

LAUGHTER IN PLUTARCH'S *LIVES**

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ABSTRACT · This article examines the literary use and significance of laughter in Plutarch's biographies. It focuses on a number of examples from Plutarch's *Lives* where the protagonists, or other secondary characters, or even groups of people appear to laugh in a derisory and mocking manner. This sort of laughter, as I argue, can point to the superior character traits and/or moral status of the laugher; or it can signal the faulty state of mind and inadequacies of character of the persons who laugh or those who are being laughed at. In that case laughter is ominous and prepares the reader for an upcoming disaster. This function of laughter in Plutarch's *Lives* is aligned with Herodotus' use of laughter in the *Histories*.

KEYWORDS: Laughter, Plutarch's *Lives*, Characterisation, Moralism.

[Demosthenes] made his escape from arms and mercenaries, and laughed to scorn (cf. *καταγελάσας*) the cruelty of Antipater.

(*Comp. Dem.-Cic.*, 5, 2)¹

These men's laughter (*γέλως*) has cost the city many a tear.

(*Phoc.*, 5, 2)

They are laughing with sardonic laughter (*Σαρδόνιον γέλωτα γελῶσιν*), and are not aware (*οὐ γιγνώσκοντες*) of the great darkness that enveloped them in consequence of his public measures.

(*CG*, 33, 8)

THIS article examines the literary use and significance of laughter in Plutarch's biographies. It argues that laughter becomes a part of Plutarch's characterising and moralising strategy: it is an index of the mental and emotional attitudes,

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¹ For the text of Plutarch's *Lives* I have consulted the Teubner editions of KONRAT ZIEGLER, *Plutarchus. Vitae Parallelae*, Leipzig, Teubner, 1957-1973; revised edition by Hans Gärtner, 1994-2002. For the text of Plutarch's *Moralia* I follow the Loeb Classical Library editions (by various scholars, 1925-1978). The translations of Plutarch's texts are based on or adopted from those of the Loeb Classical Library editions, unless I note otherwise.

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and thus of the character of historical agents; and it functions as a powerful vehicle of reflection on the moral lessons of the *Lives*.

In the *Moralia* concerns about the role of laughter are placed within Plutarch's discussion of the proper use of jests and teasing. In the *Praecepta gerendae reipublicae* Plutarch acknowledges that joke and ridicule can be proper parts of the speech of the statesman, if they are used not for insult or buffoonery, but for «needful reproof and disparagement» (803B-C). He accepts one's employment of the laughable in self-defence, but warns that jesting should be kept under control, for it can go too far and offend an audience (803C-E). In the *De adulatore et amico*, he similarly stresses, with reference to the comic poets, that «the mixture of the laughable and scurrility» makes frankness useless and ineffective; it leaves for those who use it «a name of malice and coarseness», and has no profit for one's hearers (68C).¹ Plutarch suggests that «jest and laughter may well enough be employed on other occasions with friends, but frankness of speech ought to have seriousness and character» (68C). In the *Quaestiones Convivales*, moreover, Plutarch ascribes to the exemplary symposiarch the ideal blending of seriousness and playfulness (620D; 621D), and strongly rejects jesting and teasing, which are offending and malicious (631C-F). Rather, he puts forth some valuable suggestions, namely that «men practise philosophy [...] when they jest [...] and even [...] when they are the butt of jokes and when they make fun of others» (613F); that «true philosophers with their jokes and laughter somehow arouse men who are not altogether invulnerable and make them attentive» (614A); that the king of a drinking party should reward the man «who introduces [...] a laughter that is the companion not of ridicule and insolence, but of goodwill and friendliness» (622A-B); and that «laughter serves for many useful purposes», and «seriousness can be pleasant» (621D).

A similar emphasis on the ambivalent character of jesting or joking is found in the *Lives* too. Amusement (παιδιὰ) and/or jest (σκῶμμα) are often associated with earnestness,² usefulness,³ pleasure,⁴ restraint,⁵ grace and philosophy;⁶ but they are also linked with insolence⁷ mockery and/or impropriety,⁸ buffoonery,⁹ and shamefulness.¹⁰ It is beyond the scope of this study to offer any detailed discussion of the presence and function of teasing or joking in the *Lives*,¹¹ but this brief overview suffices to show that in his biographical work, as in the *Moralia*, Plutarch acknowledges that witticism can oscillate between seriousness and playfulness, pleasure and pain, and friendship and hostility.

