

# Comedy in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*

*Sophia Xenophontos*

PLUTARCH'S RELATION to comedy has been the subject of several studies. These explore the comic quotations that Plutarch introduces, his attitude towards Aristophanes and Menander, or the comic features of his dialogue works. Comedy in Plutarch, however, is a more complex issue. When he means to criticize a course of his heroes' behavior in the *Parallel Lives*, he sometimes places it in a setting that recalls the invective of comedy. In order to make this more forceful, Plutarch might additionally delineate his biographical figures as stock characters from comedy. In this article I argue that despite variations of this technique across the *Lives*, Plutarch's use of invective always aims at the ethical instruction of his readers.

This suggestion squares with the ethical significance that Plutarch himself attributes to invective. In *On listening to lectures*, perhaps his most important educational essay, Plutarch notes that the criticism (σκῶμμα) made for the improvement of character (πρὸς ἐπανόρθωσιν ἡθους) should be accepted mildly and constructively as a sign of the truly educated (πεπαιδευμένος) and liberal (ἐλευθέριος) man (46C–47B, cf. 72F). In his *Political precepts*, an essay concerned with ethical training in politics, he similarly stresses that the rebuke (ψόγος) arousing conscience and repentance appears as both kindly (εὐμενής) and healing (θεραπευτικός) (810C, cf. 803C). In light of this, I shall go on to show how comic invective in Plutarch's biography becomes a tool of moralisation.

## *Comic invective and comic stock characters*

First some remarks on the nature and history of invective seem in order. In rhetorical theory, invective (ψόγος), as opposed to encomium (ἔπαινος), referred to the personal attack

that exposed the negative qualities of a person or a thing. In fifth-century Athens invective was a feature of political comedy aimed at denigrating public figures.<sup>1</sup> One need only think of Aristophanes' ridicule of the politician Cleon. Fourth-century orators used comic invective as a means of persuasion in courts, in order to minimize the moral standing of their opponents and win the jurors' *benevolentia*.<sup>2</sup> Demosthenes, in particular, exploited the method of character assassination when in his *De corona* and *First Philippic* he presented his rival Aeschines as an *alazon* figure of New Comedy.<sup>3</sup> Invective was made part of the political discourse in the late Roman Republic especially by Cicero, who associated his adversaries with comic counterparts in the works of Plautus and Terence.<sup>4</sup> By putting his opponents into the world of Roman comedy as naïve *adulescentes*, pro-

<sup>1</sup> C. Moulton, "The Lyric of Insult and Abuse in Aristophanes," *MusHelv* 36 (1979) 23–47; S. Halliwell, *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity* (Cambridge 2008) 243–263; I. C. Storey, "Bad Language in Aristophanes," in I. Sluiter and R. M. Rosen (eds.), *Kakos: Badness and Anti-value in Classical Antiquity* (Leiden/Boston 2008) 119–141; G. Zanetto, "Iambic Patterns in Aristophanic Comedy," in A. Cavarzere et al. (eds.), *Iambic Ideas: Essays on a Poetic Tradition from Archaic Greece to the Late Roman Empire* (Lanham 2001) 65–76.

<sup>2</sup> On rhetorical invective see S. Koster, *Die Invektive in der griechischen und römischen Literatur* (Meisenheim am Glan 1980) 76–90; on character assassination (*diabole, loidoría*) in forensic oratory (Aeschines and Demosthenes), N. Worman, *Abusive Mouths in Classical Athens* (Cambridge 2008) 213–274.

<sup>3</sup> G. O. Rowe, "The Portrait of Aeschines in the *Oration on the Crown*," *TAPA* 97 (1966) 397–406, and "Demosthenes' First Philippic: the Satiric Mode," *TAPA* 99 (1968) 361–374. For Isocrates' use of comic invective see A. N. Micheline, "Isocrates' Civic Invective: *Acharnians* and *On the Peace*," *TAPA* 128 (1998) 115–133.

<sup>4</sup> For comic techniques in Ciceronian invective see B. Harries, "Acting the Part: Techniques of the Comic Stage in Cicero's Early Speeches," in J. Booth (ed.), *Cicero on the Attack: Invective and Subversion in the Orations and Beyond* (Swansea 2007) 129–147. Cf. J. R. Dunkle, "The Greek Tyrant and Roman Political Invective of the Late Republic," *TAPA* 98 (1967) 151–171; J. Hejnic, "Clodius Auctor. Ein Beitrag zur sog. Sallusts Invektive," *RhM* 99 (1956) 255–277; L. A. Sussman, "Antony the *Meretrix Audax*: Cicero's Novel Invective in *Philippic* 2.44–46," *Erano*s 96 (1998) 114–128.

miscuous *meretrices*, or arrogant *milites*, Cicero in such works as *Pro Caelio*, *In Pisonem*, and *Second Philippic* discredited their legal trustworthiness.<sup>5</sup> In these instances invective means mainly the straightforward attack as a ‘declaration of open enmity’; milder forms of abuse, however, which might be called ‘silky ridicule’, ‘gentle undermining’, or ‘denunciation’, can also be considered as categories of invective.<sup>6</sup> It is with this flexibility that I shall be employing the term with regard to Plutarch’s own use of invective.

*Demosthenes and Cicero: Plutarch on the orators of invective*

I start with the paired lives *Demosthenes* and *Cicero*, which can help us to explore how Plutarch understands invective in the lives of the two men who were such prominent practitioners of this technique.<sup>7</sup> *Demosthenes* begins with reference to the hero’s nickname Batalus (Βάταλον), an opprobrious surname (λοιδορουμένην ἐπωνυμίαν, 4.5), which had been given to him in mockery of his physique (εἰς τὸ σῶμα ... σκωπτόμενος, 4.5).<sup>8</sup> Ridiculing individuals for their physical peculiarities and labeling them with such cognomina was a standard feature of invective,<sup>9</sup> and one that Plutarch cites in the introductory chapters

<sup>5</sup> K. Geffcken, *Comedy in the Pro Caelio* (Leiden 1973); M. Leigh, “The *Pro Caelio* and Comedy,” *CP* 99 (2004) 300–335; P. De Lacy, “Cicero’s Invective against Piso,” *TAPA* 72 (1941) 49–58; J. J. Hughes, “Invective and Comedic Allusion: Cicero, *In Pisonem*, fragment 9 (Nisbet),” *Latomus* 57 (1998) 570–577.

<sup>6</sup> The phrases are taken from J. G. F. Powell, “Invective and the Orator: Ciceronian Theory and Practice,” in *Cicero on the Attack* 1–23, at 2.

<sup>7</sup> Greek text used is the Teubner, translations Perrin’s in the Loeb, with differing paragraphing.

<sup>8</sup> For the dynamics of mockery see R. M. Rosen, *Making Mockery: The Poetics of Ancient Satire* (New York 2007); for names aiming at denigration in Ciceronian invective see J. Uria, “Personal Names and Invective in Cicero,” in J. Booth and R. Maltby (eds.), *What’s in a Name? The Significance of Proper Names in Classical Latin Literature* (Swansea 2006) 13–31.

<sup>9</sup> A. Corbeill, *Controlling Laughter: Political Humor in the Late Roman Republic* (Princeton 1996) 14–56, 57–98.

of his *Lives*, when presenting public criticism of his heroes' physical or mental flaws. He explains that according to one tradition the derogatory name attributed to Demosthenes came from Batalus, an effeminate flute-player whom a poet of Middle Comedy, Antiphanes, satirised (δραμάτιον εἰς τοῦτο κωμῳδῶν αὐτὸν Ἀντιφάνης πεποίηκεν, 4.6).<sup>10</sup> This and other instances that follow are examples of abusive language of comedy used to damage the profile of a person: once Demosthenes began his public appearances, he was laughed at for his inexperience (κατεγελᾶτο δι' ἀήθειαν, 6.3), railed at (ἐχλεύαζον αὐτόν, 8.4), and mocked by Pytheas on the grounds that his arguments smelt of lamp-wicks (καὶ Πυθέας ἐπισκόπων ἑλλυγίων ἔφησεν ὄζειν αὐτοῦ τὰ ἐνθυμήματα, 8.4).

