sides, such as his propensity to tyranny. He creates an image of Caesar as a leader who is not only very powerful but also, and most significantly, sees himself and acts as potentially an *imperator*. The theme of Caesar's ambition is introduced as early as chapter 2, in the anecdote about the pirates, which underlines that he was exceptional and, moreover, conscious of his power; however, what he was not aware of was that his highly ambitious nature would ultimately destroy him. Plutarch describes the pirate adventure in every detail in reported speech which supposedly reproduces the exact exchange of words between Caesar and the pirates, and on the whole makes the anecdote a very theatrical way of looking into the issue of Caesar's influence and power at that early stage of his career. There is indeed a lot of display and exaggeration in Caesar's behaviour while he was in the hands of the Cilicians, who were notorious for their harshness and bloodthirstiness.

Caesar's final victory over the pirates is anticipated by his attitude while still a captive, as well as by the absolute superiority and recklessness he demonstrates. He used to behave as if they were his captives and he the ruler: he treated them with disdain (2.2), and mocked at them by offering more money than they required for his release (2.1). He used to read out to them his writings using his captors as his audience, he called them 'barbarians', if they failed to appreciate his poems and prose pieces, and went as far as to threaten to hang them: "καὶ ποιήματα γράφων καὶ λόγους τινὰς ἀκροαταῖς ἐκείνοις ἐχρήτο, καὶ τοὺς μὴ θαυμάζοντας ἄντικρυς ἀπαιδεύτους καὶ βαρβάρους ἀπεκάλει, καὶ σὺν γέλωτι πολλάκις ἠπειλήσεν κρεμᾶν αὐτούς" (2.4) – Plutarch's words are important here as they create the image of a captive Caesar who performs, as it were, his role in front of his audience, his captors. That Caesar is fully in control of his 'barbarian' audience shows his confidence and determination always to be superior under any circumstances. These qualities of his character will become clearer later in his life and career, but the incident with the pirates is certainly a pointer to his becoming a self-confident and ambitious person. The reader forms here the picture of a Caesar who, apart from any element of self-aggrandisement, constructs his public image, his fame, but at the same time the reader senses perhaps that he is going one step too far – as he also does, for example, later at the incident when he remains seated in front of the senate (60.4).

Caesar, then, increasingly gained popularity as a political orator (3.2) – it is said that the encomium he wrote and pronounced for Julia, the deceased wife of Marius, met with general approval and applause – as well as public influence, by giving lavish dinners and banquets (4.4-5). Although Caesar was in heavy debt (5.8: “λέγεται πρὶν εἰς ἀρχὴν τινα καθίστασθαι χιλίων καὶ τριακοσίων γενέσθαι χρεωφειλέτης ταλάντων”) before even running for any public office, he spent considerable amounts of his own money on organising spectacles, such as shows with gladiators, processions and theatrical performances (5.8-9). The reference to theatre is significant here. Although theatrical productions are listed among lavish and extravagant expenses, Plutarch’s point may be here on the whole in favour of Caesar, in the sense that it shows that his tactics to gain political power were clever and successful – 5.9: “... τὰς πρὸ αὐτοῦ κατέκλυσε φιλοτιμίας, οὕτω διέθηκε τὸν δῆμον, ὥς καινὰς μὲν ἀρχὰς, καινὰς δὲ τιμὰς ζητεῖν ἕκαστον αἷς αὐτὸν ἀμείψαντο” (‘... he obliterated all earlier ambition; by these means he put the people in such a mood that every man of them was seeking out new offices and new honours with which to requite him’).<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, in the *Political precepts* Plutarch says that the person who favours and flatters the masses by giving them theatrical performances and making distributions of money will only be granted ‘ephemeral and uncertain reputation’ (822F: “ἐφήμερόν τινα καὶ ἀβέβαιον δόξαν”). If applied to Caesar, Plutarch’s view in the *Political precepts* carries certainly an ominous insinuation about his popularity which will later work against him as much as it favours him now, at this early stage of his career. On the whole, chapter 3 gives a heavy hint of how much he had to sacrifice to develop his career as a statesman<sup>38</sup> – indeed, this aspect of Caesar stifling other parts of his talented personality might strike at least a modern reader as especially ‘tragic’ an element in Caesar’s life – while anticipating his rise in the political arena. He was to achieve much more as a commander

<sup>37</sup> Compare the totally opposite angle from which Plutarch sees Antony’s debts, already at the beginning of his career and of the Life (chap. 2). They are part of his image and an indication of character which Plutarch disapproves.

<sup>38</sup> As Pelling remarks, much in the Lives is about choices ((2004/05), 80-81) – and the same goes for tragedy, too (cf. id. (2004c), 318).

than as an orator, even if his natural talent could clearly give him the first rank among all political orators.

Another way in which Plutarch brings out the potentially tragic nature of Caesar's Life is through reference to Alexander the Great. In *Pompey* we are told that people saw in Pompey's physical appearance many common traits with Alexander. Although Plutarch himself questions the similarity,<sup>39</sup> the fact that Plutarch mentions it makes the point that the (true or imaginary) resemblance of the two men had a certain impact on the people. So, there the comparison aimed to presage that Pompey was going to become a great ruler, an *imperator* to be compared with Alexander the Great. In *Caesar* we have the commander himself – and not the external environment, other people – reflecting on his achievements as compared to those of Alexander, after being assigned the province of Spain (11.5-6).<sup>40</sup> He is so demoralised that he even bursts into tears. When he is asked by his friends to explain his distress, his words reveal sadness for having, supposedly, achieved nothing at an age when Alexander had achieved everything.

The actual dialogue between Caesar and his friends is reproduced to create a greater impact on the reader. The agony of Caesar to succeed and fulfil his ambitions seems to be mainly, if not exclusively, a personal matter. His external environment, his friends seem rightfully unable to understand his internal battle, or even more, see in him the image of a failed general. He is the only one to set himself against Alexander, the most successful general ever, and considers his own achievements, as compared to Alexander's, of no importance. The dynamics of success and failure create emotional distress to Caesar and

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<sup>39</sup> (2.2) “ἦν δὲ τις καὶ ἀναστολή τῆς κόμης ἀτρέμα, καὶ τῶν περὶ τὰ ὄμματα ῥυθμῶν ὑγρότης, τοῦ προσώπου ποιοῦσα μᾶλλον λεγομένην ἢ φαινομένην ὁμοιότητα πρὸς τὰς Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ βασιλέως εἰκόνας” (‘His hair was inclined to lift itself slightly from his forehead, and this, with a graceful contour of face about the eyes, produced a resemblance, more talked about than actually apparent, to the portrait statues of King Alexander’). Plutarch’s comment (‘more talked about than actually apparent’) reveals his wariness to believe the common view that Pompey’s physical appearance resembled that of Alexander the Great (cf. *Pompey*-chapter, p. 130).