¹ Cf. the comments on Aristophanes, found in the probably pseudo-Plutarchan *Comparationis Aristophanis et Menandri epitome* 854D: Aristophanes is blamed for «the laughable» (τὸ γελοῖον) in his poetry, which «is not playful (οὐ παιγιώδης) but ridiculous (ἀλλὰ καταγέλαστον)».

² *Aem.*, 28, 8; *Pel.*, 19, 1; *Luc.*, 1, 7.

⁴ *Dio*, 17, 3; *Lyc.*, 12, 6-7; cf. *Ant.*, 43, 5; *Brut.*, 29, 2-3; *Cat. Ma.*, 7, 1.

⁶ *Brut.*, 34, 8.

⁸ *Cic.*, 27, 1; 38, 2-3; *Comp. Dem.-Cic.*, 1, 4-5; *Lyc.*, 19, 4.

¹⁰ *Dio*, 7, 4.

³ *Agis-Cleom.*, 33, 5.

⁵ *Sert.*, 26, 7.

⁷ *Brut.*, 45, 6.

⁹ *Cat. Mi.*, 51, 3; *Sull.*, 13, 1.

¹¹ This is a vast topic, which I plan to investigate in a separate study.

As regards laughter, it is notable that in the *Lives* laughter is often *not* benign and pleasurable. Looking at the several hundred instances of laughter in Plutarch's biographies (including all *gel-* terms and different forms of *καχάζω*), I have been able to identify only a very few occurrences where laughter is pleasant or harmless, and indicates happiness or relaxation. This kind of laughter allows a playful glimpse at the subjects of Plutarch's *Lives* and often expresses, establishes, or enhances mutuality and co-operative activity between people.¹

The greater part of Plutarch's mentions of laughter in the *Lives*, on the contrary, connote disdain and a feeling of superiority, which stems from the antagonistic stance that laughers assume towards other people. This sort of laughter, which Stephen Halliwell calls 'consequential' (in contrast to 'playful laughter'),² is hostile, derisive or demeaning, and on the basis of its function in Plutarch's *Lives* it can be divided into three different types: (i) laughter which is indicative of the laugher's superior qualities; (ii) laughter which casts an individual as a laughing-stock and calls attention to his inadequacies of character; and (iii) laughter which reflects the thoughtless confidence and ignorance of the individual who laughs. Some of Plutarch's depictions of laughter inevitably fall into more than one category – laughter can signal, for example, both the virtue of the laugher and the flaws of the laughing stock; but still the taxonomy presented here is helpful in sensitising us to those multiple possible workings of laughter within Plutarch's biographical writing.³

¹ See *Pyrrh.*, 3, 3; 6, 9; 8, 12; 14, 12; *Alex.*, 29, 6; 39, 2; 39, 5; *Caes.*, 61, 2; *Cat.Mi.*, 13; *Pomp.*, 40, 5; *Demetr.*, 19, 6; *Brut.*, 15, 3; *Alc.*, 5, 1; 9, 2; *Agis-Cleom.*, 43, 5; *Arat.*, 18, 7; 43, 9; *Art.*, 26, 8; *Nic.*, 7, 7. There are also some other occurrences of laughter, which lean towards being pleasing and less aggressive, but it seems to me that they still involve some kind of less playful teasing or scorn: *Lyc.*, 15, 18; *Sol.*, 6, 6; *Alex.*, 58, 9; *Fab.*, 15, 3-4; *Caes.*, 11, 3; *Sert.*, 16, 8; *Agis-Cleom.*, 25, 5; *Phil.*, 6, 13; *Brut.*, 34, 7; *Arat.*, 50, 6.

² See STEPHEN HALLIWELL, *Greek Laughter: A Study of Cultural Psychology from Homer to Early Christianity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008, pp. 19-38. Halliwell's distinction reflects that between 'tendenziös' ('tendentious/purposive') and 'harmlos' ('innocent') jokes, which is drawn by SIGMUND FREUD, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*, tr. James Strachey, rev. Angela Richards, Harmondsworth-New York, Penguin, 1976.