*Cicero* also begins with a derogatory nickname which became a matter of teasing for the hero (τὴν ἐπὶ κλησιν ... χλευαζομένην, 1.3; σκώπων, 1.6). Moreover, just as with Demosthenes, there is an emphasis on invective as a characteristic of *Cicero's* rhetoric (*Cic.* 5.6/5.4):

of those orators who were given to loud shouting he used to say jestingly (ἐπισκόπων) that they were led by their weakness to resort to clamour as cripples were to mount upon a horse. And his readiness to indulge in such jests (σκώματα) and pleasantries (παιδιάν) was thought indeed to be a pleasant characteristic of a pleader.

Elsewhere we read that biting jests (σκώμασι πικροτέροις, 27.1) were a standard trait of *Cicero's* style and that his indiscriminate attacks for the sake of raising a laugh (προσκρούειν ἔνεκα τοῦ γελοίου, 27.1) made many hate him. *Cicero* used to expose his opponents through jests and witty remarks (παρασκώπτειν τι καὶ λέγειν χαρίεν, 38.2). This is attested in his confrontation with the serious (ἀγέλαστος, σκυθρωπός) Pompey, as well as in his enmity with Antony in the *Philippics*, where the same abusive terminology is employed (παρα-

<sup>10</sup> For eponymies as a form of rhetorical invective, with explicit reference to Batalos, see Koster, *Die Invektive* 79, and Worman, *Abusive Mouths* 256.

σκόπτων, 41.6).<sup>11</sup>

In *Demosthenes* and *Cicero* Plutarch seems (unsurprisingly) familiar with traditional invective language and the rationale of individual vituperation.<sup>12</sup> When commenting on Demosthenes' ancestry at the beginning of the *Life*, Plutarch (*Dem.* 4.1) draws on Aeschines' *On the Crown* 171 ff., where the latter accused Demosthenes' lineage of being too menial. In evaluating his source, Plutarch emphatically notes: "I cannot say whether he speaks truly, or is uttering slander (βλασφημῶν) and lies (καταψευδόμενος)." This shows that he realises the interplay of invective between Demosthenes and Aeschines, as he does concerning the clash between Cicero and Antony, as seen in *Cic.* 41.6, quoted above. Given his deep familiarity with the texts of the two orators, Plutarch must also have been aware that in their duels with their rivals, Demosthenes and Cicero employed comic stereotype figures to challenge the wits of their audiences. Still, he treats invective in a fairly superficial way (mainly through the use of nicknames and abusive diction) and any references or allusions to comic *personae* are here not in point. This may reflect Plutarch's decision not to examine Demosthenes and Cicero as literary figures or orators but as political men, as he makes clear in his programmatic *recusatio* in the prologue to the pair (2.4).

*Demetrius* and *Antony*: comedy of abuse and comedy of criticism

I turn to *Demetrius* and *Antony*, where comic stereotypes are exploited. The prologue sets out the common moral qualities of the two men: both were amorous (ἔρωτικοί), bibulous (ποτικοί), warlike (στρατιωτικοί), munificent (μεγαλόδωροι), extravagant (πολυτελεῖς), and domineering (ὑβρισταί).<sup>13</sup> These are features

<sup>11</sup> Mockery and ironic laughter in *Cat. Min.* 13.5, 21.7–10

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Alc.* 3.2, *Flam.* 18.10.

<sup>13</sup> *Demetr.* 1.8. For the list of adjectives see T. Duff, "Plato, Tragedy, the Ideal Reader and Plutarch's *Demetrius* and *Antony*," *Hermes* 132 (2004) 271–291, at 282–283.

of the comic stock figure of the *miles gloriosus*, the braggart soldier,<sup>14</sup> a type that suits well the military activity of the two heroes. In *Demetrius* Plutarch refers repeatedly to Demetrius' *miles* characteristics: his drinking habits (2.3), his submission to erotic passions (9.5–7, 14; 16.5–7; 24.1; 25.9; 27.1), his extravagance and the excesses of his leisure-time (19.4–5, 52). In most of these cases, Plutarch discusses the hero's shortcomings by inserting vocabulary of (i) moral failure (ἐξ ἀκρασίας, 9.7; περὶ τὴν ἡδονὴν ταύτην, 14.4; τοσαύτην ὕβριν, 24.1; εἰς τὸν ἔρωτα τῆς Λαμίας, 25.9; πλημμελημάτων καὶ παρανομημάτων, 27.1; τρυφήν καὶ ἡδονὴν ἀντὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ τοῦ καλοῦ, 52.4), of (ii) utter submission (αἰσχίστην ἄλωσιν ... ἀλῶναι [sc. τὸν Δημήτριον], 9.7; ἐκράτησε τῇ χάριτι καὶ κατέσχευεν [sc. Λάμια] 16.6) to older females (οὐκ οὔσαν αὐτῷ καθ' ὥραν ἀλλὰ πρεσβυτέραν, 14.3; ἤδη λήγουσα τῆς ὥρας καὶ πολὺ νεώτερον ἑαυτῆς λαβοῦσα τὸν Δημήτριον, 16.6), and of (iii) the negative reaction of others to Demetrius' improper conduct (e.g. κακῶς ἀκοῦσαι τῶν τότε βασιλέων, 14.4; κατεγέλων, λοιδορῶν [sc. Λυσίμαχος], 25.8–9). Although not entailing any sort of caricaturing or comic attack, the features of the comic soldier in *Demetrius* economically highlight the negative qualities of the warlike hero, and discourage readers from imitation. More will be said in this regard when we compare and contrast the use of the *miles* in *Antony*.

<sup>14</sup> F. Wehrli, *Motivstudien zur griechischen Komödie* (Zürich 1936) 101–113; D. C. Boughner, *The Braggart in Renaissance Comedy: A Study in Comparative Drama from Aristophanes to Shakespeare* (Minneapolis 1954) 5–20; W. T. McCary, "Menander's Soldiers: Their Names, Roles, and Masks," *AJP* 93 (1972) 279–298; W. Hofmann and G. Wartenberg, *Der Bramerbarbas in der antiken Komödie* (Berlin 1973) 7–82; S. M. Goldberg, *The Making of Menander's Comedy* (London 1980) 45–58, 111; H.-D. Blume, "Komische Soldaten: Entwicklung und Wandel einer typischen Bühnenfigur in der Antike," in B. Zimmermann (ed.), *Rezeption des antiken Dramas auf der Bühne und in der Literatur* (Stuttgart 2001) 175–195, at 180–181; S. Papaioannou, "Postclassical Comedy and the Composition of Roman Comedy," in A. K. Petrides and S. Papaioannou (eds.), *New Perspectives on Postclassical Comedy* (Newcastle 2010) 146–175, at 163–175.

Comic delineation in *Demetrius* is not restricted to the *miles gloriosus*. Plutarch refers to the politician and orator Stratocles, the most ardent of Demetrius' Athenian promoters, as a man of servile compliance, who contrived the most monstrous idea for praising Demetrius. Stratocles urged by decree that the public envoys sent to Demetrius and his father Antigonos be called sacred deputies instead of ambassadors. Plutarch acknowledges Stratocles' extravagant flattery in an aside: "he it was who invented these elegant and clever bits of obsequiousness" (οὗτος γὰρ ἦν ὁ τῶν σοφῶν τούτων καὶ περιττῶν καινουργὸς ἀρεσκευμάτων, 11.1); he goes on to emphasize that in all other respects Stratocles was equally audacious (παράτολμος): he "was thought to imitate the scurrility and buffoonery of the ancient Cleon in his familiarities with the people" (καὶ τῇ βωμολοχίᾳ καὶ βδελυρίᾳ τοῦ παλαιοῦ Κλέωνος ἀπομιμῆσθαι δοκῶν τὴν πρὸς τὸν δῆμον εὐχέρειαν, 11.2). Stratocles' θρασύτης is exemplified straightaway in the two anecdotes that follow, which carry comic overtones and a sense of pleasantry (11.3–5). This organization of the narrative further strengthens Stratocles' delineation as a comic Cleon. The demagogue type of a Cleon is used elsewhere in the Roman *Lives*, for instance Clodius (*Caes.* 10, *Cato Mai.* 33.6–7, *Cic.* 31.1–3, *Pomp.* 46.4–5), but as is the case here, it is given in passing, often through a brief and direct comparison, and its aim is to condemn the historical flatterer (Stratocles, Clodius).