<sup>40</sup> About this anecdote and its variations in different sources see Green (1978), 3 (and *passim*), and the relevant notes. But as Pelling remarks, the fact that Plutarch presents Caesar *reading* from the history of Alexander – as opposed to the version of Suetonius (*Div. Iul.* 7.1) and Cassius Dio (37.52.2) where Caesar is *seeing* a statue of Alexander – is of importance here as it may work on more levels than one, suggesting the inspiring moral value of written narrative for Caesar as a reader, in the same way as Plutarch’s readers may have been inspired by Alexander in the paired Life ((2002b)=(2002a), 257).

at the same time emphasise the dramatic register of the Life. The high ambitions and standards he himself sets for his political and military career will drive him into a struggle to exceed himself and surpass all his predecessors. This struggle will bring him much success and glory, as it will equally make him odious and hated by his enemies, and will finally destroy him.

In the portrait which Plutarch draws of Caesar after the end of the Civil War, this battle within Caesar himself to exceed his past achievements appears even more tense. Instead of enjoying the fruits of what he had worked so hard to achieve, he emulated himself and made himself his own rival (58.4-5). Thus he decided to pursue his further ambitions and go out against many other lands, wishing to become the absolute king. It is exactly this lust for kingship which will finally work against him and drive him towards becoming less popular among the masses, and towards boastful behaviour (60.1; cf. 62.1). A good example of this kind of behaviour is offered at an incident at the rostra, where he did not rise to receive the members of the senate together with the praetors and the consuls but remained seated (60.4). It seems, though, that Caesar's decision not to stand up in front of the senators is not exactly his own.

At the end of that chapter (chap. 60) Plutarch mentions that a friend named Cornelius Balbus stopped him from receiving the senate standing, although Caesar himself was eager to do so (“πάνυ βουλόμενον αὐτὸν ὑπεξαναστῆναι τῇ βουλῇ”, 60.8), by saying to him: ‘Remember that you are Caesar, and permit yourself to be treated as superior’ (60.8). Plutarch presents here Caesar as yielding to wrong advice, just like Pompey listened to bad advisers at crucial moments in his life and career (cf. *Pomp.* 67.1-2, 67.8). Yet in Caesar's case it is an interesting paradox that apparently sensible and well-founded advice may come from an enemy (e.g. Decimus Brutus – chap. 64; cf. above, p. 165), and really bad advice may come from a friend, in this case from Balbus, who is, however, presented as a flatterer, wishing to flatter somehow his commander at this instance.<sup>41</sup> So, it is not just his personal faults, his over-ambition that will destroy him (60.1). As the

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<sup>41</sup> See Pelling (1980)=(2002a), 104-105, (1996), 324-325, and (1997c), 217 ff.: friends, along with troops and the popular reaction are the main elements in building Caesar's power, and the very same forces which drive him to his fall (esp. chap. 57 ff.).

incident at the senate shows, Caesar is also destroyed by others, who however follow the lead that Caesar himself has given by his politically hazardous moves. On this occasion as also at the crowning (61.5-7 – see below, pp. 179-181) Caesar is encouraged by others to expose his ambition in public, and thus he himself in a way encourages people to see in him a potential danger for Roman democracy.

The vivid visual image and the detailed description make the scene appear as part of a performance, a political performance in this case. Caesar's conduct towards the senate was considered by the people to be offensive, since it also insulted the state as a whole in the persons of the senators (60.5).<sup>42</sup> But when some of the people left, Caesar realised his mistake and turned to go home. In a symbolic gesture he pulled back his toga so that his neck was exposed; he cried out to his friends that his throat was available for anybody who would like to kill him (60.6: “καὶ βοᾷν πρὸς τοὺς φίλους ἀπαγαγόντα τοῦ τραχήλου τὸ ἱμάτιον, ὡς ἔτοιμος εἶη τῷ βουλομένῳ τὴν σφαγὴν παρέχειν”).<sup>43</sup> The gesture of Caesar pulling back his toga has a double value, first as a theatrical image of Caesar actively dramatising his own life, and secondly as an ominous allusion to the actual scene of his assassination.<sup>44</sup>

The ‘mirror-scene’ in chapter 66 bears striking similarities, only there it is Tillius, one of Caesar's assassins who takes hold of Caesar's toga and pulls it back signalling for the attack to begin (66.6: “ὁ μὲν Τίλλιος τὴν τήβεννον αὐτοῦ ταῖς χερσὶν ἀμφοτέραις συλλαβὼν ἀπὸ τοῦ τραχήλου κατήγεν, ὅπερ ἦν σύνθημα τῆς ἐπιχειρήσεως”). The similarity between the two scenes is evident, and the reader as a viewer can compare them in his mind and

<sup>42</sup> Pelling ((2006b), 269, and 275 n. 66) points out the striking similarity in Plutarch's phrasing in describing a similar offence against the senate at *Rom.* 27.3: “ἔδοξε κομιδῇ τὴν γερουσίαν προπηλακίζειν” (‘[Romulus] seemed to be inflicting total humiliation on the senate’); cf. *Caes.* 60.5: “ὡς ἐν τῇ βουλῇ καὶ τῆς πόλεως προπηλακισμένης” (‘as if the senate's humiliation formed an insult to the whole city’) – another indication that several Plutarchan Lives must be read together, if not taken as a sequence of a coherent whole.

<sup>43</sup> Compare again here the Decimus Brutus scene, where he takes Caesar by hand and leads him along, 64.6. The taking-by-hand-image is linked with imminent death also later, at 68.3, in the dream which the poet Cinna had, and which was fulfilled the next day at the forum, where he went to pay tribute to his friend, Caesar, and was murdered because he was mistaken for one of Caesar's assassins. Cf. Pelling (1996), 330, and (1997c), 227-228.

<sup>44</sup> On gesture as a feature of tragedy, and its dramatic effect on stage see Taplin (1978), 58-76, and on gesture in Homeric epic see Lateiner (1995), esp. pp. 19-29. On the link between robe and death see again *Agam.* 1381-1383, 1492, *Choeph.* 980-1017, and *Med.* 786-789, 982-989, and 1156 ff.

realise the extra hints that the earlier scene (*Caes.* 60) gives of the later scene (*Caes.* 66); the one scene foreshadows the other, for one naturally recalls the actual murder scene when reading the passage at 60.6. It seems that Caesar prepares his own death by neglecting the senators and acting as a king. The allusion to his death in the theatrical imagery used at this significant scene, is certainly of tragic texture: Caesar pulls back his toga himself in an attempt to show that he acknowledges his mistake, but it seems that he has already gone one step too far, fuelling at the same time the plans of his rivals to attack him (cf. *Brut.* 52.6-8, and *Caes.* 69.14, where Brutus forces his breast against his naked sword – see above, pp. 171-172).<sup>45</sup>

However, it is important to stress that it was not only Caesar's lust for power that gradually made him disliked among the masses. In what follows, public reaction and bystanders play a major role in defining Caesar's downfall. There was a group of supporters of Caesar that was always encouraging the idea of him being named 'king'. At 60.2 Plutarch tells us that his followers went even as far as spreading the rumour in the city 'that from the Sibylline books it appeared that Parthia could be taken if the Romans went up against it with a king, but otherwise could not be assailed'. They also greeted Caesar as 'king' as he was coming into the city, which disturbed those present. Despite his passion for royal power (60.1: "ὁ τῆς βασιλείας ἔρως"), Caesar clearly does not want to present himself in front of the people as a king and thus refuses the title. In this way he mitigates the reaction against him which his own supporters had fuelled by prematurely attributing to him that title.

