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Illinois Classical Studies, Volume 45, Number 1, Spring 2020, pp. 49-79
(Article)

Published by University of Illinois Press



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Plutarch and the “Malicious” Historian

CHRYSANTHOS S. CHRYSANTHOU

This article shows that Plutarch’s principles of historical criticism in *On the Malice of Herodotus* do not always obtain in the *Lives*, and that Plutarch’s narrative techniques in his biographies prove to be vulnerable to the criticisms that Plutarch makes of Herodotus in the essay. Yet rather than being a sign of malice and deviousness, as Plutarch argues for Herodotus in *On the Malice*, it is suggested that these techniques are used in the *Lives* in a sophisticated way to invite an active response from the readers toward the biographical narrative and engage them all the more profoundly in their individual process of moral reflection and evaluation of history. This insight, in turn, shows that there is more artistry in the composition and purpose of *On the Malice* than has been hitherto discerned or allowed. Overall, this article advances our understanding of Plutarch’s *oeuvre* as an integrated corpus in which Plutarch encourages through his use of inconsistencies a provocative readerly experience. It also has some far-reaching consequences for our interpretation of the literary persona that Plutarch evokes in the *Lives* and *On the Malice* and his conception of the ideal way of writing and reading history.

Introduction

In the opening chapter of *On the Malice of Herodotus*,¹ Plutarch calls attention to the fact that many people have been deceived by the style of Herodotus’s narrative as well as his moral character (854e),² which he calls “malicious”

1. For the text of Plutarch’s *Moralia* I follow the Loeb editions (1927–69); for that of Plutarch’s *Lives* I have consulted Ziegler’s Teubner edition (1957–73), revised by Gärtner (1994–2002). The translations of texts are based on or adopted from those of the Loeb editions, unless otherwise noted.

2. The connection between an author’s narrative and character is prevalent throughout ancient literature. See, for example, Ar. *Thesm.* 149–67; Isoc. *Nic.* 7; Polyb. 12.24.1–2; Dion. Hal. *Ant. Rom.* 1.1.3, *Pomp.* 3–6; Sen. *Ep.* 114; [Longin.] *Subl.* 4.7; Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.113; *P Oxy.* LXXI 4808 with Chrysanthou (2015). On this theme, see Russell (1981) 161–64; Gray (1987) 467–86; Fox (1993) 42; Duff (1999a) 56–60; Marincola (1994) 192–93; Roskam (2017) 163, 165; Kirkland (2019) 486–90. Marincola (2015b) 90 rightly argues about the nature of *On the Malice*: “It will not do to say simply that the work is not about history but about character: it’s about both and even, we might say, about the relationship between the two.”

(κακοηθείας, 854f).³ Plutarch blames Herodotus for his misleading and defamatory representation of the Greeks' achievement in the Persian wars,⁴ and openly expresses his objective to defend his ancestors and the cause of truth by exposing the dishonesty and lies that are to be found in Herodotus's *Histories* (854f). In the rest of his work, Plutarch is prepared to approach Herodotus and his work in an extremely critical manner; and at the end of the treatise he prompts his readers to be on guard against Herodotus's "slanders" (τὴν βλασφημίαν) and "ugly lies" (καὶ κακολογίαν), which he parallels with a rose-beetle "lurking beneath a smooth and soft exterior" (874b).

To this end, Plutarch offers a list of eight "signs and indications" (ἕχνη καὶ γνωρίσματα) by which the readers can determine a malicious historian and a morally unsatisfactory narrative (855b–856d): (1) a preference for the severest words, when milder ones can be used; (2) the inclusion of material that is disreputable in effect and irrelevant to the story; (3) the suppression of what is good and noble; (4) a preference for the worse version of an action when more—and fairer—alternatives are available; (5) a preference for, or even invention of, less creditable explanations; (6) the ascription of one's success to luck or money rather than to valor or intelligence; (7) an indirect attack by mentioning a slander and then withdrawing it; and (8) the mixture of blame with some praise in order to make criticism more convincing.

Scholars have already paid attention to the complex nature and usability of Plutarch's opening signs in *On the Malice*. Anthony Bowen, in his commentary on the essay, notices that Plutarch's list "provides neither the intellectual nor the formal framework of the attack that ensues. It turns out to be more of a defensive starched front, as though Plutarch felt the temerity of his undertaking, and wished to look respectable at its beginning."⁵ Following a similar line of thought, John Marincola, besides acknowledging that Plutarch's historiographical theory is much paralleled in the Greek and Roman historiographical traditions, underlines that Plutarch's principles of literary criticism "cannot be read in isolation as detachable historiographical 'rules.'"⁶ "Because they concern

3. On Plutarch's use of the term κακοῦθεια, see Boake (1975) 109–13; Roskam (2017) 164–66; Kirkland (2019) 495–96, 498–504, focusing especially on its Platonic and Aristotelian influences.

4. Overall, Plutarch is an author averse to extreme blame. See *Dion.* 36.4; *Cim.* 2.4–5; *Quomodo adul.* 26a; *De cur.* 520a–b. Cf. Polyb. 2.61; 12.15.9; Cic. *Fam.* 5.12; Dion. Hal. *Pomp.* 3–6. On this point, see Luce (1989); Gray (1990); Fox (1993); Duff (1999a) 56–59; Chrysanthou (2015); Marincola (2015b).

5. Bowen (1992) 4.

6. See Marincola (2015b) *passim* and esp. 95 for the quotation. Similarly, Teodorsson (1997) 445: "The principles Plutarch established in the beginning of the latter [i.e., *De Herodoti malignitate*]

a historian's entire disposition," so Marincola continues, "they all fit together and are employed to show how everything is of a piece for a particular type of writer, namely, his entire *Weltanschauung*: a person with *this* kind of disposition will always see the worst in things or put the worst interpretation on them."⁷ Specifically on Plutarch, Marincola rightly observes that even if he frequently reports negative material in his *Lives* or elsewhere, Plutarch "gives the readers ample evidence that his own 'disposition' . . . is not malicious, and that he will not focus *only* on what is critical and harsh and tends to a negative evaluation of his subjects."⁸ Marincola concludes that, unlike Herodotus who (according to Plutarch) in the essay misused history to criticize, attack, and diminish his subjects, Plutarch views the purpose of history as the admiration and glorification of historical actions which, even if they are treated negatively, can still serve a useful pedagogical purpose.

Most recently, Bryant Kirkland wonders about the extent to which Plutarch's opening *ichnē* are generalizable and practicable, offering some illuminating observations on the reading program they set up in the essay. Specifically, he suggests that Plutarch's signs do not simply provide a "plan for independent study," but work to create a relationship between Plutarch and his readers by "fostering respect for Plutarch's authority both to supply historical data and to offer insight into character."⁹ "Plutarch's suspicious hermeneutic," as Kirkland argues, "trains readers on Herodotus' ethical decipherability." He "wants to expose Herodotus' scurrilous obfuscation and, in the process, to perform his own contrasting probity."¹⁰ As Kirkland concludes, "Plutarch must strike a careful balance, lest he look overly vituperative."¹¹

In effect, this article will show that Plutarch's *ichnē* in *On the Malice* are traceable in the *Lives* and work to a similar effect.¹² They build up a fundamental

he seems to have designed specifically for that essay. In the *Lives* there is no indication that he ever thought of them. He actually seems to have forgotten that he once held these extreme opinions."

7. Marincola (2015b) 95.

8. Marincola (2015b) 93–94.

9. Kirkland (2019) 483–84.

10. Kirkland (2019) 506–507 for this and the previous quotation.

11. Kirkland (2019) 480.

12. This, in turn, leads to a much larger question, namely whether and to what extent it is legitimate to apply Plutarch's theory on historiography to his biographical writing, since Plutarch famously distinguishes between historiography and biography (*Alex.* 1.2). It has been well argued that the boundaries between the two genres are often blurred and fluid in antiquity (cf. Duff [1999a] 18–22), while even in the prologue to the *Alexander–Caesar* book a strict generic distinction is heavily problematized (cf. Chrysanthou [2017] 133–38). But even if one is sceptical about the intersection of the two genres in Plutarch or elsewhere in general, our approach can still be useful in showing

relationship between Plutarch and his readers, allowing Plutarch to emerge (in a carefully balanced manner) as an authoritative figure who has the right moral and intellectual framework in his *historia*,¹³ and who can thus train readers on ethical decipherability.¹⁴

Plutarch's *ichnē* in the *Lives*

1. *Plutarch's Ethical Generosity*

Plutarch often conforms to the principles listed in *On the Malice* and thus refers in a biography to the most positive version of a story, action, motives, and intentions of his hero. For example, the story of Agesilaus's accession is presented more favorably toward Agesilaus in the *Life of Agesilaus* than in the *Life of Lysander*.¹⁵ In the former, we are told that after Agis's death Lysander, who (as Plutarch relates) "was a man of the greatest influence in Sparta," tried to promote Agesilaus to the throne "on the plea that Leotychides was a bastard and had no

how and to what end Plutarch's principles of historiography are applied in his biographical mode of studying history. The conclusions are intimately connected not only with what the biographer believes to be the purpose of history, namely the kind of history he advocates, but also with the way in which he thinks history should be properly written and read. On Plutarch's view of history and the relationship of his biographical genre with historiography, see the detailed bibliography cited in Chrysanthou (2017) 128n1, to which we may add Teodorsson (1997); Pelling (2007); Marincola (2011).