The comic setting into which Stratocles fits as a Cleon is introduced by an Aristophanic quotation: "But there are things hotter even than fire" (*Demetr.* 12.1). This is line 382 of *Knights*, probably the most sharply satiric allegory on Athenian political life. Interestingly, this line comes from a context of bawdy confrontation between the Sausage-Seller, the slave Demosthenes, and the chorus of Knights on one side and Paphlagon/Cleon on the other, and approves that Cleon should be punished for his verbal insolence. As such it helps Plutarch to explain (12.6–8) why the comic writer Philippides, Menander's contemporary, was right to assail Stratocles for his political improprieties (quoting fr.25 K.-A., "it is such improprieties that overthrow

the demos, not comedy"). Plutarch agrees with the comic poet elsewhere, when, for instance, at the end of chapter 26 he inserts two quotations of Philippides that abuse (λοιδορῶν) Stratocles for his lavish flatteries. In fact, in order to condemn even more bluntly the exaggerated flattery towards Demetrius, Plutarch does not confine himself to the use of comic quotations, but also discourses at some length on the divine displeasure that the flattery caused: thunderbolts, sprouting of plants in soil in which they do not normally grow, severe and out of season frost that destroyed the grain. Such extraordinary descriptions on Plutarch's part visualize the destructive results of improper behavior.

Plutarch rounds off this section by drawing a sharp distinction between the man of the *bema* (τὸν ἀπὸ τοῦ βήματος, Stratocles) and the man of the stage (τὸν ἀπὸ τῆς θυμέλης, Philippides). With this the biographer may be alluding to the well-established clash of a similar nature between Cleon and Aristophanes. The contrast between Stratocles and Philippides may be significant for a further reason, for it shows that Plutarch uses comic invective to make moral assessments. He not only rejects Stratocles' flattery, as we have seen, but at the same time he evaluates Stratocles' critic, Philippides, as ethically superior: "And in general the character of Philippides gave him a good repute, since he was no busybody, and had none of the officious ways of a courtier" (12.8/12.5).

Plutarch's engagement with comic lines and their contexts, with comic stereotypes, and with comic poets of various periods in *Demetrius* shows that he understands invective as a strong mechanism of personal assault.<sup>15</sup> The patina of these comic elements discourages Plutarch's audience from reprehensible

<sup>15</sup> This is further attested at 27.5; here Plutarch approves the attack on Lamia the courtesan of Demetrius by a comic poet, who in Plutarch's view rightly named her a "true city taker," as she used to spend public resources for luxurious supper parties. For the relation between Stratocles and Philippides see L. O'Sullivan, "History from Comic Hypotheses: Stratocles, Lachares, and *P.Oxy.* 1235," *GRBS* 49 (2009) 53–79.

courses of action: military extravagance and demagogic methods are not to be endorsed in public life.

As Plutarch mentions at the end of *Demetrius*, *Antony* is the Roman counterpart of the Macedonian drama (δράμα) just performed (53.10). The theatrical imagery that permeates both *Lives* becomes an element of continuity in the two works, and this makes the application of comedy in *Antony* all the more expected.<sup>16</sup> In addition, Plutarch's working method of paired *Lives* takes it almost as a rule that an important theme which is treated in the first *Life* in its normal form is later developed in the second *Life* in its more interesting variations; comedy in *Antony* is therefore expected to be an advanced version of its use in *Demetrius*.

When composing *Antony*, Plutarch draws mainly from Cicero's *Second Philippic*,<sup>17</sup> which he had recently reread,<sup>18</sup> and in which Cicero invalidates the political *gravitas* of Antony by sketching him as a comic figure. Plutarch, however, redeploys Antony's comic characteristics in order to suit the ethical interests of the *Life*. For Plutarch, Antony is not a loathed legal opponent, but an ethical case-study that can be didactic for his audience in various ways.

Antony's *miles* nature is brought out early in the *Life*. His inclination to drinking bouts, women, and immoderate and extravagant expenditure (εἰς πότους καὶ γύναια καὶ δαπάνας πολυτελεῖς καὶ ἀκολάστους, 2.4) corresponded to his way of life, which was boastful, vainglorious, full of empty exultation, and distorted ambition (κομπώδη καὶ φρυαγματίαν ὄντα καὶ κενῶ γαυριάματος καὶ φιλοτιμίας ἀνωμάλου μεστόν, 2.8). This nexus of information recalls the negative impact of the same features in *Demetrius*, though now Plutarch's moral message has a deeper effect. He stresses that Antony gave brilliant

<sup>16</sup> Pelling, *Plutarch: Life of Antony* 35, 124–125, 181–182.

<sup>17</sup> L. A. Sussman, "Antony as a *Miles Gloriosus* in Cicero's *Second Philippic*," *Scholia* 3 (1994) 53–83.

<sup>18</sup> Pelling, *Plutarch: Life of Antony* 27.

promise in his youth, until Curio fell upon him like a pest (κῆρα). Curio was unrestrained in his pleasures (2.4), and thus perverted Antony's great nature. The corruption of a naturally endowed man by environmental influences is a vital theme for Plutarch's ethics, and one that he proposes to explore in this 'negative' pair of *Lives* (*Demetr.* 1.6–7). He goes on to name Curio as most bold and most disgusting, θρασύτατος, βδελυρότατος, qualities linked to the stereotype of a demagogue.<sup>19</sup> Whereas in *Demetrius* the figures of the soldier and the demagogue are not connected, in *Antony* they are treated closely together to stress how surroundings affect one's ethical state on the one hand (as happens via the demagogue type), and to cast light on individual responsibility on the other (via the soldier type). It is in this respect interesting to consider Plutarch's appropriation of his material: with reference to the same events, Cicero emphasizes Antony's erotic liaison with Curio and accuses Antony as a male prostitute (*Phil.* 2.44–47), but Plutarch carefully omits this detail and instead presents Curio as a corrupting force over Antony.<sup>20</sup> At the same time, Plutarch exposes Antony's own passivity, making this in itself a negative quality that prepares for his submissiveness to other bad persons such as Fulvia and Cleopatra and her flatterers.

Plutarch relates Antony's noble appearance to his mythical pedigree from Hercules. This in itself might be a comic implication, because Hercules is one of the primary examples of the *alazon* figure in Old Comedy. Antony's extravagant outfit too recalls the props that the comic soldier normally carries with him on stage: "whenever he was going to be seen by many people, he always wore the tunic girt up to his thigh, a large sword hung at his side, and a heavy cloak enveloped him" (4.3/4.2). All this information is imaginative reconstruction, nowhere attested in Plutarch's sources: it evokes the martial nature of a Pyrgopolynices or a Stratophanes (Plaut. *Mil.* 1265,

<sup>19</sup> Pelling, *Plutarch: Life of Antony* 119.

<sup>20</sup> Pelling, *Plutarch: Life of Antony* 118, cf. 131.

*Truc.* 515), as has been suggested.<sup>21</sup> Still Antony's comic presentation of his appearance gives a playful glimpse at the hero rather than ridicules him, and this shows how Plutarch's exposition deviates from Cicero's aggressive rhetoric.

There is a similar case of such a deviation. Antony's generalship during Caesar's dictatorship had caused public wrath: "as Cicero said," Plutarch adds, "they loathed his ill-timed drunkenness, his heavy expenditures, his debauches with women, his spending the days in sleep or in wandering about with crazed and aching head, the nights in revelry or at shows, or in attendance at the nuptial feasts of mimes and jesters" (9.5/9.3). This comes largely from the *Second Philippic*, but Plutarch does not comment adversely; with his lively description, as seen above, he rather adds a colourful nuance to Antony's extravagance and feasting as related by Cicero. Plutarch's biography is a flexible genre not restricted to faithful or precise reproduction of its sources. For Plutarch it is the representation of character that matters, and for that reason he is always willing to take liberties (e.g. *Sol.* 27.1). In this case, Cicero's hostile portrait of Antony is given a particularly provocative twist and becomes a sort of 'playful invective' designed to prompt moral problematization in readers: is Antony's vulnerability so innocent as it might seem? And are we simply to excuse it?