Bystanders also play a significant role at another incident which happened at the celebration of the Lupercalia (*Caes.* 61). Antony came forward upon the rostra where Caesar was sitting, and offered him a diadem three times, and all three times Caesar rejected it. The scene is of particular theatrical value – as well as of political interest – since it resembles in its process a performance, with the forum serving as the stage, as it were, on which the spectacle takes place, yet in reality it was meant to stage a coronation ritual:

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Pelling (1979)=(2002a), 15.

(61.5-7) ὥς οὖν εἰς τὴν ἀγορὰν ἐνέβαλε καὶ τὸ πλῆθος αὐτῷ διέστη, φέρων διάδημα στεφάνῳ δάφνης περιπεπλεγμένον ὥρεξε τῷ Καίσαρι· καὶ γίνεται κρότος οὐ λαμπρός, ἀλλ' ὀλίγος ἐκ παρασκευῆς. ἀπωσαμένου δὲ τοῦ Καίσαρος, ἅπας ὁ δῆμος ἀνεκρότησεν· αὖθις δὲ προσφέροντος, ὀλίγοι, καὶ μὴ δεξαμένου, πάλιν ἅπαντες. οὕτω δὲ τῆς πείρας ἐξελεγχομένης, Καῖσαρ μὲν ἀνίσταται, τὸν στέφανον εἰς τὸ Καπιτώλιον ἀπενεχθῆναι κελεύσας.

After he [Antony] had dashed into the forum and the crowd had made way for him, he carried a diadem, round which a wreath of laurel was tied, and held it out for Caesar. Then there was applause, not loud, but slight and prearranged. But when Caesar pushed away the diadem, all the people applauded; and when Antony offered it again, few, and when Caesar declined it, again all applauded. The experiment having failed, Caesar rose from his seat, after ordering the wreath to be carried up to the Capitol. (61.5-7)

Indeed, Caesar's experiment to see whether people liked the idea of him being named 'king' had utterly disappointed him in his hopes. His attempt at manipulation of the scene and of the audience is unsuccessful, and demonstrates that in real life a possible attempt to stage-manage audience and events can be more dangerous than in theatre.<sup>46</sup> The first time that Antony offered the diadem to crown Caesar, very few people applauded, and even that applause, Plutarch says, was prearranged ("ἐκ παρασκευῆς"). This first part of the scene was obviously set up by Caesar's supporters, and aimed at a general approval of Caesar's kingship. Yet the crowd clearly showed its dislike for that idea. This is why, both the second and third time that Antony offered the diadem to Caesar, he was applauded by only few people, whereas Caesar's refusal of the title was met with great applause.<sup>47</sup> The scene should mark a glorious moment for the main character; Caesar was supposed to be the only protagonist, and the bystanders were expected to act in favour of him. Caesar, as if a character in a play, tries to turn the crowd (the people outside the play) into the chorus in his own drama and make them respond in such a way as to help

<sup>46</sup> Compare similar stage-management by Clodius who attempts to manipulate people against Pompey at *Pomp.* 48.8-12; see above, pp. 126-127.

<sup>47</sup> Compare the similar scene at *Caes.* 47, where, shortly before his final win, a seer, Gaius Cornelius, told Caesar that all portents were in favour of him ('Victory is yours, Caesar!', 47.6), whereupon the bystanders were pleased and amazed, yet he took the garland off his head and told them that he would not wear it again until the actual facts confirmed the seer's words. The people are ready to see and honour Caesar as a conqueror, but not as a king.



him achieve his personal goals. Yet it turns out that he is unable to impose himself; the public political view controls the scene here, and the common people hold the stage.

The Lupercalia-episode is also told by Plutarch in the *Life of Antony* (*Ant.* 12), only there the emphasis is different concerning the person responsible for the unpopularity of Caesar that started to grow from that point onwards. It is implied that it was Antony's fault rather than Caesar's, whereas in *Caesar* Plutarch presents the incident as Caesar's own arrogant attempt to fulfil his over-ambition by carrying out an experiment to test the public reaction to his possible claim of the title of king.<sup>48</sup> What followed the incident showed how distressed Caesar was and how powerful the people were. Namely, Caesar's statues were found crowned with royal diadems, which vexed the tribunes, who went up and pulled them off (61.8)<sup>49</sup> – a symbolic action which demonstrated how strong the feelings of the people against monarchy were. The crowning (of statues or people) as an action which may possibly cause, consciously or unconsciously, wrath and destruction, or may point to tragic irony by standing in contrast to its honorary and festive character, is a theme which appears in tragedy; Hippolytus angers Aphrodite by offering garlands to Artemis and honouring her statues only (*Hip.* 73-87; cf. 114-120) and thus he provokes his punishment (by Poseidon) (*Hip.* 1173 ff.); Oedipus is offered garlands too, in order to save his city, but at the end he is utterly destroyed being totally ignorant of the truth (*OT* 1 ff.; and later Creon himself enters the stage crowned thinking that he brings good news for the people of Thebes – v. 113 ff.). The end of the episode in *Caesar* is decided by the influential public opinion: those who first hailed Caesar as 'king' were led off to prison by the tribunes Flavius and Marullus, at which moment the crowd cheered and called them 'Brutuses', the implication being that they were protecting the democracy, exactly as the first Marcus Brutus was the one who had replaced monarchy with a system of

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<sup>48</sup> Pelling (1988b), 144-145.

<sup>49</sup> Compare *Pomp.* 57: after Pompey's recovery from a dangerous illness, he returns to Rome, and people in all cities welcome him with garlands on their heads and torches in their hands – interestingly here, too, there is a negative touch in garlands and celebrations since Plutarch presents the public rejoicing as a factor which led to the Civil War; Pompey became arrogant towards Caesar and underestimated his power. Pelling discusses the pattern of flower-throwing in similar passages in *Pompey* and Appian (*Pomp.* 57.3~App. 2.27.106); the passages at the same time provide a link between Curio and Pompey. The use of the flower-imagery rightly leads to the assumption that 'each [sc. Plutarch and Appian] is taking elements from the complete system in Pollio's original' – Pelling (2006b), 273 n. 45.

government where the senate and the people were most powerful (61.9). Infuriated, Caesar denounced both tribunes and deprived them of their office.