13. On the term *historia* in Plutarch in the sense of history as well as narrative and other kinds of research about the past, see Duff (1999a) 18 n. 14, 33. See also Valgiglio (1987) 50–62; Hershbell (1997) 227–33; Gómez and Mestre (1997); Inglese (1997). More generally on this term in Greek historiography, see Schepens (2007). That Plutarch's moralism envisages an active reader response in the *Lives* is noted by Pelling (1988a) 10–18; (1995) 205–208, 218–20 [= repr. (2002a) 237–239, 247–49]; Stadter (1997) [= repr. (2015) 215–30]; Duff (1999a) 18n14, 33; Stadter (2000); Pelling (2002b); Stadter (2003); Stadter (2003–2004). The reader's active involvement is thoughtfully examined in detail by Duff (2011).

14. This is not the first time that a comparative exercise between *On the Malice* and the *Lives* has been conducted. See Theander (1951) 32–37; Wardman (1974) 189–96; Pelling (1990a) 32–35; Teodorsson (1997) 443–47; Pelling (2007); Dognini (2007) 481–82, 495–97; Marincola (2015a); Marincola (2016); Ingenkamp (2016), 234–42. However, one further angle of the relationship between the two works deserves more attention than it has previously received, namely the way in which the *ichnē* that open *On the Malice* are intimately connected with the moralizing program and reading experience which Plutarch encourages and demands in his biographical narrative. On the use of Plutarch's theory of historiographical criticism in *On the Malice* as a point of entry for examining an author's narrative technique, see also Baragwanath (2008) esp. 9–34, who has meticulously examined the ways in which Plutarch's *On the Malice* engages with Herodotus's nuanced and sophisticated strategies for eliciting a committed, active reader response to questions of motivation and historical explanation in the *Histories*.

15. Trego (2014) 55.

claim upon it” (3.3–4); and that “many of the other citizens also, owing to the excellence of Agesilaus (διὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν τοῦ Ἀγησιλάου) and the fact that he had been reared with them under the common restraints of public training (καὶ τὸ συντεθράφθαι καὶ μετεσχηκέναι τῆς ἀγωγῆς), warmly espoused the plan of Lysander and co-operated with him” (3.5). Only Diopeithes, a diviner in Sparta, used an oracle to warn the Spartans against a lame king (3.6–7). Lysander, however (so Plutarch’s account goes), intervened by telling the Spartans that if they feared the oracle, they should be on their guard against the illegitimate Leotychides (3.8). Agesilaus, Plutarch adds, also declared that “Poseidon bore witness to the bastardy of Leotychides, for he had cast Agis forth from his bed-chamber by an earthquake, and after this more than ten months elapsed before Leotychides was born” (3.9).¹⁶

In the version of the same story in the *Life of Lysander* (22.6–13), Plutarch relates that, when Agis died, Lysander, “who had been a lover (ἐραστής) of Agesilaus,”¹⁷ “persuaded Agesilaus to lay claim to the throne” because of Leotychides’s bastardy (22.6). Plutarch also tells us that Agis, before his death, yielding to the entreaties of Leotychides and his friends, acknowledged Leotychides as his own son and pleaded for those who were present to testify this to the Spartans (22.9). Consequently, these men acted, as Plutarch says, in favor of Leotychides (22.10). Plutarch refers next to the intervention of Diopeithes and his oracle against Agesilaus, who is depicted here “as otherwise illustrious and as having Lysander as a fellow-combatant (cf. 22.10: λαμπρὸν ὄντα τᾶλλα καὶ συναγωνιστῆ τῷ Λυσάνδρῳ χρώμενον)” (22.10–11). We are told that “many out of deference to the oracle inclined to Leotychides” (22.12), but that Lysander managed to oppose Diopeithes effectively and prevailed “because he had very great influence” (καὶ δυνάμενος πλεῖστον ἔπεισε) (22.13).

If we look more carefully at the two versions of the same story, we can notice some remarkable differences. In *Agesilaus*, Plutarch notes that many of the other citizens “warmly espoused the plan of Lysander and co-operated with him” because of Agesilaus’s virtue (διὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν τοῦ Ἀγησιλάου) and their common rearing in the *agōgē* system (3.5).¹⁸ Yet this piece of information is omitted in the *Lysander*. Moreover, Diopeithes’s disapproval of Agesilaus’s

16. Cf. *Alc.* 23.7–9 for the story of Alcibiades’s erotic affair with Timaea and Leotychides’s bastard birth. Plutarch points out explicitly that “for this reason Leotychides was afterwards refused the royal succession” (23.9). On Plutarch’s less assertive language in *Ages.* 3.9 compared to the corresponding account in *Alcibiades*, see Verdegem (2010) 181–82; Trego (2014) 51 with n36, 54.

17. Cf. *Ages.* 2.1.

18. Trego (2014) 55, 56.

accession is expressed in less personal terms in *Agesilaus* than in *Lysander*, for in the former Diopieithes is said to have referred to “a lame man” in general, while in the latter the “lameness” specifically concerns Agesilaus.¹⁹ In *Agesilaus*, moreover, Plutarch mentions at the end of his account some details about Agesilaus’s invocation of Poseidon as a witness to the bastardy of Leotychides (*Ag.* 3.9). *Lysander* does not attribute such an active role to Agesilaus,²⁰ and closes instead with a note on Lysander’s arguments and his great influence that led to Agesilaus’s successful accession to the Spartan throne (*Lys.* 22.12–13).²¹

Closely relevant to this is the different presentation of the story about Agis’s deathbed recognition of Leotychides in the two biographies. In *Lysander* we hear that Agis recognizes Leotychides as his own son and pleads for those who were present to testify this to the Spartans, which they did in support of Leotychides (22.9–10). The same information is given in *Agesilaus* but is more favorable toward Agesilaus, since Agis’s request and the witness of the onlookers in support of Leotychides are omitted: “But when the king lay sick, the supplications and tears of Leotychides prevailed upon him to declare him his son in the presence of many witnesses” (3.3).²² In a similar manner, Plutarch does not include in *Agesilaus* a reference to the support of Leotychides by many Spartans who were persuaded by the oracle (cf. *Lys.* 22.12).²³ It is notable how Plutarch’s different emphasis and internal focalization in the two biographies have wholly different effects: while in *Agesilaus*, many people favor Agesilaus’s advancement, in *Lysander* onlookers support Leotychides’s patrilineage in both instances of Agis’s death and Diopieithes’s oracle. Plutarch regularly uses in the *Lives* the comments, thoughts, and feelings of contemporary observers in order to re-enact the climate of the times and, on occasions, to guide, or at least problematize, the readers’ moral response and characterize historical agents.²⁴ In the present case,

19. *Ages.* 3.6–7: “But there was a diviner in Sparta, named Diopieithes . . . This man declared it contrary to the will of Heaven that a lame man should be king of Sparta, and cited at the trial of the case the following oracle.” Cf. *Lys.* 22.10: “Moreover, Agesilaus, who was otherwise illustrious, and had Lysander as a champion, was injured in his claim by Diopieithes . . . who published the following prophecy with reference to the lameness of Agesilaus.”

20. On the active role implied for Agesilaus in the episode of his claim to Poseidon’s sign, see Shipley (1997) 92; Trego (2014) 53.

21. Cf. Trego (2014) 55.

22. Cf. Trego (2014) 55.

23. Trego (2014) 55. Cf. Shipley (1997) 85.

24. On this technique, see Pelling (1988a) 335 (index 2. subjects, s.v. characterization by reaction); Duff (1999a) 421 (index of themes, s.v. onlookers as mouthpiece for author); Duff (2011) 65–67, 71–72; De Pourcq and Roskam (2016) 168–170; Chrysanthou (2018a) 66–102.

the very issue of readerly decision between the different versions in the two biographies is played out against scenes of internal audience's "decisions" or moments of persuasion and interpretation about what to believe and propound. Internal audiences can meaningfully influence external ones.

In this analysis, it is clearly shown that the version of the story in *Agesilaus* is more favorable toward Agesilaus than that in *Lysander*.²⁵ This has the effect of emphasizing that, in the *Life of Agesilaus*, the titular figure's appointment was not simply due to Lysander's intervention *but also* due to Agesilaus's own participation in the debate over the throne²⁶ and, significantly, his virtue and Spartan rearing. In the *Life of Agesilaus* the king's accession appears to be a less troublesome issue, which (also) keeps the reader oriented toward Agesilaus's excellence and his popular acclaim. In the *Life of Lysander*, on the other hand, the growing antagonism against Agesilaus's claim to the throne directs the spotlight onto Lysander's ability to overpower all opposition and exercise great influence over politics.²⁷ Plutarch chooses to omit or downplay some favorable material about Agesilaus in the *Life of Lysander*, but his practice serves to draw attention to Lysander's virtue and bolster the arguments in favour of him rather than undermining Agesilaus maliciously (cf. principle n. 3, noted above).