Moral issues in Plutarch are never treated as black and white, and so when dealing with the public strictures against Antony's military improprieties, Plutarch uses a balancing technique (4.4–5/4.2–3):

However, even what others thought offensive, namely his jesting and boastfulness (καὶ τὰ τοῖς ἄλλοις φορτικὰ δοκοῦντα, μεγαλαυχία καὶ σκῶμμα), his drinking-horn in evidence, his sitting by a comrade who was eating, or his standing to eat at a soldier's table—it is astonishing how much goodwill and affection for him all this produced in his soldiers. And somehow even his conduct in the field of love was not without its charm, nay, it

<sup>21</sup> Pelling, *Plutarch: Life of Antony* 124.

actually won for him the favour of many; for he assisted them in their love affairs, and submitted pleasantly to their jests upon his own amours.

On the one hand Plutarch draws on the features of the braggart soldier to sketch the public mockery against Antony, and on the other he outweighs this by assigning Antony features of the good soldier stereotype, as known in Greek and Roman historiography.<sup>22</sup> Elsewhere, for instance, he reports that Antony was liberal: he bestowed favours upon his soldiers, and helped them with money (4.6–9, cf. 43.3–6). Blending as it does praise and blame, Antony's characterization becomes all the more complex and thought-provoking.

Antony's licentiousness is rendered in a theatrical representation of the oriental excesses of his leisure (21 and especially 24), but Plutarch once more moulds the material independently of Cicero, so as to introduce particular themes of his moralisation. This is the crucial point that prepares the ground for Cleopatra's and her court's domination over him, and so Antony is sketched as a passive agent, susceptible to the moral weaknesses others impose on him:<sup>23</sup> the Asiatic flatterers are described as "surpassing in impudence and effrontery the pests of Italy" (ὑπερβαλλομένων λαμυρία καὶ βωμολοχία τὰς ἀπὸ τῆς Ἰταλίας κήρας, 24.2). The expression recalls the vocabulary that had been used of Curio, who was compared to a demagogue-pest, responsible for corrupting Antony's character (2.4). Plutarch sketches Antony as the easy prey of bad influences by using a sort of teaching register, which is so characteristic of his moralising style: Cleopatra needs to pay teaching fees (διδασκάλια) to Fulvia for having taught Antony to endure a woman's prevalence, since she now took him over quite tamed (πάνυ χειροήθη) and schooled (πεπαιδαγωγημένον) to

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Xen. *Cyr.* 1.6.25, Plin. *Pan.* 15, Tac. *Hist.* 1.23, for the general's sharing in his soldiers' pleasures and toils alike.

<sup>23</sup> Pelling, *Plutarch: Life of Antony* 169.

obey women (10.6).<sup>24</sup> Later Cleopatra, described as a “final curse” (τελευταῖον κακόν, 25.1), itself an equivalent to “pest,” takes advantage of his simplicity of mind and laughs at his expense as a flatterer (*kolax*) (24.9–12, 27.1, 29.5–7, cf. 26.1 κατεγέλασε). Irresistibly charming, Cleopatra scorns soldier Antony who is by nature naïve. All these might bring to mind Demetrius’ own submissiveness to dangerous women, though in the case of Antony the reader will certainly ponder the role that Antony’s own passivity played in his being manipulated by others.

Plutarch’s use of comedy in *Antony* might encompass the employment of comic stereotypes, mostly in line with his sources (so it is with the *miles gloriosus*, yet not with the demagogue or the *kolax*), but this does not result in a straightforward denigration of the main hero. The organization of the narrative might rather give the impression of sympathetic playfulness for Antony. The Alexandrian flatterers used to enjoy Antony’s pleasant deeds and his improper dressing as a servant (in itself a *topos* of invective);<sup>25</sup> they also indulged (προσέχαιρον, συνέπαιζον) his abuses (σκώμματα) and coarse wit (βωμολογία). Antony is always ready to accept a joke (24.11, 27.2, 29.7), and Plutarch stresses that despite being Antony’s flatterers, the Alexandrians liked him (ἀγαπῶντες), because he would use the tragic mask with the Romans but the comic mask with them (29.4). Such emphases make us see how easily one might feel compassion for persons like Antony, and this reflects the subtler reading that Plutarch would have wanted us to do; Antony’s comic characterization leads us to feel that his weakness of will is the topic of a comic play for the moment, but only later, especially at the end of the *Life*, do we realise how catastrophic that could be. Comedy in *Antony* is a means for constructive

<sup>24</sup> Cf. S. Swain, “Cultural Interchange in Plutarch’s *Antony*,” *QUCC* 34 (1990) 151–157.

<sup>25</sup> Sussman, *Scholia* 3 (1994) 79.

criticism on the role of both the moral agent and his surroundings.

*Pericles* and *Fabius Maximus*: comic testimonies as moral authorities and the comedy of allusion

In *Pericles* and *Fabius Maximus* Plutarch proposes to explore the characteristic of mildness (*praotes*) as exhibited by the two heroes (*Per.* 2.5).<sup>26</sup> In *Pericles* Plutarch makes more extensive use of comic citations than in any other *Life*.<sup>27</sup> Given that Attic comedy was political satire preoccupied with the great politicians of the time, one could argue that the comic citations are contemporary testimonies, used by Plutarch to support factual claims. But is it not strange that whereas in historiography comic poets are rarely used as sources, Plutarch employs them in great abundance? This suggests that Plutarch deals with them not so much to document historical events, but, as we shall see, to serve his moralisation. That is consistent with the commitment of Plutarchan biography to the depiction of character and not to historical precision (*Alex.* 1.1.–2; *Nic.* 1.5, “I am conveying material which is helpful for grasping the man’s nature and character”). The poetic quotations in *Pericles* are redeployed to stress the public criticism levelled at Pericles, and ultimately to highlight the hero’s *praotes* in withstanding such attacks.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> On the prologue to the pair see T. Duff, “The Prologue to the *Lives of Pericles and Fabius* (*Per.* 1–2),” in A. Pérez Jiménez and F. C. Bordoy (eds.), *Estudios sobre Plutarco: misticismo y religiones místicas en la obra de Plutarco* (Madrid 2001) 351–363. The other shared virtues of the two heroes are well set out in P. A. Stadter, “Plutarch’s Comparison of Pericles and Fabius Maximus,” *GRBS* 16 (1975) 77–85.

<sup>27</sup> Consultation of W. C. Helmbold and E. N. O’Neil, *Plutarch’s Quotations* (Baltimore 1959), shows that *Pericles* has the most comic citations (19 in total); see also G. Zanetto, “Plutarco e la commedia,” in I. Gallo and C. Moreschini (eds.), *I generi letterari in Plutarco* (Naples 2000) 319–333.