As Caesar starts acting as a king, the political dangers for him and for Rome itself come to the surface. Earlier in the Life Plutarch hinted at these dangers with an incident of tragic coincidence in Caesar's life which, however, had more complex implications. When Caesar was about to sail to Gaul, a message arriving from Rome informed him about the death of his daughter in childbirth, who was also Pompey's wife at that time (23.5). However, there is another important aspect of Julia's death, as it marks the start of a serious threat for the Roman constitution.<sup>50</sup> Yet at *Caes.* 28.1 and most importantly at *Pomp.* 53.8 Plutarch underscores the link between the death of Crassus and the start of political upheavals for Rome, since it was Crassus who had managed to constrain both Pompey's and Caesar's ambitious plans for as long as he was alive. The friends of Caesar and Pompey were obviously able to see the link between the two levels of personal and political tragedy: the grief was common for the two generals, but their friendship, which was up to that moment a factor of stability, peace and concord for the state, had died together with the death of Julia's and, a few days later, of her child. In Plutarch's words:

(23.5-6) τελευτῇ δὲ τίκτουσα παρὰ Πομπηίου. καὶ μέγα μὲν αὐτὸν ἔσχε Πομπήιον, μέγα δὲ Καίσαρα πένθος, οἱ δὲ φίλοι συνεταράχθησαν, ὥς τῆς ἐν εἰρήνῃ καὶ ὁμονοίᾳ τᾶλλα νοσοῦσαν τὴν πολιτείαν φυλαττούσης οἰκειότητος λελυμένης· καὶ γὰρ <καὶ> τὸ βρέφος εὐθὺς οὐ πολλὰς ἡμέρας μετὰ τὴν μητέρα διαζήσαν ἐτελεύτησε.

She died in childbirth at Pompey's house. Great was the grief of Pompey, and great the grief of Caesar, and their friends were greatly troubled too; they felt that the relationship which alone kept the ailing state in harmony and concord was now dissolved. For before long the baby died too, after surviving its mother a few days.

(23.5-6)

Julia was one important link between Caesar and Pompey, and her death marked not only a new era in the relationship between the two generals, but also a new era for Rome.

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<sup>50</sup> Plutarch develops in his Lives different views on the importance of the marriage between Pompey and Julia for Roman politics, which are not always consistent and focus on different aspects according to the purposes of each Life (cf. *Cato Minor* 31.6, *Caes.* 14.7-8, *Pomp.* 47.9-10); see Pelling (1995b), 324-326, esp. 324 n. 13 (he also discusses Plutarch's adaptation of his source, Pollio, about the Roman crisis).

Family stability is lost together with Rome's stability. The break of the Civil War and the personal conflict between Pompey and Caesar will not be long in coming. The passage mirrors *Pomp.* 53, with the important repetition of the word "οἰκειότης":

(*Pomp.* 53.7) εὐθὺς γὰρ ἐκύμαιεν ἡ πόλις, καὶ πάντα τὰ πράγματα σάλον εἶχε καὶ λόγους διαστατικούς, ὥς ἢ πρότερον παρακαλύπτουσα μᾶλλον ἢ κατείργουσα τῶν ἀνδρῶν τὴν φιλαρχίαν οἰκειότης ἀνήρηται.

For the city became at once a tossing sea, and everywhere surging tumult and discordant speeches prevailed, since the marriage alliance which had until then veiled rather than restrained the ambition of the two men was now at an end.

The vocabulary, and especially the word "οἰκειότης", strengthens the *oikos*-point as an important element in the Life, suggesting that what is happening inside the family is reflected in the turbulent political situation. (*Pomp.* 53.7)

Dreams are a common motif of foreboding the future in tragedy, a role which they sometimes play in Plutarch, too – significantly, in both *Pompey* (cf. 68.2-3) and *Caesar* (see below) dreams are presenting in a very visual manner the protagonist's agonies and the ambiguities at most crucial moments.<sup>51</sup> Thus, apart from their role of alluding to what will happen to the main character in near or remote future, they also intensify the feeling of suspense, since the reader is intrigued to check their truth by the actual outcome. At 32.9, just before his attack against Ariminum, Caesar had a strange dream of incestuous intercourse with his mother ("ἐδόκει γὰρ αὐτὸς τῇ ἑαυτοῦ μητρὶ μείγνυσθαι τὴν ἄρρητον μείξιν" – 'the unspeakable union'). It might, or might not perhaps be accidental that this dream comes almost half-way in the Life (32.9) – Caesar's murder comes in chap. 66. At a moment when everything goes well for Caesar and he is about to cross the Rubicon, this dream raises unsettling ambiguities, suggesting that the situation is less auspicious

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<sup>51</sup> In tragedy there are many examples where dreams foretell the future or trouble characters with their ambiguous or deceiving meaning – Aeschylus' *Pers.* 176-231, *Agam.* 410-416, 491-492, 891-894, 981, *Choeph.* 32 ff., 523 ff., Sophocles' *Elec.* 417-430, 459-460, 479-481, 498-501, 644-7, 1389-1390, Euripides' *Hec.* 68-97, *IT* 150 ff., 348 ff., 452-455, 569. Cf. Dodds (1951), 102-134, and Devereux (1976), who discusses some of these dreams in Greek tragedy. Dreams are a common motif already in Homer (e.g. *Odys.* 4.795-841, 6.15-41, 19.535 ff., *Il.* 2.60-70) but also in historiography, especially in Herodotus: e.g. 1.209, 6.107, 7.12-19.

than Caesar's military superiority may suggest<sup>52</sup> – a kind of dramatic device which creates suspense and prepares the reader for a possible reversal of good luck (*peripeteia*). Although the language of dreams often throws the people that it concerns into confusion, it is usually clear to the viewers what it signifies. Bearing this in mind one could say that this unnatural dream (“ὄναρ ἐκθεσμιον”, 32.9) reflects in the reader's mind the reversal of the natural order in Roman politics and history; Caesar will take possession of his own country by force. But even if the dream signifies in this way a disaster to come for Rome, it could also be interpreted in a positive way for Caesar, that is, if one infers that the mother symbolises the earth and the conquest of lands by Caesar which is yet to come. At the same time the dream could be interpreted as a pointer to a more personal misfortune which will fall upon Caesar – and Plutarch's choice of vocabulary (“ἄρρητον μείζην”, 32.9) sounds ominous on that (personal) level, too.

So, the incest-dream has undeniably both positive and negative suggestions for both Caesar and the reader, while it also carries tragic weight as an important recurrent theme in tragedy. In any case, as Pelling has remarked, it is certainly an example of Plutarch's subtly insinuating of an ominous note at a moment of success.<sup>53</sup> At a very crucial historical moment, that of the crossing of the Rubicon, some more dramatic tension is added due to all the possible implications which this ambiguous dream may convey for Caesar. Yet Caesar went ahead with his plan to cross the river and then attack Ariminum – as if following Jocasta's advice to her king, after a similar dream he had: ‘Many have lain with their mothers in dreams too. It is he to whom such things are nothing who puts up with life the best’ (OT 981-983). There must also certainly be a link between this dream (32.9) and Calpurnia's dream the night just before Caesar's assassination (63.9); both dreams prepare for the disaster to come, and gain even more significance from the fact that they are connected with two persons (his mother and his wife) that are the closest to him.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Pelling ((1997b), 200-201) comments about the uncertainties which the dream both derives from and creates; cf. id. (2004c), 317-318.

<sup>53</sup> Pelling (1997c), 220. He also points out that at this instance ‘the audience might well think of Hippias' famous dream before Marathon (Hdt. 6.107.1), and what *that* portended for the hapless dreamer’.

<sup>54</sup> See also p. 165.