These differences in detail between the two biographies reveal the subtlety of Plutarch's ethical and political portraiture in each biography and provoke us toward analysis of his technique of narrating the same events in different *Lives*, in ways that help us reach a more coherent view of the *virtuous character* of his protagonist.²⁸ In each of the two versions of Agesilaus's accession story, Plutarch prefers to use material that serves to place the respective protagonists

25. Trego (2014) 55. See the more critical approach of the same topic in the *synkrisis* to *Agesilaus–Pompey* book, below p. 62.

26. Much more emphasis on Agesilaus's own responsibility for his accession is placed in Xen. *Ages.* 1.5 and *Hell.* 3.3.1–4. See Trego (2014) 43–47 on Xenophon's version of the story, where she persuasively argues that Plutarch's variations in *Agesilaus* should be explained by his decision to stress the theme of friendship between Agesilaus and Lysander, which matter to the *Agesilaus–Pompey* book as a whole. On the literary tradition on Agesilaus's succession, see also Shipley (1997) 79–80, 90–93.

27. In this paragraph, I am indebted to Trego (2014) 55–57.

28. Examples of this technique may be easily multiplied. Cimon is presented more negatively in the *Life of Pericles* than in his *Life*, while Lucullus is more favourably depicted in the *Life of Lucullus* than in the *Life of Pompey*. See Chrysanthou (2018a) 160–62. Caesar's behaviour during the Catilinarian conspiracy is more positively depicted in *Caesar* 7.5–8.5 than in other late Republican biographies (e.g., *Cic.* 10–24; *Ca. Mi.* 22–24; *Crass.* 13.3–5): see Pelling (2011) 160–71. Cf. Pelling (1985). Other examples are discussed in van der Valk (1982) 309–14, 330–337; Georgiadou (1992) 4230–4231, 4233–4238, 4254; Schepens (2000) 425.

in the most glamorous and attractive light and single their noble actions out for special commendation.

Still, as we shall see in the following section, in other scenes or episodes from the *Lives* Plutarch is prepared to be much more critical of his protagonists, and does not waste the opportunity to blacken or berate them, thus flouting the principles of non-malicious historiography laid out at the outset of *On the Malice*.

2. Plutarch's Preference for the "Worse"

In the *Lives* there are several instances where, contrary to his warnings in *On the Malice*, Plutarch employs bold and severe language, although he could have used milder expressions. He also refers to the worse version of some action and the more discreditable explanation or intention, though often there are other milder alternatives available.

Some expressive examples of Plutarch's use of harsh phraseology are found in the *Life of Antony*. Consider, for example, Plutarch's blunt and outspoken criticism of the triumvirate and its proscriptions:

οὐδὲν ὀμότερον οὐδ' ἀγριώτερον τῆς διαμείψεως ταύτης δοκῶ γενέσθαι· φόνων γὰρ ἀντικαταλλασσόμενοι φόνους, ὁμοίως μὲν οἷς ἐλάμβανον ἀνήρουν οὕς ἐδίδοσαν, ἀδικώτεροι δὲ περὶ τοὺς φίλους ἦσαν οὕς ἀπεκτίννυσαν μηδὲ μισοῦντες. (Plut. *Ant.* 19.4)

Nothing, in my opinion, could be more savage or cruel than this exchange. For by this barter of murder for murder they put to death those whom they surrendered just as truly as those whom they seized; but their injustice was greater toward their friends, whom they slew without so much as hating them.

We may compare Plutarch's less damning vocabulary in his evaluation of the same incident in the *Life of Brutus*:

μετὰ ταῦτα διαλλαγέντες οἱ τρεῖς, Καῖσαρ Ἀντώνιος Λέπιδος, διενείμαντο τὰς ἐπαρχίας σφαγὰς τε καὶ προγραφὰς ἀνδρῶν διακοσίων ἐποίησαν, ἐν οἷς καὶ Κικέρων ἀπέθανε. (Plut. *Brut.* 27.6)

After this, the three men, Octavius, Antony, and Lepidus, were reconciled with one another, distributed the provinces among themselves, and sentenced to death by proscription two hundred men. Among those put to death was Cicero.

One can see that, had Plutarch wanted, he could easily have used milder words against Antony in his *Life*. Such direct and strong moralism in the *Life*

of *Antony*,²⁹ however, is effective in strengthening Plutarch's evidence for Antony's wanton character and reinforcing the idea (expressed in the prologue to the *Demetrius–Antony* book) that Antony (just as Demetrius) was a “great nature,” a man who produces great virtues as well as great vices (cf. *Demetr.* 1.7).³⁰ Rather than being a sign of sustained and malign criticism (according to Plutarch's theory in *On the Malice*), harsh and severe vocabulary, then, can be used in the *Lives* to deepen the readers' understanding of an individual's character and morality. Closely relevant to this is Plutarch's “rare and striking use” of the first person in the verb δοκῶ,³¹ which introduces his personal evaluative perspective, but at the same time it might be used to soften the harsh language and judgement, perhaps encouraging the readers to test this view for themselves.³² We will return to Plutarch's “rhetoric of diffidence” and its consequences for the kind of reader response Plutarch promotes, later in this article.

Another striking example of Plutarch's use of strong language occurs in his description of Antony's reaction to Cicero's murder in the *Life of Antony*:³³

Κικέρωνος δὲ σφαγέντος ἐκέλευσεν Ἀντώνιος τὴν τε κεφαλὴν ἀποκοπῆναι καὶ τὴν χεῖρα τὴν δεξιάν, ἣ τοὺς κατ' αὐτοῦ λόγους ἔγραψε. καὶ κομισθέντων ἐθεῖατο γεγηθῶς καὶ ἀνακαγχάζων ὑπὸ χαρᾶς πολλάκις· εἶτ' ἐμπλησθεὶς ἐκέλευσεν ὑπὲρ τοῦ βήματος ἐν ἀγορᾷ τεθῆναι, καθάπερ εἰς τὸν νεκρὸν ὑβρίζων, οὐχ αὐτὸν ἐνουβρίζοντα τῇ τύχῃ καὶ καταισχύνοντα τὴν ἐξουσίαν ἐπιδεικνύμενος. (Plut. *Ant.* 20.3–4)

Moreover, after Cicero had been butchered, Antony ordered his head to be cut off, and that right hand with which Cicero had written the speeches against him. When they were brought to him, he gazed upon them exultantly, laughing aloud for joy many times; then, when he was sated, he ordered them to be placed on the rostra in the forum, just as though he were putting insult upon the dead, and not rather making a display of his own insolence in good fortune and abuse of power.

Compare the language used in Plutarch's narrative treatment of the same event in the *Life of Cicero*:

29. On Plutarch's strong moralism at this point, see Pelling (1988a) 149, 166; Duff (2011) 63.

30. On the Platonic notion of “great natures” in Plutarch, see esp. Duff (1999a) 46–49, 60–65, 224–28; Duff (1999b) 313–32; Frazier (2014) 498–501.

31. Pelling (1988a) 166.

32. I owe this point to the anonymous reader of the article.

33. Pelling (1988a) 149, 168 stresses Plutarch's “unusually direct moral commentary” here.

Τῶν δ' ἀκρωτηρίων εἰς Ῥώμην κομισθέντων, ἔτυχε μὲν ἀρχαιρεσίας συντελών ὁ Ἀντώνιος, ἀκούσας δὲ καὶ ἰδὼν ἀνεβόησεν, ὡς νῦν αἱ προγραφαὶ τέλος ἔχουσιν. τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν καὶ τὰς χεῖρας ἐκέλευσεν ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐμβόλων ἐπὶ τοῦ βήματος θεῖναι, θέαμα Ῥωμαίοις φρικτόν, οὐ τὸ Κικέρωνος ὄραν πρόσωπον οἰομένοις, ἀλλὰ τῆς Ἀντωνίου ψυχῆς εἰκόνα. πλὴν ἔν γε τι φρονήσας μέτριον ἐν τούτοις, Πομπωνία τῇ Κοΐντου γυναικὶ τὸν Φιλόλογον παρέδωκεν (Plut. *Cic.* 49.1–2)

When Cicero's extremities were brought to Rome, it chanced that Antony was conducting an election, but when he heard of their arrival and saw them, he cried out, "Now let our proscriptions have an end." Then he ordered the head and hands to be placed over the ships' beaks on the rostra, a sight that made the Romans shudder; for they thought they saw there, not the face of Cicero, but an image of the soul of Antony. However, he showed at least one sentiment of fair dealing in the case when he handed over Philologus to Pomponia, the wife of Quintus.