<sup>28</sup> C. Pelling, “*Synkrisis Revisited*,” in A. Pérez Jiménez and F. Titchener (eds.), *Historical and Biographical Values of Plutarch’s Works: Studies devoted to Professor Philip A. Stadter* (Málaga/Logan 2005) 325–340, at 326, rightly brings out that the mockery of the Athenian people against Pericles is “one reason

At the beginning of *Pericles* (3.3) Plutarch inserts a series of comic quotations from Cratinus' *Cheirons* (fr.258 K.-A.) and *Nemesis* (fr.118), from Teleclides (fr.47), and from Eupolis' *Demes* (fr.115) which mock the Athenian statesman for his elongated head.<sup>29</sup> Pericles' nickname is *schinokephalos*, 'squill-head' (*Per.* 3.3–7, cf. 13.10). We have seen that nicknames stemming from physical peculiarities were a standard feature of comic invective, but it is also worth noting that when Plutarch comments on the queer shape of Pericles' head, he distorts his sources. Although tradition attests that a general in a helmet is a commonplace in depictions,<sup>30</sup> Plutarch infers arbitrarily that the reason why artists depicted him wearing a helmet was because they wanted to cover his deformed head. This distorted detail is introduced in order to intensify the invective levelled at Pericles, and hence to make the occurrence of the comic citations not only necessary but also meaningful.<sup>31</sup>

But why does Plutarch need to emphasise the element of hostile laughter at the expense of his hero? That will help him to illustrate on one level the mildness with which Pericles put up with the criticism (a widespread theme throughout the *Life*, esp. 5.1–2, 20.1–3, 21.1, 28.6–7, 33.6–7, 34.1, 39.1–2). On another level, however, it will help him to respond himself to such damaging and often unfair sarcasm. In this context, for instance, Plutarch restores Pericles' public image by referring to him as a lion (αὐτὴ κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους ἔδοξε τεκεῖν λέοντα, 3.3). The lion is traditionally used as a figurative equivalent for

---

why *Pericles* is so rich in its quotation of contemporary carping and ridicule."

<sup>29</sup> See P. A. Stadter, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Pericles* (Chapel Hill 1989) lxiii–lxix.

<sup>30</sup> Stadter, *Commentary* 65; see also B. Cohen, "Perikles' Portrait and the Riace Bronzes: New Evidence for *Schinocephaly*," *Hesperia* 60 (1991) 465–502.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. T. E. Duff, "How *Lives* Begin," in A. G. Nikolaidis (ed.), *The Unity of Plutarch's Work* (Berlin 2008) 187–207, at 195, on how the detail of Pericles' ill-proportioned head was crafted to reflect his character, and thus to invite a "moral judgment"; see esp. 196 for a different view on how Pericles' pointed head functions in the narrative.

a tyrant or a powerful man.<sup>32</sup> This tends to be used above all as a comic convention in Aristophanes, e.g. in *Knights* 1037, 1043, of Cleon, and in *Frogs* 1431, relating to Alcibiades. It is true, however, that in Pericles' case Plutarch's readers would also have been thinking of the portent of the lion dream associated with the Alcmaeonid family in Herodotus 6.131.2.<sup>33</sup>

The rest of *Pericles* too is punctuated by plenty of comic quotations, which castigate the statesman for his political tendencies and decisions (e.g. 16.1–2, 33.7–8), his building programme (13.8–10), his sexual misconduct (13.15–16, 24.9–10), and even his financial policy (12.3–6; 14). In the *Life* the polarities become particularly varied: Pericles' critics are not only his political rivals, but also his supporters, public opinion, or (quite frequently) the Lacedaemonians, and even individuals such as Cimon's sister Elpinice (10.5–6, 28.4–7) and Pericles' own son Xanthippus (36.1–6).<sup>34</sup>

Against this backdrop of opposition, Plutarch keeps defusing the mockery through his defence of the hero. This seems to be part of the technique he had used in *Antony*, when he mitigated Cicero's exposure of Antony's *miles* characteristics. In *Pericles*, however, Plutarch elects to respond to the public derision by deploying a weighty nickname himself, *Olympios*. When they call him *Olympios*, it is mainly for "his natural intelligence combined with his loftiness of thought and perfectness of execution," Plutarch says authoritatively (8.2), paraphrasing Plato's *Phaedrus* (270A). Although Plato was a hostile critic of Pericles (e.g. *Grg.* 515E), here and elsewhere (5.1, 9.1, 15.2) Plutarch refutes Plato's negative assessments, making them favourable to Pericles. Of course, Plutarch continues, others believe that the nickname *Olympios* is attributable to Pericles' political and mil-

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Plut. *Alex.* 2.4, *Dem.* 23.5.

<sup>33</sup> Duff, in *The Unity of Plutarch's Work* 193–195, has some succinct remarks on the image of the lion in Herodotus.

<sup>34</sup> See V. Hunter, "Gossip and the Politics of Reputation in Classical Athens," *Phoenix* 44 (1990) 299–325, on censorious gossip as a form of moral judgment in Classical Athens.

itary prowess, which he concedes is equally possible (8.3). But when the comic poets accuse him ironically of “thundering” and “lightening” and “wielding a dread thunderbolt in his tongue,” despite its being a rather insulting turn of phrase in relation to so great a man as Pericles, Plutarch notes that it nevertheless illustrates his rhetorical skill. Thus he cleverly undermines the force of the comic accusation (8.4). In fact, Pericles’ by-name *Olympios* is a point on which Plutarch does not easily give up. In the final chapter, where he has his last chance to establish the ethical integrity of his hero, Plutarch gives a more elevated connotation to *Olympios* by using it this time to suggest that Pericles was equal to the gods themselves (39.1–2).

Plutarch’s “βροντᾶν” μὲν αὐτὸν καὶ “ἀστράπτειν” ὅτε δημηγοροῖη (“‘thundering’ and ‘lightening’ when he harangued his audience,” 8.4) of Pericles’ rhetorical ability is an adaptation of line 531 of Aristophanes’ *Acharnians*. This may be significant for two reasons. First, the line comes from the *parabasis*, the section of comedy in which spectators traditionally receive a commentary on contemporary Athenian politics. Here Dikaiopolis discusses the causes of the Peloponnesian War, and in particular how Pericles started the war for trivial motives, both public and private. At the beginning of the *parabasis* Dikaiopolis asks the Athenians to excuse him for the displeasure he might cause with his critique (λέξω δεινά, 501), and goes on with a speech full of abusive language. Dikaiopolis then applies the medium of invective to criticize Pericles’ political misfirings. In his *Pericles*, Plutarch reproduces the invective that comedy had hurled against Pericles, but he also appropriates it to bring out its flaws, as we have seen; Pericles’ greatness in accepting the criticism shows that Plutarch’s hero does not assimilate to what his enemies unfairly accused him of.

Second, the context of the Aristophanic quotation is critical, because it relates both to the demagogue type of a Cleon and to the soldier type. The former is referred to explicitly at 503–504 (οὐ γὰρ με νῦν γε διαβαλεῖ Κλέων ὅτι / ξένων παρόντων τὴν πόλιν κακῶς λέγω), and the latter comes just after the *parabasis* (572–625), where the general Lamachus, the earliest

form of the comic *alazon* soldier that we know of, appears on stage.<sup>35</sup> When composing this pair of *Lives*, Plutarch had consulted the Aristophanic original<sup>36</sup> rather than depending on his memory, and that makes it plausible that he had recalled both comic stereotypes. If so, how do these help Plutarch in his moralising programme? In *Demetrius* and *Antony* we have seen that the references to the demagogue and *miles* support a broader application of the comic figures and encourage reflection on how the heroes fit this stereotype. In *Pericles* the biographer plays with the stereotype that comedy applied to Pericles, and shows that it does not fit at all. By counterbalancing the comic burlesque of the hero, Plutarch brings out the limitations of that caricature, and points rather to a much more positive implication, the hero's *praotes*. Plutarch seems especially interested in answering the mockery that is applied to the wrong player. We shall see this in *Fabius* as well.

We have seen that Plutarch manipulates the aggressive comic

<sup>35</sup> See D. M. MacDowell, *Aristophanes and Athens* (Oxford 1995) 67–71. On the *alazon* type and its general features, see traditionally Arist. *Eth.Nic.* 1127a12 and Theophr. *Char.* 23. In *Per.* 30.4 Plutarch quotes lines 524–527, which are only a few lines before Lamachus appears on stage (572 ff.). Line 530, which is just one line before the “thundering and lightening” quotation from *Achamians*, includes a reference to Pericles’ nickname *Olympios* (Περικλέης οὐλύμπιος), which Plutarch explicitly uses for the Athenian politician. That is a strong indication that Plutarch’s reading extended to that part of the comedy in which Lamachus plays an important role. Lamachus is a leading figure also in 1071 to the end of *Achamians*. Plutarch was certainly acquainted with this section of the play: in the epitomized *Comparison of Aristophanes and Menander* 853C, Lamachus’ words are quoted twice (lines 1208 and 1223–1124).