The image of a dream appears again in a simile shortly after Caesar's conquest of Gaul. The Gallic army, despite its great force, vanished like a phantom or a dream (27.7: "οὕτως ὁξέως ἢ τοσαύτη δύναμις ὥσπερ εἶδωλον ἢ ὄνειρον ἡφάνιστο καὶ διεπεφόρητο")<sup>55</sup> – the simile presents us with the image of the Gauls being routed and at the same time emphasises how great Caesar's win was; it also perhaps adds a tone of vanity in human achievements, and gives a hint that the whole of the Gallic challenge might later seem as a kind of unreal past. Yet most striking is the moment of the surrender of their leader, Vercingetorix (27.9-10). Having put on his most beautiful armour and having decorated his horse, he emerged from the city gate on horseback. He rode around Caesar and then dismounted, stripped off his armour and sat quietly at Caesar's feet, this being the ultimate sign of defeat. The scene is strongly reminiscent of a similar scene in *Pompey*, where King Tigranes surrenders his sword and his royal tiara to Pompey, completely humiliated and powerless (33.2-5). The visual similarities, which the two scenes present, make the reader recall the 'mirror-scenes' in drama, and particularly in tragedy, where they are a recurrent pattern of special importance, as Taplin has shown.<sup>56</sup> However, the staging of these two 'mirror-scenes' also reveals perhaps a difference in character concerning the winners of the war. Whereas Pompey did not let Tigranes throw himself down as a suppliant, and treated him as an equal by even offering him a seat next to him, Caesar, on the other hand, acted as the absolute conqueror and ordered for Vercingetorix to be kept in custody until the final triumph. Significantly, the similarity between the two scenes points again to the fact that the two Lives are closely interlinked and that the readers can understand these extra synkrisis-points only if they read the two Lives together.

It is not only Caesar who is visited by ominous visions; Pompey too, shortly before the battle at Pharsalus had a dream of entering his theatre in Rome and being applauded by crowds:

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<sup>55</sup> Appearance and disappearance of phantoms in dreams is a recurrent theme in epic, as much as in tragedy – see, for example, Anticleia (*Odys.* 11.152-224), who appears to Odysseus in Hades and then vanishes 'like a shadow or a dream' (207-208); and again in *Ajax* 121-126 Odysseus is reflecting on life, expressing the view that all those who live are nothing but ghosts, or a fleeting shadow.

<sup>56</sup> For 'mirror-scenes' and their role in tragedy cf. *Pompey*-chapter, p. 140 n. 57, and *passim*.

(*Caes.* 42.1) ἔτι καὶ φασμάτων οὐκ αἰσίων προσγενομένων καὶ καθ' ὕπνον ὄψεως· ἐδόκει γὰρ ἑαυτὸν ὄρᾶν ἐν τῷ θεάτρῳ κροτούμενον ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων.

There befell him unlucky appearances and a vision in his sleep. He dreamed, namely, that he saw himself in his theatre applauded by the Romans. (*Caes.* 42.1)

In this Life Plutarch says no more; yet in *Pompey*, where he again refers to the same vision, he gives a fuller reference and explanation of the apparition (*Pomp.* 68.2-3; cf. p. 143). The second part of the dream, which is not mentioned in *Caesar* at all, presented Pompey decorating the sanctuary of Venus Victrix.<sup>57</sup> Since Caesar's descent goes back to Venus, the dream was there interpreted by Pompey as a sign of his defeat by Caesar, who would thus gain much glory through his weakness. The dream comes at a very important moment, that of the battle preparations, to give significant clues about the future. The passage quoted above is not the only instance where the Lives of *Pompey* and *Caesar* meet.<sup>58</sup> It seems that Plutarch at various instances in those two Lives uses the same material and highlights different sides of it according to the particular aspects of each Life, and according to the way he wants to portray his characters in their own Life and in other Lives.<sup>59</sup>

And there is a further example of use of common material. Before the battle at Pharsalus, and while Pompey was being indecisive as to whether to engage in a battle with Caesar or not, people used to criticise him for wrong tactics, and called him 'Agamemnon' and 'King of Kings':

(41.2) οἱ δ' ἄλλοι πάντες ἐκάκιζον τὸν Πομπήϊον φυγομαχοῦντα καὶ παρώξυνον, Ἀγαμέμνονα καὶ βασιλέα βασιλέων ἀποκαλοῦντες, ὥς δὴ μὴ βουλόμενον ἀποθέσθαι τὴν

<sup>57</sup> If one compares the two versions of the dream in the two Lives, one has the impression that there is a problem of inconsequentiality in *Caes.* 42.1: Why are the Romans here applauding? Why is there no reference to Venus Victrix? Is the text corrupt, or is Plutarch severely abbreviating the incident? Compare Pelling (1984), 44-45, who gives a full review of other sources (Livy, Appian, etc.) and of the opinion of different scholars on the 'textual problem', and presents a good case for considering the text to be sound; see also Brenk (1977), 224, and n. 10.

<sup>58</sup> See e.g. *Caes.* 28.4~*Pomp.* 46.4; *Caes.* 35~*Pomp.* 60; *Caes.* 35.2~*Pomp.* 62.2-6; *Caes.* 41.2~*Pomp.* 67.5; *Caes.* 44.9-12~*Pomp.* 71.1-4; *Caes.* 45.7-8~*Pomp.* 72.1-3; *Caes.* 48.5-9~*Pomp.* 77.2-4.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Pelling (1979) and (1980) on the common sources and material which Plutarch draws upon in the Lives of *Crassus*, *Pompey*, *Caesar*, *Cato*, *Brutus* and *Antony* which he must have written as a single project; also id. (2004c), 325.

μοναρχίαν, ἀλλ' ἀγαλλόμενοι ἡγεμόνων τοσούτων ἐξηρημένων αὐτοῦ καὶ φοιτῶντων ἐπὶ σκηνήν.

All the rest, however, reviled Pompey for trying to avoid a battle, and sought to goad him on by calling him 'Agamemnon' and 'King of Kings', implying that he did not wish to lay aside his sole authority, but plumed himself on having so many commanders dependent upon him and coming constantly to his tent. (41.2)

The passage is along the same lines as 67.5 of *Pompey*. In both passages the name 'Agamemnon' pays no credit to Pompey, since it underlines his love for authority and his fear to risk what he already possessed, and will finally have a disastrous effect for Pompey's side at Pharsalus. For it is seemingly partly due to those names, which Pompey believed were unjustly attributed to him, that he was compelled to go out to war against Caesar against his will ("ἐκ τούτων ἀπάντων συνελαυνόμενος ἄκων εἰς μάχην ὁ Πομπήιος ἐχώρει τὸν Καίσαρα διώκων" – *Caes.* 41.5)<sup>60</sup> – similar reluctance is shown by Caesar at the incident when Balbus persuades him, despite Caesar's intention to receive the senate standing, to remain seated, which was apparently a fatal political error (60.4-8, see above, p. 177). Thus apart from describing a general who was a slave to fame and to authority, these names are linked to a dramatic turn in both Pompey's life and in the course of the Civil War; they make Pompey abandon his initial wise decision not to engage in war, and drive him to an untimely attack which will eventually destroy him. Interestingly, the people who accuse Pompey of a passive attitude in war and, above all, of his vain love for authority are, as it seems, equally possessed by their ambitions and by their thirst for becoming rulers. That Plutarch does not side with their opinion is implied by the language he uses; he refers to them as if they are a crowd, a mob ("οἱ δ' ἄλλοι πάντες", 41.2), without naming or distinguishing among them anyone in particular.