³ Scholars have been sensitive to Plutarch's use of humour and comic in the *Lives*: e.g. ZOFIA ABRAMOWICZÓWNA, *Humor U Plutarcha*, «Eos», LIV, 1964, pp. 87-98; TONY REEKMANS, *Verbal Humour in Plutarch and Suetonius' Lives*, «AncSoc», XXIII, 1992, pp. 189-232; IDEM, *Non-Verbal Jesting in Plutarch's Lives*, in *Plutarchea Lovaniensia. A Miscellany of Essays on Plutarch*, ed. Luc Van der Stockt, Leuven, Peeters, 1996 («Studia Hellenistica», 32), pp. 227-241; FIDEL DELGADO, *El sentido del humor en Plutarco*, in *Estudios sobre Plutarco. Aspectos Formales: Actas del IV Simposio Español sobre Plutarco: Salamanca 26 a 28 de Mayo de 1994*, eds. José Antonio Fernández Delgado, Francisca Pordomingo Pardo, Salamanca, Ediciones Clásicas: Universidad de Salamanca, 1996, pp. 381-404; VICENTE RAMÓN PALERM, *Recursos humorísticos en la obra de Plutarco*, in *The Unity of Plutarch's Work: 'Moralia' Themes in the 'Lives', Features of the 'Lives' in the 'Moralia'*, ed. by Anastasios Nikolaidis, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2008 («Millennium Studies», 19), pp. 601-610; MALLORY MONACO, *Folly and Dark Humor in the Life of Demetrius*, «Ploutarchos», IX, 2011-2012, pp. 49-59; SOPHIA XENOPHONTOS, *Comedy in Plutarch's Parallel Lives*, «GRBS», 52, 2012, pp. 603-631; MARK BECK, *The Serio-Comic Life of Antony*, in *A Versatile Gentleman. Consistency in Plutarch's Writing*, eds. Jan Opsomer, Geert Roskam, Frances Titchener, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2016 («Plutarchea Hypomnemata»), pp. 137-146. On the use of wit and jokes in the biographies, see ALAN WARDMAN, *Plutarch's Lives*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1974, pp. 228-230. On the use of *παιδιά* in Plutarch's *Quaestiones Convivales*, see FRANÇOISE FRAZIER, *Théorie et pratique de la παιδιά symposiaque dans les Propos de table de Plutarque*,

In what follows I discuss some representative examples from each category and argue that laughter is no laughing matter in Plutarch's *Lives*: it is tightly integrated into his characterisation of his biographical subjects and is designed to prompt problematisation in readers about moral issues that are pivotal to the process of Plutarch's historical and ethical interpretation in the *Lives*. Laughter of types ii and iii, in particular, has – at least in a retrospective consideration – an especially ominous quality, for it signals character traits that are catastrophic, thus preparing the reader for, and (often) anticipating, the failure of an individual, which lurks nearby.

I. THE LAUGHER'S SUPERIORITY

Individuals whose laughter is mentioned are often marked out as superior – in terms of their character, moral or intellectual qualities, or even their leadership – to those people whom they laugh at. To give a few examples: the laughter of Timoleon and his men at (cf. γελῶν αὐτοῖς ἐπήρει) Mago's cowardice (*Tim.*, 21, 1) signals their bravery, for which they get a good press not only from Mago himself (*Tim.*, 20, 11) but from Plutarch as well (*Tim.*, 21, 4). Sertorius' laughter at (cf. ἐγέλασε) Pompey points to his military πρόνοια (*Sert.*, 18, 8), while that of Agesilaus (cf. γελᾶσας) shows him as a man of sharp wit, able to defend himself against the accusations that the allies of the Lacedaemonians throw at him (*Ages.*, 26, 9).

In a similar way, Pompey's laughter at (cf. γελῶν) his soldiers' avarice reveals his high moral principles and his ability as commander to control his men efficiently (*Pomp.*, 11, 5), while Metellus' scornful laughter at (cf. κατεγέλα) the soldiers' mockery of his refusal to meet Sertorius in single combat is indicative of his superior understanding that a leader «should die the death of a general, not that of a common targeteer» (*Sert.*, 13, 5-7). One might also consider Lycurgus, who scornfully laughed at (*Lyc.*, 15, 11: καταγελῶν) those who rejected freedom in marriage relations, thus bringing all the more sharply into relief the decorum and reverence of his own regulations (*Lyc.*, 15, 11-18).

Similar things can be said of the derisive laughter (cf. κατεγέλα) of Cato the Elder at the delight of others in honorary statues, which reflects his (earlier) aversion to such praises (*Cat. Ma.*, 19, 5); or of Lysander's ridicule of (cf. καταγελᾶν) those who thought that deceit should not be employed in war (*Lys.*, 7, 6). Indeed, it is shown in the *Lysander* that the use of cunning and trickery in the affairs of state is not necessarily a stain on an individual's moral status, but can be a mark of good generalship.¹ Also noteworthy is Artaxerxes' laughter at (cf. κατεγέλασε) Teribazus, who contrary to Artaxerxes' order put on the king's coat, thus arousing (as

in *Le rire des anciens: actes du colloque international (Université de Rouen, École normale supérieure 11-13 janvier 1995)*, éd. par Monique Trédé, Philippe Hoffmann, Paris, Presses de l'École normale supérieure, 1998, pp. 281-292. KATARZYNA JAZDZEWSKA, *Laughter in Plutarch's Convivium Septem Sapientium*, «CPh», cxI, 1, 2016, pp. 74-88 has recently discussed Plutarch's use of laughter in the *Septem sapientium convivium*.