<sup>36</sup> It is generally agreed that Plutarch had direct knowledge of Old Comedy when composing *Pericles*. Zanetto, in *I generi letterari* 331–332, citing other references, the most important of which is Stadter, *A Commentary* lxxv–lxxvi, writes: “Plutarch, then, when citing Old Comedy in the *Pericles* and other fifth-century lives, was drawing on his own reading”; also M. Di Florio, “Presenze e valutazione di Aristofane nei *Moralia* di Plutarco,” in S. M. Medaglia (ed.), *Miscellanea in ricordo di Angelo Raffaele Sodano* (Naples 2004) 157–186, at 171–173.

citations to show both the opposition to Pericles, and how the hero put up with this opposition with magnificent composure. The author himself reacts to the comic hostility and defends his hero's distinctive *praotes*. This implies a broader manipulation of comic stereotyping and characterization. In loading comic testimonies with ethical import, Plutarch invites his audience to imitate Pericles' fine qualities. How, then, is comedy used in *Fabius*?

At the beginning of *Fabius* Plutarch resorts again to nicknames. Fabius is called Verrucosus for the small wart above his lips, and Ovicula 'lambkin' for his calmness (1.4). Of the two nicknames, Verrucosus is by far the most frequent, but Plutarch again is not content with observing established tradition. He insists on including the much rarer Ovicula, which is attested only once, in *De viris illustribus* 43.1.<sup>37</sup> This agnomen has a special role to play in Plutarch's narrative, since it reflects Fabius' mildness, which those around him often misinterpreted as a sort of laziness in learning or even stupidity. The tone is one of pleasantry, but the pejorative flavour of Fabius' nicknames still sketches the public opposition to the hero.

*Fabius* deals with the events of the Second Punic War in which Rome faced her fiercest enemy, Hannibal. The text unfolds as a succession of confrontations between Fabius and other Roman military officials: in sequence, Gaius Flaminius, Marcus Minucius, Terentius Varro, Aemilius Paulus, Claudius Marcellus, and Scipio Africanus. Most of these confrontations arose from opposition to Fabius' defensive tactics, the famous *cunctatio*, which aimed to debilitate the enemy's forces by not attacking straightaway.<sup>38</sup> Fabius' *cunctatio* is given more weight in Plutarch than in his sources, namely Polybius, Livy, and

<sup>37</sup> Stadter, *Commentary* 79.

<sup>38</sup> On Fabius' role as a general and his strategy see P. Erdkamp, "Polybius, Livy and the 'Fabian Strategy'," *AncSoc* 23 (1992) 127–147; R. Feig Vishnia, "The Delayed Career of the *Delayer*: The Early Years of Q. Fabius Maximus Verrucosus, the *Cunctator*," *SCI* 26 (2007) 19–37.

Valerius Maximus:<sup>39</sup> Plutarch's text highlights the hero's rationality and self-restraint, which are contrasted with the destructive *philotimia* of his opponents.<sup>40</sup>

I focus on the skirmish between Fabius and Marcus Minucius, which not coincidentally extends to ten whole chapters (4–13), more than a third of the total. Plutarch here creates an allusive comic setting, in which he sketches Minucius as the braggart soldier of comedy, once again in order to instruct his audience.

The conflict between Fabius and Minucius springs from their distinct approaches to military policy, which in turn reflect their respective ethical states.<sup>41</sup> Fabius, as a supporter of delaying tactics, is calm, maintains his reverence (4.4–6, 5.1), and sticks to his initial resolutions (βέβαιος, ἀμετάπτωτος, 5.5).<sup>42</sup> Conversely, Minucius attempts to attack Hannibal in the heat of the moment. He is overwhelmed by an ill-judged desire to fight (φιλομαχῶν ἀκαίρως, 5.5), he is over-bold (θρασυνόμενος, 5.5), and he inspires rash emotions and vain hopes in his troops (θράσους τὸ στρατιωτικὸν ἐμπεπληκώς, 8.3).

With the contrast between Fabius' *praotes* and Minucius' braggartism, Plutarch keeps the focus sharply on Fabius' magnanimity when confronting his opponent. After he was summoned to Rome, Fabius appointed Minucius as his *magister*

<sup>39</sup> In creating the biographical portrait of Fabius, Plutarch aims to give his views on the ethics of generalship and determine those ethical virtues that distinguish an ideal general: see S. A. Xenophontos, "Plutarch's *Fabius Maximus* and the Ethics of Generalship," *Hermes* 140 (2012) 160–183.

<sup>40</sup> On *philotimia* in Plutarch see A. E. Wardman, *Plutarch's Lives* (London 1974) 115–124; F. Frazier, "A propos de la 'philotimia' dans le 'Vies': quelques jalons dans l'histoire d'une notion," *RevPhil* 62 (1988) 109–127; T. Duff, *Plutarch's Lives. Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford 1999) 205–240.

<sup>41</sup> H. Beck, *Karriere und Hierarchie. Die römische Aristokratie und die Anfänge des cursus honorum* (Berlin 2005) 269–270, rightly argues that the biographical narrative is structured around Fabius' *cunctatio*.

<sup>42</sup> On Livy's handling of the character of Fabius see T. A. Dorey, "Livy and the Popular Leaders," *Orpheus* 2 (1955) 55–60.

*equitum*, allowing him to take charge of the forces.<sup>43</sup> Though he gave him strict orders and reiterated his injunctions against engaging in battle with Hannibal (8.1), Minucius attacked the enemy's army with unbridled boastfulness (μεγαλαυχίας ἀμέτρου, 8.3; cf. καὶ δεδοικῶς μὴ παντάπασιν ἐκμανεῖς ὑπὸ κενῆς δόξης καὶ ὄγκου φθάσῃ τι κακὸν ἀπεργασάμενος, λαθὼν ἅπαντας ἐξῆλθε ... καὶ καταλαβὼν τὸν Μινούκιον οὐκέτι καθεκτόν, ἀλλὰ βαρὺν καὶ τετυφωμένον καὶ παρὰ μέρος ἄρχειν ἀξιοῦντα, 10. 4–5; τοῦ Μινουκίου τὸ θράσος, 11.6). Minucius is then crushed by Hannibal, but in Plutarch's version Fabius discreetly avoids mentioning Minucius' military mistakes (12.2–3). Furthermore, Plutarch's Fabius never does pronounce any invidious words against Minucius, even well after the dreadful Roman defeat (οὐδὲν ὑπερήφανον οὐδ' ἐπαχθὲς εἰπὼν περὶ τοῦ συνάρχοντος, 13.1).<sup>44</sup>

The cluster of attributives that show Minucius' boastfulness is Plutarch's contribution to the narrative: their Latin counterparts are absent from both Livy and Valerius Maximus. The expressions describing Minucius' arrogance, quoted above, could easily recall the language used to describe the character of the comic soldier, especially those derivatives and synonyms of ἀλαζονεύεσθαι.<sup>45</sup> As we shall see, the texture which de-

<sup>43</sup> Plutarch is often inclined to assign Fabius responsibilities which other sources, such as Livy, clearly identify as being executed by collective authorities. See A. Pérez Jiménez, "La batalla de Trasimeno y la caracterización Fabio-Flaminio en Plutarco, *Fab.* 2.2 –3.7," *Habis* 16 (1985) 129–143, at 130, for further examples.

<sup>44</sup> On Fabius' *philanthropia* see R. Scuderi, "L'humanitas di Fabio Massimo nella biografia plutarchea," *Athenaeum* 98 (2010) 467–487.

<sup>45</sup> So for instance the language in the descriptions of Choricus or Photius of the conventional comic soldier: Men. *Misoumenos* fr.1 and 10 Sandbach. Minucius' rashness too, expressed by Plutarch with the term *thrasos*, is very close to the vehemence of the comic soldier, termed *sphodrotes* in the case of Polemon for instance (W. W. Fortenbaugh, "Menander's *Perikeiromene*: Misfortune, Vehemence, and Polemon," *Phoenix* 28 [1974] 430–443). On the language and style of *Fabius* see R. Guerrini, A. Santoni, and P. A. Stadter (eds.), *Plutarco, Vite parallele: Pericle-Fabio Massimo* (Milan 1991) 279–283.

scribes Minucius' soldierliness is replete with comic associations and imagery as well, presented in a way that suggests that Plutarch depicts Minucius here as the braggart soldier of comedy.