Plutarch not only includes at this point in *Cicero* Antony's commendable action of offering Philologus, the traitor of Cicero, for punishment—an incident omitted in the *Life of Antony* (cf. principle n. 3, noted above)—but he also uses words that are much milder than those which he uses in his corresponding account in the *Life of Antony*. In the latter, Plutarch enlarges upon Antony's *derision*—the word ἀνακαγγάζων, literally “guffaw,”³⁴ carries clear connotations of derision³⁵—and his *abuse* (note the sequence ὑβρίζων, οὐχ αὐτὸν ἐνουβρίζοντα) of Cicero's corpse, which reflect Antony's cruel and dishonorable action that Plutarch clearly disapproves.³⁶ In *Antony*, moreover, the καθάπερ-construction (“just as”/ “as if”) explicitly introduces into the narrative Antony's perspective, which is aligned here with an “alternative” reality, an “as if-situation” that Plutarch rejects by juxtaposing what is actual and real—notably, in *Cicero* it is simply the onlookers' shuddering at Antony's cruelty that is mentioned. Antony is *laughing at* the dead Cicero *as if* (καθάπερ) insulting the dead—this is what Antony thinks—and *not rather* (οὐχ) displaying his insolence and abuse of his own power—which is exactly the case. I suggest that the distance between the

34. Pelling (1988a) 167.

35. Cf. similar uses of the verb in Pl. *Resp.* 337a where Thrasymachus indulges in a “highly sardonic guffaw (cf. ἀνεκάγγασέ τε μάλα σαρδάνιον);” ps.-Lucian *Philopat.* 22; Lucian *Iupp. trag.* 31; Hippoc. [*Ep.*] 17.4. Cf. Halliwell (2008) 523n17. On Plutarch's use of laughter in the *Lives*, see most recently Chrysanthou (2019).

36. Jeering at the dead was subject to ethical restraints throughout Greek culture. See Halliwell (2008) 26–30.

“alternative” and “actual” realities, which Plutarch’s more explicit and critical language in *Antony* points to, is effective in drawing the reader to engage with Antony’s altered state of consciousness which is central to Antony’s final downfall.³⁷

Indeed, Plutarch’s delving into the minds of his characters, feelings, beliefs, emotions, and motives constitutes an important and pervasive aspect of the readers’ inquiry into questions of cause and explanation, and hence of moral evaluation in the *Lives*. To this end, Plutarch often refers to, or even elaborates, the more discreditable explanation or intention of an individual’s action. In the *Life of Alcibiades*, for example, Plutarch ascribes Alcibiades’s decision to violate the Peace of Nicias to his great annoyance with Nicias’s high repute in Athens.³⁸ Thucydides mentions Alcibiades’s personal motivations too, but he also states that “Alcibiades thought the Argive alliance really preferable” (5.43.2). This statement makes Alcibiades’s decision explicable in terms of politics as well.³⁹ Moreover, in Thucydides it is the “party at Athens” (οἱ ἐν ταῖς Ἀθήναις), of which Alcibiades was part, which wishes to cancel the treaty (5.43.1), whereas in Plutarch the focus (understandably) falls on Alcibiades alone (*Alc.* 14.1). Further, while Plutarch lays emphasis on Alcibiades’s excessive distress and envy toward Nicias (*Alc.* 14.1–2), Thucydides mentions only Alcibiades’s “contentiousness”/“party spirit” (cf. φρονήματι φιλονικῶν) (5.43.2).⁴⁰ In addition, the measures taken by Alcibiades are treated differently in the two authors: according to Thucydides, Alcibiades opposed the treaty by accusing the Lacedaemonians of being untrustworthy and of wishing through the negotiations to crush Argos and then attack Athens. He then sent (as Thucydides tells) word to the Argives and urged them to come to Athens as quickly as possible with proposals of alliance, also declaring his willingness to help them (5.43.3). In Plutarch, on the other hand, there is no reference to the Lacedaemonians’ plan of attacking Argos and Athens. Prominence is instead given to Alcibiades’s

37. Kirkland (2019) 490–96, 501–504 makes some good comments on Plutarch’s quasi-Platonic emphasis (including in *On the Malice*) on “seeming” vs. “being.”

38. See *Alc.* 14.1: “Alcibiades was sore distressed to see Nicias no less admired by his enemies than honoured by his fellow-citizens;” 14.2: “Alcibiades was therefore distressed beyond measure, and in his envy planned a violation of the solemn treaty.” Cf. Plutarch’s different interpretation in *Nic.* 10.3: “Such being the course of events, Alcibiades, who was naturally indisposed to be quiet, and who was incensed at the Lacedaemonians because they scornfully ignored him in their fond attachment to Nicias, promptly opposed and obstructed the general peace.”

39. See Frazier (1996) 102n8; Verdegem (2010) 188–9.

40. See LSJ, s.v. φιλονικέω. Cf. *Nic.* 9.2 (ῥύμη καὶ σφοδρότητι τῆς Ἀλκιβιάδου φιλοτιμίας αὐθις ἐξῶσθεῖς εἰς τὸν πόλεμον). See also Verdegem (2010) 189.

alertness to the “hatred” (μίσει) and “fear” (φόβω) of the Argives toward the Spartans—an emphasis missing from *Nicias*⁴¹—and his encouragement of the Argives through inspiring them with hopes of an alliance with Athens (Plut. *Alc.* 14.3).⁴² Plutarch’s focus then remains more on emotions and passions rather than policy.

Similar re-moldings of Thucydides can be found in the *Life of Nicias*. There, after the news from Pylos reaches Athens, Cleon accuses Nicias of cowardice (δειλία) and weakness (μαλακία) (7.3). In Thucydides, Cleon’s attack is expressed in less blunt and personal terms (4.27.5: “if the generals were men”). In Plutarch’s narrative, moreover, Nicias’s delay in Olympieum is presented as deliberate and self-interested (16.7), reflecting an excessive concern for his self-preservation. This suggestion is not present in Thucydides’s corresponding account (6.71), although it is plausible that Plutarch has generalized it from Nicias’s speech in Thucydides, where Nicias declares his preference to die in Sicily rather than in Athens (7.48.4). Both authors, in addition, have Nicias reject Demosthenes’s proposal for withdrawal. But Plutarch omits the more strategically concerned argumentation of Nicias in Thucydides (7.48),⁴³ and lays emphasis on Nicias’s fear of the Athenians alone (22.2–3).⁴⁴ Once again Nicias’s fear of the Athenians might have been generalized from Thucydides (7.48.3–4), but it is developed more systematically in *Nicias* through Plutarch’s insistent interest in Nicias’s uncertain relationship with the Athenian people.⁴⁵

We can therefore notice that in both the *Life of Alcibiades* and the *Life of Nicias* Plutarch prefers to (re)construct a psychological and emotional profile of the subjects of his biographies, which prioritizes negative readings of explanations and motives. However, I suggest, the ultimate effect of Plutarch’s practice is not to derive pleasure from accusing Alcibiades or Nicias in a malicious way. Rather, it invites readers to engage empathetically with the cognitive and emotional states of historical agents, their motives and hopes, feelings and perceptions, which have inspired a particular course of action. Consequently,

41. *Nic.* 10.4: “Finally he [i.e., Alcibiades] managed to have an embassy sent from Argos to Athens, and tried to effect a separate alliance between these two cities.”

42. See Verdegem (2010) 191–94.

43. Plutarch moves much of Nicias’s argumentation in Thuc. 7.48 to *Nic.* 21.4–6, where Nicias tries to oppose Demosthenes’s suggestion to attack Epipolae. See Marasco (1976) 163, 165, 71; Nikolaidis (1988) 328 with nn. 36–37. This narrative choice illuminates Nicias’s (usual) failure to impress his judgement on others.

44. Cf. Levi (1955) 180; Littman (1970) 218–19; Stadter (1973) 114; Marasco (1976) 164, 171–72; Nikolaidis (1988) 327–28; de Romilly (1988) 31.

45. See Marasco (1976) 169–71; Pelling (1992) 20–21. See also Diod. Sic. 13.12.2, where Nicias’s fear is not stressed.

readers are allowed to “understand and explain,” rather than simply to judge, some of the most morally perplexing actions and decisions of historical agents, and even come to appreciate better some of their strongest qualities.⁴⁶ In that regard one might contrast Plutarch’s image of Herodotus in *On the Malice*, who (according to Plutarch) has so unfairly represented the Persian Wars that he effectively blocks readers’ ability to engage with the psychology and motives of his characters. We might think of Plutarch’s presentation in the essay of Herodotus’s commentary on Themistocles (867b–e; 869c–f; 871c–d) or Artemisia (869f–870a) as (maliciously) simplistic and one-sided.⁴⁷

Plutarch’s process of characterization and historical-ethical interpretation in the *Lives*, unlike that of Herodotus (at least as Plutarch presents it in the essay), is shown to be a multiform, nuanced, and complex one.⁴⁸ In effect, in the *Life of Nicias*, Nicias’s hesitation and fear reflect the decline in the Athenian leader as well as the Athenian city, where Nicias’s nervousness and apprehension can be somehow understood and explained, but not necessarily pardoned.⁴⁹ In the *Life of Alcibiades*, the emphasis on Alcibiades’s great hostility toward Nicias re-enacts for the readers the antagonism between Alcibiades and the other political leaders of the time (*Alc.* 13.1), and invites them to contextualize this set of events against the broader background of Alcibiades’s struggle to prevail in the political scene of fifth-century Athens. A few lines later Plutarch narrates Alcibiades’s duping of the Spartan ambassadors and his supreme control over Nicias (*Alc.* 14.6–12). Plutarch clearly shows both here and elsewhere that Alcibiades’s success over his adversaries should primarily be attributed to his ability to be alert to, read, and exploit the minds of others effectively (*Alc.* 17.1–4)—remember especially his chameleon-like quality (*Alc.* 23.3–5). No wonder, then, that in the case of the Argives Plutarch lavishes so much attention on Alcibiades’s perception (cf. αἰσθανόμενος) of the Argives’ hatred and fear of the Spartans (*Alc.* 14.3), thus sensitizing his readers to a keynote characteristic of Alcibiades.⁵⁰

46. On Plutarch’s moralism as a combination of “understanding,” “reflection,” and “evaluation,” see esp. Pelling (1988a) 11–16; (1988b); (1990b) 224–35; Duff (1999a) 68–70; Pelling (2002a) 321–29.