¹ See TIMOTHY DUFF, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 170-176.

Plutarch says) the displeasure of all of the people (cf. πάντες μὲν ἠγανάκτουσιν) (*Art.*, 5, 4). Artaxerxes' laughter clearly signals his gentleness and kindness (*Art.*, 4, 4-5). Finally, a particularly interesting example occurs in the *Life of Alexander*: Alexander laughed at (cf. γέλασας) Anaxarchus, who asked him if he, the son of Zeus, could thunder (*Alex.*, 28, 4). Alexander refused, as Plutarch says, for he did not wish to frighten his friends (*Alex.*, 28, 4). Both Alexander's laughter and his words are revealing of the moderate way in which he (as Plutarch supports) treated the matter of his divine parentage only in order to subjugate others (*Alex.*, 28, 6).

In all of the aforementioned depictions of laughter in the *Lives*, it is clear that the individual who laughs gets the upper hand in his exchange with another person or group because of his excellent ethical and/or leadership qualities. Laughter serves as an expression of these qualities and as a convenient narrative means of drawing readers' attention towards them.

In the following sections, however, we shall see that Plutarch uses laughter in the *Lives* not simply as a window on to one's superior character traits and moral virtue, but (most interestingly) as a signal to the reader of an individual's character flaws and failure of insight. We will discuss, first, instances where the laughter of secondary characters alerts readers to the moral or mental failings of the protagonists of the *Lives*, who here become the target of others' ridicule;¹ and we will consider next those laughing individuals or groups of people, whose laughter, especially at the height of prosperity, indicates some inadequacy of character or perception. In both cases, the laughter functions as a highly charged medium that helps readers to understand better the approaching failure of Plutarch's biographical subjects.

II. BECOMING A LAUGHING-STOCK

I will start with a number of episodes of laughter from the *Life of Solon* and the *Life of Crassus*:

(i) τὸν οὖν Ἀνάχαρσιν πυθόμενον, καταγελαῶν τῆς πραγματείας τοῦ Σόλωνος, οἰομένου γράμμασιν ἐφέξειν τὰς ἀδικίας καὶ πλεονεξίας τῶν πολιτῶν, ἀ μὴδὲν τῶν ἀραχνίων διαφέρειν, ἀλλ' ὡς ἐκεῖνα τοὺς μὲν ἀσθενεῖς καὶ λεπτοὺς τῶν ἀλισκομένων καθέξειν, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν δυνατῶν καὶ πλουσίων διαρραγήσεσθαι. (*Sol.*, 5, 4)

Anacharsis, accordingly, on learning what Solon was about, laughed at him for thinking that he could check the injustice and rapacity of the citizens by written laws, which were just like spiders' webs; they would hold the weak and delicate who might be caught in their meshes, but would be torn in pieces by the rich and powerful.

(ii) (1) Ὁ δὲ Κράσσοσ εἰς Βρεντέσιον ἦλθεν. ἔτι δ' ἀστατούσης χειμῶνι τῆς θαλάσσης, οὐ περιέμεινεν, ἀλλ' ἀνήχθη καὶ συχνὰ τῶν πλοίων ἀπέβαλε, τὴν δ' ἄλλην ἀναλαβὸν δύναμιν, ἠπείγετο πεζῆ διὰ Γαλατίας. (2) εὐρῶν δὲ τὸν βασιλέα Δημόταρον πάνυ μὲν ὄντα γη-

¹ Some of Plutarch's subjects are especially sensitive to the danger of becoming a laughing-stock: e.g. *Num.*, 5, 8; *Cam.*, 12, 2.