But why would Plutarch borrow from the comic soldier in particular? First, Plutarch in *Fabius* is mostly concerned with generalship and its proper ethical regulation (*comp.* 2.2–4). So the exploitation of the comic soldier not only harmonises with the thematics of the *Life* but also helps Plutarch communicate his views on the ethics of generalship. This is true, as we have seen, for both *Demetrius* and *Antony*, where generalship is the leading theme and the figure of the *miles* is again exploited.

Second, the use of the braggart warrior is consistent with the sort of mockery that characterizes Fabius' relations with the Roman camp and occasionally with the enemy too. The comic soldier is not invariably the target of mockery, but depending on his moral condition he either attracts or forestalls the scorn of others. In *Antony*, we saw that the hero's passivity caused the laughter of his flatterers. As we shall see, Plutarch is good also at redirecting the comic invective, as he seems to be transferring it from the moral character to the reprehensible one. We saw this in *Pericles*, in which the mockery was diligently removed from Pericles, once the comic caricaturing proved to be so ungenerous toward his mildness.

I turn to the manner in which Plutarch's text conveys the public credentials of the *miles* by giving them a special role to serve in his narrative.<sup>46</sup> First, the post-Aristophanic comic soldier is normally a foreigner (*xenos*) in the sense that he is not an Athenian.<sup>47</sup> This convention explains the soldier's boast-

<sup>46</sup> In this I am mainly following in the footsteps of McCary, *AJP* 93 (1972) 279–298, and more recently P. G. McC. Brown, "Soldiers in New Comedy: Insiders and Outsiders," *LICS* 3.08 (2003/4) 1–16, who have done much to assemble and clarify the standard characteristics of the soldier in New Comedy.

<sup>47</sup> A rootless *peregrinus* in Roman comedy with no settled home, notably Brown, *LICS* 3.08 (2003/4) 1–16; M. Leigh, *Comedy and the Rise of Rome*

fulness as a barbaric and not an Athenian trait. In *Fabius* the opposition between Romans and non-Romans is a key aspect: it often concerns which moral traits are germane to civilised men and which to barbarians. Minucius is of course a Roman; but his military boastfulness could still correspond to the barbarian features in Plutarch, and begin to align him with Rome's adversaries rather than Rome itself.<sup>48</sup> Such a classification is in keeping with Plutarch's tendency to determine ethnic identity on the basis of moral and cultural behavior rather than by origin. In similar way, he varies Antony's cultural identity depending on the place he is and his corresponding behavior each time: when in Greece, he behaved without rudeness or offense, and so he was taken as a philhellene, a φιλαθήναιος (23.2); when he crosses into Egypt and resorts to his uncultured manners, he is an anti-Roman, a μισορρώμαιος (54.5).

In *Fabius* it therefore becomes significant that Hannibal, the barbarian *par excellence* in the account, is presented with features that resemble those of Minucius' *miles* nature. Hannibal laughs and makes bitter jokes at the spectacle of the Roman army, showing in this way his scorn for the enemy and its alleged superiority over him (15.2–4). Minucius too shows contempt for his opponent, Fabius (5.5–7, see below). Yet Hannibal can also be contrasted with Minucius; in particular, he shows much greater appreciation of the merits that Fabius' calm generalship has been presenting, and teasingly calls him a cloud (νεφέλην) that bursts upon the Carthaginians in a drenching and furious storm (12.6). Given that Hannibal is admittedly a very effective

---

(Oxford 2004) 134–135 with n.151; S. Ireland, in *Brill's Companion to the Study of Greek Comedy* (Leiden 2010) 370.

<sup>48</sup> A. G. Nikolaidis, “Ελληνικός-βαρβαρικός: Plutarch on Greek and Barbarian Characteristics,” *WS* 20 (1986) 229–244, at 244. The same applies to Roman comedy, cf. Anderson, *Barbarian Play* 145, who notes that “the principal function of the soldier is to represent a ridiculous and non-Roman kind of soldier ... at which the entire audience, as Romans, can join in laughing.”

and proud general, who does not easily accept defeat and thus often scorns his rival, when we see the Roman Minucius behaving in a similar manner it is as if he out-barbarians the much shrewder barbarian general.

Minucius has not only the conventional pomposity of the soldier, as found mainly in Aristophanes, but he is also given a strange sort of nobility, of the kind that soldiers acquire in Menandrian comedy.<sup>49</sup> It is true that the soldier Bias in Menander's *Kolax* 26–39 is mostly in the traditional form,<sup>50</sup> and Plutarch himself seems aware of this (*Quomodo adulator ab amico internoscatur*, 57A), yet the rest of the spectrum of Menandrian soldiers are not stereotypical *miles* caricatures,<sup>51</sup> but characters with sensible attitudes. The soldier Thrasonides in *Misoumenos* 262–269 is a good instance of a likeable military figure.<sup>52</sup> His plight is made even more explicit in the prologue (*Mis.* 1–17), a large part of which Plutarch himself quotes and discusses at *De cupiditate divitiarum* 524F–525.<sup>53</sup> In most cases, Menander's mil-

<sup>49</sup> On the popularity of Menander see e.g. E. Fantham, "Roman Experience of Menander in the Late Republic and Early Empire," *TAPA* 114 (1984) 299–309. On Plutarch and Menander see A. Casanova, "Plutarco e Menandro," in A. Casanova (ed.), *Plutarco e l'età ellenistica* (Florence 2005) 105–118, and M. Di Florio, "Usi e riusi menandrei in Plutarco," in *Plutarco e l'età ellenistica* 119–140.

<sup>50</sup> Brown, *LICS* 3.08 (2003/4) 7, 14. T. L. B. Webster, *Studies in Menander* (Manchester 1960) 164, and H.-G. Nesselrath, *Die attische mittlere Komödie* (Berlin 1990) 328, define the traditional form of the soldier as one who, in the context of the comedy in which he appears, shows only arrogance and a variety of selfish tendencies.

<sup>51</sup> See McCary, *AJP* 93 (1972) 297; Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* 28; N. Zagagi, *The Comedy of Menander: Convention, Variation and Originality* (London 1994) 29, 32–33; Ireland, in *Brill's Companion* 362 with n.101 following W. G. Arnott, "Menander, *Qui Vitae Ostendit Vitam*," *G&R* 15 (1968) 1–17, at 15–17, and "Time, Plot and Character in Menander," *Papers of the Liverpool Latin Seminar* 2 (1979) 343–360, at 353–357.

<sup>52</sup> Equally likeable is Kleostratos in *Aspis*, on whom see McCary, *AJP* 93 (1972) 288.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. 654D. For Plutarch's quotations from Menander see Helmbold and O'Neil, *Plutarch's Quotations* 51, with Casanova, in *Plutarco e l'età ellenistica*

itary characters eventually become attractive heroes, especially when in a scene of self-realisation they express their regret for the arrogance they had exhibited: thus the scenes in *Sikyoniōs* 236–243 and *Perikeiromene* 982–989 in which the soldiers Stratophanes and Polemon are transformed,<sup>54</sup> the former giving up his initial claims on the girl (cf. 93–95), the latter regretting his mistake and apologising to his beloved. Both scenes resemble the repentance of the arrogant Minucius in *Fabius* 13, which (unlike its counterpart in Livy) is constructed by Plutarch in a highly dramatic manner, as if to encourage readers to grasp the comic influences and connotations (13.2–4 ... 7–9 / 13.1–2 ... 4–5):

“Fellow-soldiers, to avoid all mistakes in the conduct of great enterprises is beyond man’s powers; but when a mistake has once been made, to use his reverses as lessons for the future is the part of a brave and sensible man. I therefore confess that while I have some slight cause of complaint against fortune, I have larger grounds for praising her. For what I could not learn in all the time that preceded it, I have been taught in the brief space of a single day, and I now perceive that I am not able to command others myself, but need to be under the command of another, and that I have all the while been ambitious to prevail over men of whom to be outdone were better. Now in all other matters the dictator is your leader, but in the rendering of thanks to him I myself will take the lead, and will show myself first in following his advice and doing his bidding ... Dictator, you have on this day won two victories, one over Hannibal through your valour, and one over your colleague through your wisdom and kindness. By the first you saved our lives, and by the second you taught us a great lesson, vanquished as we were by our enemy to our shame, and by you to our honour and safety. I call you by the excellent name of Father, because there is no more honourable name which I can use; and yet a father’s kind-

<sup>54</sup> 105–118, and Di Florio, in *Plutarco* 119–140.