47. I owe this point to the anonymous reader.

48. Though, as Baragwanath (2008) esp. 61–62 (on Artemisia), 289–322 (on Themistocles) has shown, Herodotus’s presentation defies simplistic interpretations and constructs complex and ambivalent characters as well.

49. See Chrysanthou (2018a) 85–91 with further bibliography cited there.

50. Verdegem (2010) 192 interestingly notes: “No matter whether Plutarch drew upon another source at the beginning of *Alc.* 14.3 or twisted Thucydides’ account himself, he must have consciously deviated from Hist. V 40, because the idea that Alcibiades knew that the Argives wanted

Plutarch's tendency to present negative motives and explanations is not confined to the narrative parts of his biographical book, but is richly manifested in the final comparative epilogues as well.⁵¹ For instance, in the *Synkrisis* to the *Agesilaus–Pompey* book, Plutarch plainly states that “Agesilaus seemed to acquire the kingship [sc. being] blameless neither in the eyes of gods nor men, since he accused Leotyichides of being a bastard, whom his brother accepted as his legitimate son, and since he manipulated the oracle about his lameness” (1.2).⁵² Such a note of blame is out of keeping with the more positive threads that the readers have already heard in the preceding *Life*, as we saw above.⁵³ Similarly, the *synkrisis* to *Dion–Brutus* allows the alternative that the tyrannicide was not a good thing to do (2), although *Brutus* emphasized Brutus's high morals and gave the impression of divine support for Caesar's murder (14.2–3).⁵⁴ Moreover, while in the *synkrisis* to *Demetrius–Antony* Plutarch mentions the reports of many people (cf. πολλοὶ λέγουσι) that Demetrius made false charges against Alexander and killed him (5.4), in the *Life of Demetrius* he suggested that Demetrius was acting in self-defense (36).⁵⁵ Plutarch's emphasis in the *synkrisis* shows considerable discord with the preceding biography. In all of these examples, the more critical readings and interpretations in the *synkrisis* are designed, as Timothy Duff has aptly argued, to draw readers to grapple with the incongruities, weigh up conflicting strands, and re-evaluate their earlier moral verdicts, thus allowing them to reach a fuller understanding of an individual's character and morality.⁵⁶

Plutarch's staging and deployment of alternatives work effectively to this end too,⁵⁷ for they are shown to be designed not to “deceive,” as Plutarch thinks in the essay of Herodotus's use of variants.⁵⁸ In the *Life of Lucullus* Plutarch gives

to break away from Sparta was crucial to his story if he did not want it to create the impression that his protagonist's quick decision to send a secret embassy to Argos was a desperate gamble.”

51. See Duff (1999a) 257–62; (2011) 74–75. Cf. Van der Valk (1982) 310.

52. Trans. Trego (2014) 57.

53. See Trego (2014) 57–58, discussing also *Ages.-Pomp.* 2.1. Cf. Duff (1999a) 276 on the more critical tone of the *synkrisis* to *Agesilaus–Pompey* compared to the preceding biographies.

54. Cf. Pelling (1997) 243; Duff (1999a) 284.

55. Pelling (1988a) 20; Duff (1999a) 280.

56. Cf. Duff (1999a) 249–86; (2011) esp. 74–75. Cf. Trego (2014) 58–59 on the *synkrisis* to *Agesilaus–Pompey*.

57. On Plutarch's use of alternatives to encourage an active reader-response, see Duff (2011) 68–75; Mossman (2018) 499–502; Chrysanthou (2018a) 120–23, 133–35.

58. One might be reminded, for instance, of Herodotus's inconsistent picture of the Alcmaeonids, which, if we follow Plutarch's remarks in the essay (cf. 858c; 862c–863b), appears to be a matter of praise-and-blame rhetoric rather than suggesting alternative potential readings of exploratory character. See Baragwanath (2008) 27–34 who argues that Herodotus's Alcmaeonid excursus is

two explanations for Lucullus's withdrawal from politics: "either he saw that it [i.e., politics] was already beyond proper control and diseased, or, as some say (ὡς φασιν ἔνιοι), he had his fill of glory, and felt that the unfortunate issue of his many struggles and toils entitled him to fall back upon a life of ease and luxury" (38.2).⁵⁹ In a similar vein, in the *Life of Pericles* Plutarch offers his readers a variety of alternative explanations for Pericles's decision not to revoke the Megarian decree: (1) "Some say (οἱ μὲν . . . φασίν) that he persisted in his refusal in a lofty spirit and with a clear perception of the best interests of the city, regarding the injunction laid upon it as a test of its submissiveness, and its compliance as a confession of weakness" (31.1); (2) others (οἱ δέ) say that he condemned the Spartans out of arrogance and a love of victory in order to display his power (31.1); (3) the worst charge of all (ἡ δὲ χειρίστη μὲν αἰτία πασῶν), but the one which has the most witnesses (ἔχουσα δὲ πλείστους μάρτυρας), as Plutarch says, was that Pericles and his friends were under attack, Pericles feared a trial and so turned to war in order to restore his authority (31.2–32.6).

Plutarch suggests in *On the Malice of Herodotus* that, when the events or the cause and intention of an action are not clear, then the more creditable version and explanation should be preferred (855e–f). In the example from *Lucullus*, the first explanation, though not necessarily morally superior to the second—Plutarch's ideal statesman is one who should feel the need to get involved and do something about an uncontrolled political situation (cf. *Praec. Ger.* 823e–825f)—is still blander, for it invites the reader not simply to judge Lucullus but also to try to understand and explain his retirement as deriving from the turbulent circumstances in which Lucullus lived.⁶⁰ As for the second explanation, it is true that Plutarch mitigates its negative tenor by citing (in the next lines) the praise of those who commended Lucullus for being unlike Marius (and others)—that is, leaders whose insatiate desire for glory and power had terrible consequences (38.3–4). This narrative balancing stands as an example of the practice of mixing blame with praise which Plutarch disapproves of in the essay. It is also possible that Plutarch keeps some distance from this alternative by attributing it to those unidentified "others" (cf. 38.2: ὡς φασιν ἔνιοι).⁶¹ But contrary to his warning in *On the Malice of Herodotus*, he still includes it.

designed to draw readers to observe and reflect on several inconsistencies and thus acquire an enhanced historical understanding.

59. Cf. *Pomp.* 48.7 and *Cat. Mai.* 24.11 where it is old age that presses Lucullus to retire.

60. On this point, see Chrysanthou (2018a) 91–93.

61. See Pauw (1980) 90–91; Stadter (1989) 320–21; Pelling (1992) 11 with 32n4; Duff (1999a) 186n106, although such citations do not (always) suggest "distancing": Cook (2001); Pelling (2007) 159.

The same applies in the case of the unresolved alternatives in *Pericles*. In *On the Malice*, Plutarch ascribes the “worst charge” (i.e., the third alternative) to the comic poets, whom he characterizes as malicious and hostile because “they tend towards the less creditable explanation” (855f–856a). Admittedly, Plutarch labels the last charge “the worst,” though he devotes far more text space to it and mentions that it has the greatest number of witnesses, but leaves the question of Pericles’s motivation open to different interpretations: “the truth is unclear” (τὸ δ’ ἀληθὲς ἄδηλον, 32.6).