The parallel passages in the two Lives show that Pompey's figure is central not only in the Life which Plutarch wrote for him, but in Caesar's Life, too. The choice of words and

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<sup>60</sup> Compare the wording in *Pomp.* 67.7: "Ταῦτα καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πολλὰ λέγοντες ἄνδρα δόξης ἥττονα καὶ τῆς πρὸς τοὺς φίλους αἰδοῦς τὸν Πομπήιον ἐξεβιάσαντο καὶ συνεπεσπᾶσαντο ταῖς ἐαυτῶν ἐλπίσι καὶ ὁρμαῖς ἐπακολουθῆσαι, προέμενον τοὺς ἀρίστους λογισμούς" ('With these and many similar speeches they forced Pompey from his settled purpose – a man who was a slave to fame and loath to disappoint his friends – and dragged him into following after their own hopes and impulses, abandoning his best laid plans'). Pompey engages, against his better judgement ("ἐξεβιάσαντο" – *Pomp.* 67.7, "ἄκων" – *Caes.* 41.5) into a war which others consider as necessary and inevitable.

ways to describe events and reactions of the two men nuances their image in each of the two Lives, as is the case at *Caes.* 45.7-8 and its parallel passage at *Pomp.* 72.1-3. The scene is interesting for many reasons. It concerns a crucial moment in Pompey's political and military career, yet it reveals more about Pompey's personal thoughts and psychology than about his actual tactics of war. It has also a dramatic value, for it stirs in viewers the feeling of agony and uncertainty for the general's future, and marks a significant moment in the change of Pompey's luck, which has its analogies to the tragic *peripeteia*.

Plutarch describes the first moments and reactions of the defeated general after the battle at Pharsalus. As he saw his army fleeing and being scattered by enemy forces, he left the battlefield and withdrew to his tent in silence, and from there he watched the end of the battle until his army was completely routed. Plutarch dramatises Pompey's withdrawal, by vividly describing the moment in detail, and by using direct speech, which is rarely employed by Plutarch in this Life. He seems unable to trace the reasons for his not fighting until the end and not standing by his troops. This kind of behaviour was so unlike him that Plutarch invokes the 'supernatural' in order to be able to offer an explanation of his decision – he says:

(45.7-8) Πομπήιος δ' ὡς κατεῖδεν ἀπὸ θατέρου τοὺς ἵππεῖς φυγῇ σκεδασθέντας, οὐκέτ' ἦν ὁ αὐτὸς οὐδ' ἐμέμνητο Πομπήιος ὢν Μᾶγνος, ἀλλ' ὑπὸ θεοῦ μάλιστα βλαπτομένῳ τὴν γνώμην εἰκῶς [ἢ διὰ θείας ἥττης τεθαμβημένος],<sup>61</sup> ἄφθογος ὤχετ' ἀπιὼν ἐπὶ σκηπὴν, καὶ καθεζόμενος ἐκαρᾷδοκεῖ τὸ μέλλον, ἄχρι οὗ τροπῆς ἀπάντων γενομένης ἐπέβαινον οἱ πολέμιοι τοῦ χάρακος καὶ διεμάχοντο πρὸς τοὺς φυλάττοντας. τότε δ' ὥσπερ ἔνους γεγόμενος, καὶ ταύτην μόνην ὥς φασὶ φωνὴν ἀφείς “οὐκοῦν καὶ ἐπὶ τὴν παρεμβολήν;” ἀπεδύσατο μὲν τὴν ἐναγώνιον καὶ στρατηγικὴν ἐσθήτα, φεύγοντι δὲ πρέπουσαν μεταλαβὼν ὑπεξῆλθεν.

<sup>61</sup> Sintenis rightly, I think, deletes the phrase in brackets, since it neither fits syntactically (the superlative “μάλιστα” does not require a second term of comparison introduced by ἢ) nor does it add anything to the meaning of the preceding phrase (“ἀλλ' ὑπὸ θεοῦ μάλιστα βλαπτομένῳ τὴν γνώμην εἰκῶς”). Cf. Glaucos in *Il.* 6.232 ff. (at the exchange of armour with Diomedes it was as if Zeus took away his wits, the poet says) or Agamemnon in *Il.* 19.86 ff. (he claims that Zeus, Fate and Erinys cast on his mind fierce blindness on that day when on his own authority he took from Achilles his prize, Briseis).



When Pompey, on the other wing, saw his horsemen scattered in flight, he was no longer the same man, nor remembered that he was Pompey the Great but more like one whom some god has robbed of his wits than anything else, he went off without a word to his tent, sat down there, and awaited what was to come, until his forces were all routed and the enemy were assailing his ramparts and fighting with their defenders. Then he came to his senses, as it were, and with this one sentence, as they say, ‘What, even to my quarters?’ took off his fighting and general’s dress, put on one suitable for a fugitive, and stole away. (45.7-8)

Plutarch often draws our attention to the theatrical dimension of scenes. In this case the theatrical texture of the scene emerges both from the use of direct speech, when reproducing the final words of Pompey as he goes away from the camp, and from the visual character of the actual scene of Pompey changing his garment; he takes off the clothes which he was wearing until that moment as the commander-in-chief and wears those of a fugitive. The reader knows that he is never going to put on again the clothes of the general to command his army.

The scene invites a comparison with the picture of an actor in theatre. Pompey, just like an actor, puts on the clothes of the role he has to play now, that of a fugitive. Interestingly, at *Pomp.* 72.3, where the same scene is described, the actual word ‘fugitive’ is not used; instead of: “καὶ στρατηγικὴν ἐσθῆτα, φεύγοντι δὲ πρέπουσαν μεταλαβὼν ὑπεξῆλθεν” (*Caes.* 45.8), Plutarch changes the phrase into: “καὶ λαβὼν ἐσθῆτα τῇ παρούσῃ τύχῃ πρέπουσαν, ὑπεξῆλθεν”, replacing “φεύγοντι” with “τῇ παρούσῃ τύχῃ”. It must be a conscious choice on Plutarch’s part to avoid directly imposing on Pompey’s own *Life* the image of the fugitive on a king who had achieved so much up to that moment. Moreover, the fleeing comes only later in *Pompey* to prepare the events in Egypt. However, in both passages Plutarch’s phrasing hints at Pompey’s acting like a fugitive: firstly, he uses the verb “ὑπεξῆλθεν”, which conveys the image of Pompey’s acting in a way which is unworthy of him, since he ‘withdraws secretly’; and secondly the word “πρέπουσαν” stands in contrast with Pompey’s behaviour: the clothes he puts on may be appropriate for a fugitive, but they are inappropriate for an *imperator*; by doing what is suitable for a

fugitive to do, he denies his other, his true identity, as a general – the two identities necessarily exclude each other.