<sup>54</sup> According to A. E. Traill, “*Perikeiromene* 486–510: The Legality of Polemon’s Self-help Remedy,” *Mouseion* 1 (2001) 279–294, Polemon is an atypical comic soldier, sympathetic in many ways.

ness is not so great as this kindness bestowed by you. My father did but beget me, while to you I owe not only my own salvation, but also that of all these men of mine." So saying, he embraced Fabius and kissed him, and the soldiers on both sides in like manner embraced and kissed each other, so that the camp was filled with joy and tears of rejoicing.

Minucius is transformed into a repentant person, who recognises his errors and follows the example of those whom he has wronged. Despite his previous unrelenting *philotimia*, his regret now renders him an appealing figure. In particular his statements about human morality could presumably be seen as a manifestation of Plutarch's 'descriptive moralism'.<sup>55</sup> However, they also lend a dramatic tone to Minucius' self-realisation, though admittedly not a comic one this time.

Moreover, as happens with Menander's soldiers, Minucius' submission to Fabius here is rendered in military terms, victory and defeat: ἡττᾶσθαι – οὐκ ἄρχειν ἐτέρων δυνάμενον, ἀλλ' ἄρχοντος ἐτέρου δεόμενον – νικᾶν ὑφ' ὧν ἡττᾶσθαι κάλλιον. ὑμῖν δὲ τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἐστὶν ἄρχων ὁ δικτάτωρ – δύο νίκας ... νενίκηκας – ἡττωμένους αἰσχροῦ μὲν ἦταν; recall *Perikeir.* 985 ὡς κατὰ κράτος μ' εἴληφας (cf. *Sik.* 240–241 ὄντες αὐτοὶ κύριοι ταύτης, 237 οὐδὲν ἀξιῶ λαβεῖν). Plutarch, however, introduces deeper elements to this comic format, when he accompanies Minucius' submission with pedagogical language (διδάγμασι, πεπαίδευμαι, πεπαίδευκας), characteristic of his moralising style. The yielding to one's passions and the description of this via a teaching register is a pattern we have seen in both *Demetrius* and *Antony*, when Plutarch was exploring his hero's yielding to uncontrollable emotions and bad influences.

That a kind of allusive theatre is staged before us is confirmed by Plutarch's own words. In the same context in which Minucius is shown as a braggart soldier, there are repeated

<sup>55</sup> Pelling, *Plutarch and History* 239, 248, draws a distinction between descriptive and protreptic moralism, the former exploring universal truths about human experience, the latter simply advising the reader to imitate or disdain certain courses of action.

references to the scorn, mockery, and laughter levelled at Fabius both by Minucius himself and by his soldiers. This scorn is expressed by Plutarch in roughly theatrical terms. From Minucius' boastful viewpoint, Fabius' encampments on the hills opposite Hannibal look like beautiful theatres (καλὰ θέατρα), which will witness the spectacle of Italy's destruction (*Fab.* 5.5–6/5.4–5):

The soldiers railed at Fabius and scornfully called him Hannibal's pedagogue; but Minucius they considered a great man, and a general worthy of Rome. All the more therefore did he indulge his arrogance and boldness, and scoffed at their encampments on the heights, where, as he said, the dictator was always arranging beautiful theatres for their spectacle of Italy laid waste with fire and sword. And he would ask the friends of Fabius whether he was taking his army up into heaven, having lost all hope of earth, or whether he wrapped himself in clouds and mists merely to run away from the enemy.

Clouds, air, sky, and soon there is fire as well: such mocking visualization is Plutarch's contribution, once again with no parallel in his sources. This resembles the visualizing elaboration in *Demetrius* 12.3–5, at the point when physical disorder squared with ethical failure. Here, the taunting tone is sustained by Fabius' departure from earth to heaven and his being wrapped in clouds and mists. We have seen that Hannibal used to call Fabius a cloud (νεφέλη, 12.6), while elsewhere the Carthaginians considered Fabius a looming danger, suspended in mid-air over them (μετέωρος, ἐπηωρεῖτο, 5.2). Still, for the Carthaginians, comparing Fabius to a cloud did not denote mockery, as it did for the Romans, but rather fear and respect. This is a case of a mocking inversion by Plutarch of an image that sounded very different on enemy lips.

Nor is this the only case where Plutarch uses this technique in defence of his hero. In *Marcellus* 9.7 Hannibal admits that he fears Fabius as a pedagogue. Plutarch reuses the same detail in *Fabius* 5.5 but changes it to invective, by having Minucius' soldiers scorn (and not praise, as one would expect) Fabius for this same quality, for being Hannibal's pedagogue. But Plu-

tarch ingeniously puts things in order; he not only condemns the invective levelled at Fabius, but in Minucius' speech of repentance he presents Fabius as a true pedagogue to Minucius himself, rather than to Hannibal, as we have seen at 5.5–6. Furthermore, Plutarch in this case applies a more specific form of refutation of mockery, by redirecting it: he responds to the reviling by himself reviling the accusers—he ironically undermines the Roman soldiers' impression of Minucius as “a great man and a general worthy of Rome” (5.5/5.4).

In relation to *Pericles*, where comic mockery was rejected as unsuitable for the main hero, *Fabius* develops and further complicates the use of invective, in that the comic stereotyping is not only undeserved by the hero, but for that reason to a great extent redirected towards the deserving target, Minucius.

### *Conclusions*

I have argued that Plutarch sets his figures against the backdrop of comic abuse, when he means to stir his audience's reflection on an aspect of ethical behavior. In taking this course the biographer varies his technique in means and implications, but not in purpose. When he associates Demetrius with the rough, almost un-thinking features of the *miles gloriosus*, he urges us to avoid imitation of them. When in the same *Life* he sketches Stratocles as a comic demagogue Cleon, who was severely attacked by the comic poet Philippides, the reader disapproves of Stratocles' extravagant flattery. In encountering the flattering Cleopatra or the demagogue Curio deceiving Antony and abusing his naïvety, we realize the vital role of the environment to our ethical well-being, but at the same time we learn a lesson about how our own moral weaknesses may lead us to fall victim to wily persons. In *Pericles* the comic citations which so carpingly mock the Athenian statesman for his appearance, life, and policies are not just factual testimonies, but rather pointers to the hero's mildness in withstanding public criticism. By showing how the comic stereotype that the citations project is not fitting for Pericles' character, Plutarch seems to be using them as a sort of moral evidence. In *Fabius* the model of the comic soldier is cleverly deployed so as to degrade

the ethical conduct of Marcus Minucius, a man blinded by *philotimia* and *alazoneia* in the military field. With the deft redirection of mockery against the *alazon* figure, Plutarch protects the morally superior Fabius; and once Minucius has regretted his ethical errors Plutarch eventually rehabilitates him through his self-repentance.

Comic invective in Plutarch is far from a self-evident matter; sometimes explicit and at other times more opaque, the qualities of invective (use of nicknames, abusive diction, comic stereotyping, redirection of mockery) are part of Plutarch's moralising method in the *Parallel Lives*.<sup>56</sup>

August, 2012

University of Oxford  
sophia.xenophontos@gmail.com

<sup>56</sup> I would like to thank Christopher Pelling and Peter Brown for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this paper. I am grateful to the anonymous reader for *GRBS* for his/her expert advice, as well as to the editor, K. Rigsby, for all his valuable help.