Rather than being a mark of malice, however, as Plutarch thinks in *On the Malice of Herodotus*, these unsettled alternatives are highly effective in their capacity to engage readers further, helping them to reach a more profound view of Pericles’s and Lucullus’s motives and thus a more profound moral evaluation of their characters. Plutarch presents a variety of possible intentions and invites his readers to notice and examine a range of possibilities as to what was motivating Pericles or Lucullus at the time. It is true that Plutarch sends out signals about which alternative is likely to win,⁶² while at the same time the wider narrative agendas of *Pericles* and *Lucullus* have given a clear guide as to which explanation is less likely to be true. But still, there can be great value in Plutarch’s restraint from expressing explicitly his own opinion and thus making the moral verdict the readers’ own work, for the process of judging turns out to be more engaging and “philosophical” for them.⁶³ To use Plutarch’s own words from his essay *On the Principle of Cold*: “It is more philosophical (φιλοσοφώτερον) to suspend judgement when the truth is obscure than to take sides” (955c).⁶⁴

Sometimes, however, a straightforward authorial resolution is present, and Plutarch explicitly expresses his opinion, especially about his sources. In the *Life of Antony*, Plutarch reports the charges of Calvisius against Antony’s behavior toward Cleopatra (58.9–11), but he plainly states that “most of these charges . . . were thought to be falsehoods” (59.1). In the *Life of Lycurgus*, he refers to the accusation of disobedience made against Sparta (30.3), but he goes on to prove the opposite (30.4–7). In the *Life of Demosthenes*, he similarly rejects Theopompus’s charge that Demosthenes was unstable in his character and policy (13). Moreover, in *Alcibiades*, he refuses Antiphon’s accusations of Alcibiades

62. Cf. Duff (2011) 66–67, 71, discussing examples of onlookers’ conflicting reactions to a character in the *Lives*.

63. See Duff (2011) 71: “Divergent focalisation tends to have the effect of exposing the reader to different perspectives, even if one is obviously to be preferred.”

64. See Stadter (1989) 305; Chrysanthou (2018a) 165.

(3), while in *Pericles* he disqualifies the sharp thrusts that Ion (5.3), Idomeneus (10.7), the comic poets, Stesimbrotus of Thasus (13.15–16), and Duris of Samos (28.2–3) make at Pericles.

This practice of Plutarch in the *Lives* leads to a much larger question: since in *On the Malice of Herodotus* Plutarch criticizes harshly those who mention a slanderous report and then withdraw it (856c), why does he include in the biographies such blunt criticisms that he neither believes nor accepts?

This technique of Plutarch, I argue, is highly effective in keeping before the eyes of his readers a complex skein of opposing judgements that engage them further in their individual act of judging characters ethically. Plutarch often explicitly invites the reader's active participation through first-person plurals (*Per.* 5.3: "let *us* leave [ἐὼμεν] Ion's claim"), questions, and imagined "anonymous interlocutors" (*Per.* 10.7: "how could *one* trust Idomeneus [πῶς ἂν οὖν τις Ἰδομενεῖ . . . πιστεῦσαι?]), or even through his adoption of a pose of diffidence: "But *perhaps* (ἴσως) it is not worthy to give credit to these (i.e., Antiphon's accusations)" (*Alc.* 3.2)—we may be reminded here of Plutarch's use of *δοκῶ* in *Ant.* 19.4.

Thus, although Plutarch's guidance of his readers toward a positive reading of his characters is quite clear, he still appears to raise questions to them and offer alternative lines of thinking which provoke the reader's further careful inquiry. The acknowledgement of and alertness to contrary verdicts, including those with which Plutarch explicitly disagrees, work to "broaden the moral perspective of the reader"⁶⁵ and train their capacity for judging. Plutarch sensitizes his readers and accustoms them to be sensitive to different and wholly contrasting moral strands, which themselves reflect the complexities and subtleties inherent in the process of moral evaluation.⁶⁶

We might contrast Herodotus's use of negative explanations, behind which he does not stand, which appears to be (according to Plutarch in the essay) less sophisticated. Consider, for example, Plutarch's criticism of Herodotus's treatment of the story about the flight of the Corinthian admiral at Salamis (870b–d). Herodotus, according to Plutarch, cites both the Athenians' charge of treachery or desertion against the Corinthians and the Corinthians' rejection of it. "The result for him," as Plutarch says, "is that the Athenians are discredited if the charge is disbelieved, the Corinthians if it is believed" (870d). Herodotus's narrative technique (as Plutarch perceives) does not have any bearing on the readers' interpretation and evaluation of historical events and personalities, besides

65. Duff (2011) 67.

66. See Duff (2011) 66–67, 71–72, 79.

denigrating and maligning historical agents.⁶⁷ Unlike Plutarch's own technique in the *Lives*, Herodotus's does not (by Plutarchan standards) set up or allow a reading dynamic that engages the audience in active inquiry or engender their questioning.

Plutarch's "rejected criticism" in the *Lives* might also serve to offer readers an example of how to be alert to opposing threads as well as how to be critical of the counter-perspectives of different people and across different periods. In *Aristides*, for example, Plutarch rejects Craterus, for he "furnished no documentary proof, no judgement of the court, no decree of indictment, although he is wont to record such things with all due fullness, and to adduce his authorities" (*Arist.* 26.4). In *Alcibiades*, Plutarch is scrupulous to warn that Antiphon's accusations should possibly be disbelieved, for they come from a man who "admits that he hated Alcibiades, and abused him accordingly" (*Alc.* 3.2). Plutarch's circumspection in this case establishes his own authority as narrator who has already exercised such fair-minded criticism, and who can now provide his readers with a model of interpretative methodology, to be used especially when they are presented with the carping or mean-spirited criticism of others. Hence readers are invited to listen to others' judgements, but they should also be ready to examine them carefully and skeptically for themselves.

Particularly notable is when this carping or mean-spirited criticism re-creates the atmosphere of the time, such as in the case of Calvisius in *Antony*, Theopompus in *Demosthenes*, Antiphon in *Alcibiades*, or Ion, the comic poets, and Stesimbrotus of Thasus in *Pericles*. A rejected criticism may serve to illuminate the dispute that a figure such as Alcibiades causes,⁶⁸ while at the same time it can draw attention to a particular flaw of a character—Calvisius's charges point to Antony's total submission to Cleopatra—and its contemporary resonances. A denied possibility might also provoke a counter-suggestion by inviting readers to think differently about an individual's character and moral stature. This can be done explicitly as in the *Life of Demosthenes*: Plutarch cites Theopompus's charge about Demosthenes's political instability, but directly afterwards rejects it in order to focus readers' attention on Demosthenes's steadfast resolution

67. Cf. also Plutarch's criticism of Herodotus's picture of the Alcmaeonids (862c–863b), esp. 863a: "This is what you are doing: you make a charge, and then you speak in their defense; you spread slanders against distinguished men which you subsequently withdraw . . . Yes, when you defend the Alcmaeonids you reveal yourself as a malicious accuser." However, see Baragwanath (2008) 27–34 on Herodotus's multiform, ambiguous, and exploratory presentation.

68. Cf. Duff (2011) 71–72. On Alcibiades's multifarious character and the contradictory responses he provokes, see Pelling (1996) xlii–xliv, lvi–lvii; Duff (1999a) 205–40; Gribble (1999) 267–82; Beck (2000) 26–29; Verdegem (2010) 419–22.

(*Dem.* 13),⁶⁹ or more implicitly as in the *Life of Pericles*, where the negative judgements of contemporaries illuminate the real antagonism and attacks that a man like Pericles has to handle, and thus serve to augment the effectiveness of his policy and render his achievement of dealing with such malign criticism all the more marvelous.⁷⁰ In any case, Plutarch accustoms his readers to the likelihood that an initially harsh judgement may be deflected or reversed, balanced or even outweighed by more positive things that may be still *sub iudice*, and that moral judgement may not be so easily reducible to a black-and-white pattern. This is an aspect of Plutarch's wider practice of mixing blame with praise, which Plutarch again rejects in *On the Malice of Herodotus* (856c–d).⁷¹

Conclusion: The *Lives* and *On the Malice*

The foregoing discussion has shown that Plutarch's narrative techniques in his biographies often prove to be vulnerable to the criticisms that Plutarch makes of Herodotus in the essay.⁷² Yet rather than being a sign of malice and devi-

69. See e.g. *Dem.* 13.1–2: “So I do not know how it occurred to Theopompus to say that Demosthenes was unstable in his character and unable to remain true for any length of time to the same policies or the same men. For it is apparent that after he had at the outset adopted a party and a line of policy in the conduct of the city's affairs, he maintained this to the end.”

70. This is a crucial theme of *Pericles*, already stressed in the prologue to *Pericles–Fabius* (*Per.* 2.5): “The men were alike in their virtues, and more especially in their gentleness and rectitude, and by their ability to endure the follies of their peoples and of their colleagues in office, they proved of the greatest service to their countries.” See Stadter (1975) 84–85; (1987) 260, 267; (1989) xliii; Xenophon (2012) 616–21; Chrysanthou (2018a) 95–100.

71. Contrast, however, his argument in the *Prae. ger. reip.* 810c: “For blame which is mingled with praise (ὁ γὰρ μεμιγμένος ἐπαίνῳ ψόγος) and contains nothing insulting but merely frankness of speech, and arouses not anger but a pricking of the conscience and repentance, appears both kindly and healing; but abusive speech is not at all fitting for statesmen.”