The change of clothes by a leader is a motif which appears again, among others,<sup>62</sup> in *Demetrius*, a Life that is, admittedly, one of the richest in theatrical value and imagery.<sup>63</sup> The situation, and the wording, is very similar to the one at Pharsalus. Demetrius, when defeated by Pyrrhus, withdraws to his tent, as advised; he takes off the kingly clothes and puts on a dark cloak, and in this he goes away in order to seek refuge.<sup>64</sup>

(*Demetr.* 44.9) καὶ παρελθὼν ἐπὶ σκηνὴν, ὥσπερ οὐ βασιλεύς, ἀλλ' ὑποκριτῆς, μεταμφιέννεται χλαμύδα φαιὰν ἀντὶ τῆς τραγικῆς ἐκείνης, καὶ διαλαθὼν ὑπεχώρησεν.

So he went to his tent, as if he had been an actor and not a real king, put on a dark cloak in the place of his stage-robcs of royalty, and stole away unnoticed. (*Demetr.* 44.9)

Plutarch here again raises the question how characters should dress and behave. Demetrius, who appears in many ways as a tragic character,<sup>65</sup> is attacked by Plutarch when behaving in a theatrical manner, which he clearly considers to be unworthy of a king. Clothing, along with the way it is linked to characters' behaviour, is an important theme in tragedy as well. Costume is a definer of status; it can reinforce the political or social status of a character, but it can also be a sign of the hero's mortification. One thinks here of Euripides who was strongly criticised for presenting 'kings in rags' (e.g.

<sup>62</sup> Compare a similar scene in *Aem.* 23: Perseus after the battle of Pydna takes off his purple garment as well as his diadem, the obvious signs of kingship.

<sup>63</sup> See Tagliasacchi (1960), 139-141. Cf. Duff (2004), 271 and 283-287.

<sup>64</sup> Cavafy later placed Plutarch's theatrical image at the centre of his poem about 'King Demetrius' ("Ὁ Βασιλεὺς Δημήτριος" – published in 1906) – he even quotes *Demetr.* 44.9 at the beginning of his poem. This unusual image for a king, which presents him changing into humble clothes, exactly like an actor after a performance, was what apparently inspired Cavafy to write this poem, though he saw Demetrius under a much more sympathetic light (than Plutarch) in his decision to withdraw after being defeated; he rather admired him for his good sense and courage. Cf. Mossman (1992), 106 n. 12; also Pelling (1988b), 21. For Plutarch and Cavafy see Lavagnini (1989), and González González (1994).

<sup>65</sup> See again Tagliasacchi (1960), 140, esp. n. 46, where she refers to all what is so distinctively theatrical in *Demetrius*, and p. 141. Moreover, De Lacy (1952) in his fundamental article about tragedy and biography in Plutarch goes as far as classifying *Demetrius* as 'a Plutarchian tragedy' (p. 171) – see also his analysis of the tragic aspects of the Life on pp. 168-170. Others have also seen Demetrius and Antony as tragic heroes, for example see Russell (1973), 135, Pelling (1988b), 21-22, Mossman (1992), 92, 96, and 104, and Duff (2004).

Telephus; but Electra too),<sup>66</sup> thus questioning the dignity of both kings and tragedy itself. Costume also forms the subject of the famous debate between the two tragedians in the *Frogs* (1061-1068), where Aeschylus reproaches Euripides for presenting his kings dressed in tatters and rags (1063) to rouse pity among the audience. Aristophanes makes the audience reflect on the changing of clothes as a sign of the demeaning of tragic characters.<sup>67</sup> The image of 'kings in rags' is undignified for tragedy, since it contrasts the tragic prototype of kings being presented in kingly clothes as a way of emphasising their qualities and power, as it is for Plutarch undignified for real-life kings. As Tagliasacchi has rightly remarked for *Demetr.* 18, Plutarch does not attack the actors and their acting as such, but instead castigates those people who in real life behave in a theatrical manner.<sup>68</sup> So, there may be nothing reproachable in the actors who adapt their voices, posture and manners to the character they play on stage, but when it comes to non-theatrical context and to figures like Antigonus, Demetrius, Seleucus, Lysimachus and others who changed their manners and behaviour after becoming kings, then this is regarded as inappropriate attitude; acting and pretence are always considered by Plutarch to be unacceptable kinds of behaviour in a real-life context (cf. *Demetr.* 18.5).

Pompey's putting on the clothes of a fugitive brings to mind another incident in *Caesar*, which happened under quite different circumstances. There the protagonist is Caesar, who compelled as he was by the difficult situation in which he found himself at Apollonia, decided to disguise himself as a slave and board a boat in order to retrieve his troops from Brundisium (*Caes.* 38).<sup>69</sup> His army at that moment could not be compared in size with the army which Pompey had under his command, and moreover his soldiers were reluctant to continue fighting as they were physically exhausted. So Caesar,

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<sup>66</sup> Euripides' Electra appears in a decidedly non-heroic light, dressed in poor clothes and complaining about her poverty (*Elec.* 175-189, 300-313). But Xerxes, too, visibly signals the utter downfall of his pride at the end of the *Persae* (909 ff., esp. 1017), with his distressful appearance.

<sup>67</sup> About Aristophanic paratragedy and parody see Silk (1993).

<sup>68</sup> Tagliasacchi (1960), 131; cf. also above, p. 190 n. 65.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. *Ant.* 10.8, and 14.1: Plutarch describes Antony's flight after the Ides, only there his disguise as a slave shows fear, whereas Caesar's similar move shows his courage as a leader and his determination to win – cf. Pelling (1988b), 142 and 151.

perplexed and desperate as he was, decided to take the risk and set out for Brundisium on a twelve-oared boat without revealing his true identity:<sup>70</sup>

(38.1-2) Ἐν δ' Ἀπολλωνίᾳ Καῖσαρ οὐκ ἔχων ἀξιόμαχον τὴν μεθ' ἑαυτοῦ δύναμιν, βραδυνούσης δὲ τῆς ἐκεῖθεν ἀπορούμενος καὶ περιπαθῶν, δεινὸν ἐβούλευσε βούλευμα, κρύφα πάντων εἰς πλοῖον ἐμβὰς τὸ μέγεθος δωδεκάσκαλμον ἀναχθῆναι πρὸς τὸ Βρεντέσιον, τηλικούτοις στόλοις περιεχομένου τοῦ πελάγους ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων. νυκτὸς οὖν ἐσθῆτι θεράποντος ἐπικρυψάμενος ἐνέβη, καὶ καταβαλὼν ἑαυτὸν ὥς τινα τῶν παρημελημένων ἡσύχαζε.