72. To be more precise, in this article I did not deal (at least explicitly) with the sign of malicious writing n. 6 (as noted in the “Introduction”), which refers to the ascription of one's success to luck or money rather than to valor or intelligence (856b–c). First, this sign builds on and easily results from the previous one, which concerns a writer's preference for, or even invention of, less favorable explanations, causes and intentions (855f–856b), which has been examined in some detail. As Marincola (2015b) 89 puts it, this principle like the previous one “has to do with the denial of greatness, not now concerning the deeds themselves—Plutarch is assuming that (as before) the deeds cannot be denied—but rather the attendant circumstances.” Second, fortune, in particular, is a complicated issue in Plutarch's work and raises many questions about his historical causality and wider religious and philosophical system. On this topic, see e.g., Brenk (1977) 145–183; Swain (1989); Frazier and Leão (2010). Fortune plays a dominant role in many of Plutarch's biographies. See, for example, *Demetrius*, with Pelling (1988a) 24–25. In this *Life*, it is interesting to notice that, although Plutarch often ascribes Demetrius's heroic accomplishments and failures to the workings of fortune (see Pelling [1988a] 24), he frequently uses references to fortune to call attention to

ousness, as Plutarch argues for Herodotus in *On the Malice*, I have suggested that these techniques are used in the *Lives* in a sophisticated way to invite an active response from the readers toward the biographical narrative and engage them all the more profoundly in their individual process of moral reflection and evaluation. My argument here evokes Emily Baragwanath's reader-response approach to Herodotus's *Histories*, and particularly her analysis of how Plutarch's criticisms in *On the Malice* provide a useful entry into Herodotus's strategies for guiding his reader to deal actively and empathetically with questions of historical causation and for engaging them thoughtfully with difficult historical problems.

However, if we accept that *On the Malice of Herodotus* emphasizes narrative methods that are in fact shared by both Herodotus and Plutarch, should we consider that Plutarch is such a naïve and ingenuous author as to indulge, at the mercy of his nationalism, in such a polemical (mis-)reading of Herodotus's text?⁷³ And, crucially, shall we admit (à la Baragwanath) that "Plutarch failed to comprehend the impulse behind some of Herodotus's narrative strategies?"⁷⁴ Such claims, I believe, not only seem to be out of step with Plutarch's appreciation of Herodotus's *Histories* elsewhere in his work,⁷⁵ and with the *persona* of sympathy and moderation that Plutarch mostly displays in his corpus of writings;⁷⁶ they also risk overlooking the subtlety and sophistication of Plu-

praiseworthy aspects of Demetrius's character and leadership (cf. 8.5, 19.4). Cf. similar concerns in the *Life of Alexander* (20.7, 26.14, 58.1–2). The question of the relationship between Alexander's fortune and virtue is most fully explored in Plutarch's treatise *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander*, on which see e.g., Wardman (1955); Hamilton (1969) xxxv–xxxix; Whitmarsh (2002) 179–80. I intend to explore the different ways in which Plutarch uses fortune in the *Lives* as an avenue of reflection on his subjects' character and morality in a separate study.

73. See, for example, Teodorsson (1997) 440; Dognini (2007) 482. I owe these references to Roskam (2017) 167n34. Roskam (2017) 169 notes that "throughout *On the Malice of Herodotus*, Plutarch is, quite systematically, concerned with Herodotus's bad character; the patriotic or Panhellenic agenda is secondary at best." On Plutarch's Panhellenic agenda, see also *De glor. Ath.* 350a–b.

74. Baragwanath (2008) 34.

75. See Pelling (2007) 155–62: "So in Plutarch we have a spectrum of different attitudes to Herodotus, a very negative one in *Malice*, a more measured and more selectively critical one in the *Life* [sc. of *Themistocles*], a very positive one in the Epicurus essay" (162). On Plutarch's different approaches to Herodotus in the *Lives* and the *Moralia*, see also Theander (1951) 45–48; Lachenaud (1981) 118–20; Magallón García and Ramón Palerm (1989) 11; Hershbell (1993); Inglese (2003) 225n13; Dognini (2007) 481–82, 495–502; Candau Morón (2013) 278. Other examples of Plutarch's habit of differing his advice or thesis in different works according to the perspective, context, or discourse are mentioned in van Hoof (2010) 30.

76. See Duff (1999a) 59: "Humanity is a virtue which recurs in the heroes of the *Lives* themselves and which . . . is an important part of Plutarch's own *persona*." See also Beck (2000) 22–32. On philanthropy in Plutarch, see Hirzel (1912) 23–32; Martin (1961); Frazier (1996) 233–36;

tarch's own narrative technique in the *Lives* as well as in *On the Malice of Herodotus* itself.

As I recently argued, in *On the Malice of Herodotus* Plutarch works within the agonistic rhetorical framework of the essay, making an extreme and one-sided case against Herodotus and inviting his readers to become capable and perspicacious judges.⁷⁷ Such an interpretation not only conforms to the “judicial setting” of the work, as thoroughly discussed by William Seavey,⁷⁸ but is further fostered and corroborated by the active reader-response which Plutarch encourages in *On the Malice*. Plutarch, in fact, invites his readers directly to look at the malice of Herodotus—“notice (ὄρα) how [sc. Herodotus] maltreated Othryadas” (858c); “listen (ἄκουσον) to his [i.e., Herodotus's] persuasive explanation” (871f)—and he often uses several narrative means, such as questions (e.g., 857c, 858b, 865d, 866d, 868d), anonymous interlocutors (863d–e, 864b, 866c), counter-suggestions (857c, 857f, 859c, 864e, 872b), and first-person plurals (e.g., 870a, 874c), which are highly effective in their capacity to keep the readers engaged.

Duff has appositely suggested that Plutarch envisions an active and critical reading experience in both the biographies and in some works of the *Moralia*,

Duff (1999a) 77–78; Ferreira (2005); Teodorsson (2007); Van Hoof (2007); Ferreira et al. (2009); Roskam (2014) 520–21.

77. See Chrysanthou (2018a) 168–70.

78. See, for example, the use of legal technical language (863a); the addresses to witnesses (860c, 861c); the employment of *eikos*-arguments (870d, 871a, 873d); the direct apostrophes to Herodotus (861f, 862f–863a, 873b). See Seavey (1991). Cf. Ragogna (2002) 28–29. On the genre and narrative style of *On the Malice*, see Russell (1973) 60, who argues that it is “a kind of scholarly *controversia*.” Bowen (1992) 4 acknowledges that “a semi-forensic air” exists in the whole work. Ramón Palerm (2000) discusses the rhetorical aspect of the essay and relates it to *psogos*. Cf. Ramón Palerm (1997) 416, 421; Muccioli (2012) 66 with n. 226. Marincola (1994) esp. 194–200 stresses that rhetorical criticism is appropriate in historiographical polemic—cf. Homeyer (1967) 187; Hershbell (1993) 158–59—and argues that *On the Malice of Herodotus* is a historiographical and ethical essay (192–193). See also Grimaldi (2004) 9–11; Marincola (2015b) 89–90. Cf. Candau Morón (2013) 286–92, suggesting that “il *De Herodoti malignitate* presenta elementi propri della diatribe” (286). Roskam (2017) 161–73 suggests that in *On the Malice*, “Plutarch's principal aim is an ethical one, and his basic argument is rooted in his moral and pedagogical approach towards literature” (172). Most recently, Marincola (2018) 19–35 offers an analysis of some of the techniques used by Plutarch in *On the Malice* to refute Herodotus. Marincola (2018) 21 comments on the genre of *On the Malice*: “More than one thinks of it as merely a rhetorical display piece, not to be taken seriously, or maybe only as seriously as the disquisitions on Alexander's or Rome's fortune. Not all of the argumentation of the work is equally persuasive, to be sure, but at its best it is fairly sophisticated and shows an impressive command of rhetorical technique and knowledge of the Persian-Wars tradition.”

which is consistent with “ancient pedagogical methods and reading practices.”⁷⁹ Plutarch, as Duff has clearly shown, used several “unresolved questions in the *Lives* or their *synkrisis*,”⁸⁰ and wrote essays, such as *Which Are Cleverer: Land Animals or Sea Animals?*, *On the Fortune or Virtue of Alexander*, or even *Were the Athenians More Glorious in War or in Wisdom?*, where he deliberately presents his readers with opposing, and often extreme, arguments and viewpoints in order to raise questions and prompt reflection.⁸¹ “The position of the reader,” as Duff puts it, “is . . . as a judge of the arguments presented: not passive, but actively engaging with and weighing the arguments.”⁸²

Presumably, the readers of *On the Malice of Herodotus* come to the essay with their own independent experience and knowledge of Herodotus’s text; moreover, it is highly possible that they are already acquainted with (some of) the rest of Plutarch’s literary works as well. They may know, for example, of Plutarch’s humanity toward Herodotus elsewhere (in the *Lives* or the Epicurus essay).⁸³ Thus Plutarch’s unusual insulting style and subsequent distortions,⁸⁴ as well as his tendentious interpretations of Herodotus’s *Histories* in the essay, may surprise and unsettle readers and prompt them to reconsider and re-evaluate the arguments presented about Herodotus’s character and narrative method. They may, accordingly, well wonder about whether and how far they have been deceived (cf. 854e) and beguiled (cf. 874b) by the charm and grace of the *Histories*.

With these considerations in mind, Plutarch works in *On the Malice of Herodotus* in much the same way that he works in his other essays (mentioned earlier and analyzed by Duff), and to the same effects. He expresses an extreme, surprising, and one-sided thesis, offering his reader the role of a judge who listens to the criticisms expressed but is not necessarily ready to accept them *tout court*. Rather, just as in the *Lives*, the reader is primed to reflect perspicaciously on them through their individual (re-)engagement with and interrogation of Herodotus’s *Histories*.