At Apollonia, since the force which he had with him was not a match for the enemy and the delay of his troops on the other side caused him perplexity and distress, Caesar conceived the dangerous plan of embarking in a twelve-oared boat, without anyone's knowledge, and going over to Brundisium, though the sea was encompassed by such large armaments of the enemy. At night, accordingly, after disguising himself in the dress of a slave, he went on board, threw himself down as one of no account, and kept quiet. (38.1-2)

Caesar's decision to abandon his kingly clothes and to conceal his true identity in order to reinforce his military position shows his confidence and determination to win; it was a desperate move to undertake such a daring act, but to him it appeared to be worth trying. Caesar dresses like a slave but behaves as a leader who is ready to take all the risks to win a battle; at 45.8 Pompey took off his general's clothes and put on those of a fugitive, but he also acted as a fugitive. Interestingly, their acting as a different 'character' reveals their quite different attitude; Caesar, in contrast to Pompey, plays his theatrical role, as it were, but in reality he never identifies himself with his role. When the sea became rough and the helmsman wanted to take the boat back, Caesar revealed who he was and encouraged him and his sailors (38.5): “ ἴθι' ἔφη ‘γενναῖε, τόλμα καὶ δέδιθι μηδέν· Καίσαρα φέρεις καὶ τὴν Καίσαρος Τύχην συμπλέουσιν’ ” (‘Come, good man’, he said, ‘be bold and fear nothing; you carry Caesar and Caesar's luck in your boat’). Although there was no success, Caesar, by risking his own life, managed to boost his troops and make them more confident of defeating Pompey's troops (38.7). At the ultimate moment of danger

<sup>70</sup> Pompey, too, when he found himself in a similarly perplexed situation, acted courageously (*Pomp.* 50), another close parallel which indicates how intimately the two Lives are connected. The parallel is emphasised by Beneker ((2005a), 318-320) in his discussion of thematic correspondences in the two Lives.

Caesar takes off the mask of the slave and acts as a real king.<sup>71</sup> Caesar's dynamic character, which emerges from this anecdote, stands in contrast to his accepting of his tragic doom later on.

In this last passage, as well as in many other cases (discussed above) Plutarch seems to hint at an extra *synkrisis* between the two Lives. Comparing *Pompey* and *Caesar*, which are closely interconnected, we see that in both Lives there are many common important instances in the two generals' course of life and career which are presented by Plutarch in such a way so that they recall analogies in tragedy and in theatrical context, encouraging readers to understand Plutarchan characters by means of their tragic parallels, or make them think about common human patterns of behaviour in similar circumstances. The two Lives are so closely linked that the strong theatricality of some passages of *Pompey* inevitably carries over into *Caesar*, too. What intensifies the tragic texture is that both generals are at the end victims of a complicated political situation, which is tormented by many upheavals, by a most powerful Civil War, by complex balances between influential figures of that period which are easily disturbed, by betrayals, and personal ambitions; in this complex nexus of personal relationships and political ambiguities Caesar, as much as Pompey, perceives all the ominous signs of his *tyche* but cannot resist his fate.

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<sup>71</sup> Compare the treatment of this anecdote in the essay *On the fortune of the Romans* (319B-D), where it is clearly of rhetorical character, a *declamatio*; Plutarch is not interested there to outline the strong will of Caesar and his decisiveness, but just gives examples of *tyche* in the life of the Romans.

## **Conclusion**

Plutarch's work shows deep engagement with the past in times when there was a sustained and widespread interest in revisiting the classical authors not only to admire the literary value of their work but also to learn important lessons for both politics and philosophy. In his extensive use of philosophers, poets and historiographers Plutarch both promotes and challenges their views and approaches to important issues, and particularly their exploration of different sides of human character (*ēthos*). Plutarch was at home in tragic poetry, exploiting well known material in ways which depended heavily on rhetorical effect as well as on the point he wanted to make in each Essay or Life. The variety of perspectives and objectives in his work may result in what may seem to be a lack of coherent argument and theory concerning poetry in general and tragedy in particular and its role, yet it reinforces the flexibility of his use of tragic material.

The treatment of tragedy and theatre by Plutarch raises important questions concerning both his motives for citing tragic lines and the reflections he invites from his readers. The authorial voice, often hidden behind multiple voices and characters, can be difficult to trace. Yet Plutarch's personal filter is everywhere, and most significantly when it comes to tragedy and theatre. Tragedy is an area which can offer significant moral lessons, and therefore it helps Plutarch to develop his educational theory and, no less, his complex moralism. As an educator and moralist Plutarch uses tragedy as a point of reference, fluctuating between, on one hand, its economy, conciseness and capacity to convey deep moral truths about human experience, and, on the other hand, the negative implications that it may carry if transposed to real life. But, either way, he can always gain authority for himself. Platonist though he may be, Plutarch does not follow his predecessor in banning poetry and poets from the state or from young men's education, but approaches it in a more pragmatic and productive way, amending poetic lines and leading the (young) readers to evaluate poetry's fundamental role in contributing towards a fuller education and in promoting the protreptic use of philosophy. In this way he also manages to effect a strong bond with his learned readership. Plutarch's quoting and challenging of poetic lines becomes part of his strategy for highlighting their morally beneficial side and

at the same time eliminating the danger to readers of treating poetry as a guide to real life. His continuous recasting and reinterpreting of poetry testify to Plutarch's ability to remould his material as needed to support his argument and develop a personal authorial voice, even if that voice is not always saying the same thing, or speaking in the same register, in every type of work.

In Plutarch's work, in addition to the straightforward positive value of theatre as a means of education and moralism there is a less straightforward aspect of theatre as a point of comparison to one's own life. Apart from the aesthetic value of theatrical imagery there is also the pragmatic value which tragic/theatrical references gain from the analogies they create to real life. As a moralist and biographer Plutarch exploits and adjusts the original context of quotations and theatre-as-metaphor so as to suit the Plutarchan context and mindset. The use of tragedy and theatre helps to refine Plutarch's own description of events and human characters. The contrast between illusion and reality emerges as an important point here. The audience/readers have to bear in mind that, although illusion and reality merge on the theatrical stage, in real life a stark distinction between the two elements must be made; otherwise, if they do not adopt this approach, then dangers may emerge – as e.g. the case of the flatterer proves.

In a similar way Plutarch uses tragic hints and imagery in his *Lives* to forebode disaster when the behaviour of the great men he describes involves exaggerated pathos, pretence, or ignorance of imminent danger at crucial moments in their life and career. Personalities of high calibre and with a history of great achievements, like Pompey and Caesar, meet a tragic – perhaps even undeserved – end, just as characters in tragedies do, either blinded by their passion for success and power, or ruined by their external environment (e.g. bad advisors, misguided friendships, adverse public reaction) – or perhaps because of both. Plutarch's use of tragic parallels and imagery in the *Lives* casts tragic light on his historical, non-tragic source-material. Behind the strong visual quality of theatrical scenes and dramatic incidents the readers are encouraged to sense the ambiguities which 'theatre' and tragedy create and to prepare for the characters' impending doom. Thus the tragic background and theatrical setting become pointers to what Plutarch's characters

share with characters in tragedy, but they also create a tragic thread that links the Lives in a subtle, oblique and most powerful way. I have tried to demonstrate that these links are more pervasive than hitherto recognised by Plutarchan scholars, especially in the Lives of *Pompey* and *Caesar*.



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