79. See Duff (2011) 77–82. The citation is from p. 77.

80. Duff (2011) 79.

81. Duff (2011) 78–80. Cf. Duff (1999a) 245–48.

82. Duff (2011) 79.

83. See *Non Posse* 1093b–c. On the chronology of the Epicurus essay and *On the Malice of Herodotus*, see Pelling (2007) 157n41 with a detailed bibliography cited there: “*Malice* probably belongs to the period when the *Lives* were being composed . . . i.e. over a substantial period after 96 . . . not long before his death. The Epicurus essay seems to belong closely with *Against Colotes* (cf. 1086 C–D), and that work can very tentatively be dated to around 98–9 . . . But none of this is altogether secure.”

84. See Boake (1975) 256, 270, 290–91, 327–28n125, 333–34n142, 334–35n147, 335–336n149; Ragogna (2002) 33–37; Inglese (2003) 228 talks about “una ‘sleale’ manipolazione del racconto erodoteo.”

The way in which Plutarch, in both the *Lives* and *On the Malice*, provokes his readers to work actively with and interrogate his text advances significantly our understanding of Plutarch's self-projection as narrator and interpreter of the historical past. Plutarch presents himself as an authoritative figure who appears to have the right moral and intellectual framework in his study of history, and who can now provide his readers with a model of interpretative methodology of how to work critically themselves with unreliable or malicious criticism. In the *Lives*, this has been especially so, as noted above, in the criticism of contrary or contradictory sources. Concomitantly, it has been suggested that in the biographies Plutarch often expresses a kind of precariousness and diffidence about his work. This kind of narratorial "uncertainty"—whether genuine or not—has the effect of winning over the indulgence and confidence of his readers because it builds a particular sort of authority in Plutarch: the authority of a moralist and interpreter of history who is not imposing and heavy-handed. Rather, Plutarch appears to know and reveal the difficulties in the process of reading and evaluating history; and to share his readers' anxieties and acknowledge that they are right to be puzzled and be on their guard rather than following the arguments presented uncritically.

This understanding of Plutarch's self-positioning in the *Lives* concurs with the observation made by Kirkland about Plutarch's projected posture at the outset of *On the Malice*. There, as Kirkland notices, Plutarch expresses, alongside his theory on malicious history-writing, his intention to defend his ancestors and the truth by showing Herodotus's dishonest and defamatory presentation of the Greeks' victory in the Persian Wars (854f). "Suspicion of Herodotus' bad character," as Kirkland stresses, "encourages and may even require a concomitant trust in Plutarch's virtuous behavior and privileged authority as critic. Plutarch must strike a careful balance, lest he look overly vituperative."⁸⁵

The balance, in fact, between Plutarch's authoritative presence and encouragement of the readers' active involvement in both the *Lives* and *On the Malice* ties in well with what Plutarch does elsewhere in his literary *oeuvre*.⁸⁶ Scholars have

85. Kirkland (2019) 480.

86. On this aspect of Plutarch's self-projection in the *Lives*, see also the good remarks in Duff (2011): "In other cases, opposing reactions are given, though often with a strong hint at which should carry more weight" (66). "In those earlier examples the reader seems to have been expected to share the judgements of such onlookers or, where divergent reactions are presented, is given a strong push as to whom they should side with—though, as we noted, even there, divergent focalisation tends to have the effect of exposing the reader to different perspectives, even if one is obviously to be preferred" (71). "This provides a good indication of the purpose of the unresolved questions in the *Lives* or their synkrisis: the reader's moral sensibilities are deepened by being exposed to conflicting viewpoints and drawn into the work of assessing or resolving them. But the broader context of moral thought is never in doubt" (79).

recently done an excellent job on the self-image Plutarch projects in the *Moralia* and the relationship he negotiates and establishes with his intended readership. Lieve van Hoof has closely examined Plutarch's writings of practical ethics,⁸⁷ and beautifully shown that Plutarch creates an image of himself "as the exclusive gatekeeper of philosophical insight" and "also accords himself the role of the unchallengeable exemplar," though van Hoof stresses that "the result is a tone not so much of lecturing as of pursuing a road together" with his readers, even if "Plutarch is clearly one step ahead of" them: "he shows a remarkable understanding of the problems which his readers may face but depicts himself as dealing with those problems in an exemplary way."⁸⁸ Van Hoof has also illuminated a number of discursive strategies and rhetorical devices that Plutarch develops and employs in his works of practical ethics in order to guide his readers toward adopting a philosophical manner of understanding, judging, and acting in society.⁸⁹

A similar move is also noticed by Jason König in Plutarch's *Table Talk*. There, as König argues, Plutarch, though at times seeming self-effacing, has a prominent role and serves as a model for others.⁹⁰ Plutarch's text (according to König) engages the readers actively and draws them in to respond for themselves "to the puzzles under discussion . . . and from there to cultivate the inquiring habits of mind which are the key to a philosophical understanding of the world."⁹¹ König interestingly associates Plutarch's *Table Talk* with Plutarch's treatise *On Listening* where weight is accorded to the importance of a style of "listening which is obedient and attentive, but also selective and skeptical, rather than passive and unreflective."⁹²

In conclusion, then, it is arguable that just as Plutarch elsewhere in his literary *oeuvre* acknowledges the dangers lying in the process of hearing a lecture or participating in a symposium, or even living (in general) a good social and political life, so in *On the Malice* and the *Lives* he does not forego the opportunity to alert his readers to the dangers lurking in the writing and reading

87. See van Hoof (2010) 257–58 for a list of the texts within the *Moralia* included in this category.

88. Van Hoof (2010) 75–76. See, more generally, van Hoof (2010) 66–80 on Plutarch's self-disclosure in the works of practical ethics.

89. See van Hoof (2010) esp. 41–65.

90. König (2012) 60–89. Cf. Klotz (2007) on Plutarch's exemplary self-representation in the *Table Talk* and the exploratory character of the work. On Plutarch's projection of himself as a role model for his reader in the *Lives*, see also the prologue to the *Aemilius–Timoleon* book (*Aem.* 1), with Duff (1999a) 30–34; and the prologue to the *Demosthenes–Cicero* book (*Dem.* 1–3), with Chrysanthou (2018b).

91. König (2012) 70.

92. König (2012) 60–61 (the citation is from p. 60).

of history; and just as elsewhere he advises and encourages through several rhetorical devices the ideal listener of a lecture or a guest at a banquet, or even the ideal advisee of a topic on practical ethics, to work together with him (or other participants) in an atmosphere of mutual respect and communality, and at the same time to adopt an active, exploratory and philosophically inspired attitude toward the problems and arguments under scrutiny, so in the *Lives* and *On the Malice* Plutarch employs, and trains his ideal reader of history to employ techniques which engender further questioning, examination, and discussion of the issues and paradoxes involved in history. This does not mean (as noticed throughout our discussion) that Plutarch's text promotes an approach to the past that allows a limitless freedom of readerly interpretation; but it does open up and problematize different interpretative possibilities that lead to a deeper understanding of historical and ethical meanings.

As such, therefore, Plutarch's way of writing, reading, and evaluating history tallies with his wider intellectual and philosophical concerns elsewhere in his literary *oeuvre*.⁹³ History and history-writing (whether in biographical form or not) are shown to be for Plutarch another means (like the sympotic conversation or a philosophical lecture) of familiarizing his readers with the nature of autonomous, philosophically imbued attitude which he envisions within all fields of intellectual inquiry. This might well be the aspect, in Plutarch's estimation, which Herodotus's historiography falls short of. But that is another story.⁹⁴

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93. Van Hoof (2010) 12, 46, 64–65, 75–76n30, 256–57 underlines that despite the differences in methodology, both Plutarch's *Lives* and writings of practical ethics show a similar kind of challenging moralism. Significantly, Duff (2011) 81–82 draws a connection between Plutarch's essay *How the young man should listen to poems* and the *Lives*: the former, so Duff notices, “ends with the claim that the young man needs to be taught to read poetry critically ‘in order that, having gained a preliminary education . . . he may be conveyed by poetry to philosophy . . .’ (37B). In the *Lives*, Plutarch expects more mature readers who, by applying their critical faculties, are able to read history philosophically, that is, to see in the *Lives* of the great men of the past a stimulus to their own critical reflection. As Plutarch once puts it in another context, they are to use ‘history as material for philosophy’ [sc. *De def. or.* 410B].” On Plutarch as a critical reader of poetry, see *De aud. poet.* 16d–28d with Konstan (2004); Konstan (2006) 10; Duff (2011) 80–82. On Plutarch's ideal reader in the *De aud. poet.*, see also Brandão (2002); Saïd (2005) 160–61; Xenophontos (2016) 89, also drawing some links with the critical reader of Plutarch's *De aud. poet.*

94. I am grateful to Prof. Timothy Duff for his useful comments on an earlier version of this article. I also wish to thank the anonymous readers of the journal for their extremely useful comments and suggestions, and the German Research Foundation (DFG) for supporting my research.

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