ραίων ἤδη, κτίζοντα δὲ νέαν πόλιν, ἐπέσχωψεν εἰπών· «ὦ βασιλεῦ, δωδεκάτης ὥρας οἰκοδομεῖν ἄρχῃ». γελάσας δ' ὁ Γαλάτης· «ἀλλ' οὐδ' αὐτός» εἶπεν «ὦ αὐτόκρατορ, ὡς ὁρῶ, πρωλίαν ἐπὶ Πάρθους ἐλαύνεις». (3) ἦν δ' ὁ Κράσσοσ ἐξήκοντα μὲν ἔτη παραλλάττων, πρεσβύτερος δὲ τὴν ὕψιν ἢ καθ' ἡλικίαν. (Crass., 17, 1-3)

But Crassus came to Brundisium. And though the sea was still rough with wintry storms, he would not wait, but put out, and so lost a great number of his vessels. With what was left of his forces, however, he hurried on by land through Galatia. (2) And finding that King Deiotarus, who was now a very old man, was founding a new city, he rallied him, saying: «O King, you are beginning to build at the twelfth hour». The Galatian laughed and said: «But you yourself, Imperator, as I see, are not marching very early in the day against the Parthians». Now Crassus was sixty years old and over, and looked older than his years.

(2) πρὸς ταῦτα Κράσσοσ κομπάσαντοσ, ὡς ἐν Σελευκείᾳ δώσει τὰσ ἀποκρίσεισ, γελάσασ ὁ πρεσβύτατοσ τῶν πρέσβειων Οὐαγίσησ καὶ τῆσ χειρὸσ ὑπτίασ δείξασ τὸ μέσοσ, «ἐντεῦθεν» εἶπεν «ὦ Κράσσε φύσονται τρίχασ πρότερον ἢ σὺ ὕψει Σελευκείαν». (Crass., 18, 2)

To this Crassus boastfully replied that he would give his answer in Seleucia, whereupon the eldest of the envoys, Vagises, burst out laughing and said, pointing to the palm of his upturned hand: «O Crassus, hair will grow there before you shall see Seleucia».

In the first example from the *Life of Solon* Plutarch reports on Solon's meeting with Anacharsis, who mocks – literally 'laughs down' (cf. *καταγελάειν*) – Solon for trying to check the injustice and greed of his citizens by mere laws. Anacharsis' mocking laughter, which is strikingly missing from the other ancient sources on Anacharsis and Solon,¹ connotes the simplicity of the mind of Solon, who appears to hold an over-idealistic view of the Athenians, as well as Anacharsis' superior insight, which Plutarch confirms a few lines later: «But the results justified the conjecture of Anacharsis rather than the hopes of Solon» (5, 6).² Plutarch's statement is ominous and foreshadows Solon's failure in Athens. Anacharsis' laughing response primes readers to reach some comprehension of Solon's failure, for it exposes them to Solon's basic flaw, his questionable ability – contrary to Plutarch's instruction for the ideal statesman in the *Political precepts* (799B-800A) – to realise the true character of his people and thus know how to lead and control them effectively.³

¹ E.g. Ael., *VH*, 5, 7; D.L., 1, 58; 1,101-105. Cf. Tz., *Chiliades*, 4, 923-31 (12th c. AD), deriving the story from Plutarch but omitting the laughter.

² Cf. D.L., 1, 58 attributing Anacharsis' words in Plutarch to Solon. Plutarch's choice to have Anacharsis express the parallelism between laws and spiders' webs adds to Anacharsis' power of intellect. On Anacharsis in Plutarch's work, see JAN FREDRIK, *Anacharsis: The Legend and the Apophthegmata*, Uppsala, Almqvist & Wiksell, 1981, pp. 44-48; CLAUDIA UNGEFEHR-KORTUS, *Anacharsis, der Typus des edlen, weisen Barbaren*, Frankfurt, Lang, 1996, pp. 146-186; THOMAS SCHMIDT, *Plutarque et les Barbares: La rhétorique d'une image*, Leuven-Namur, Peeters, 1999, pp. 260-261.

³ On Solon's flawed statesmanship, see also LUKAS DE BLOIS, *Plutarch's Solon: A Tissue of Commonplaces or a Historical Account?*, in *Solon of Athens: New Historical and Philological Approaches*, ed. by Josine Blok, André Lardinois, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2006 («Mnemosyne Supplements», 272), pp. 429-440: 434-438; LUKAS DE BLOIS, *The Ideal Statesman: A Commonplace in Plutarch's Political Treatises, His Solon, and His Lycurgus*, in *The Unity of Plutarch's Work*, cit., pp. 317-324; CHRYSANTHOS CHRYSANTHOU, *Plutarch's Parallel Lives: Narrative Technique and Moral Judgement*, Berlin, de Gruyter, 2018, pp. 16-25.

Laughter has similar effects in the other passages cited above from the *Life of Crassus*. The laughter (cf. γελάσας) of King Deiotarus draws attention to Crassus' lack of self-knowledge. Crassus, despite being very old himself, makes fun of (cf. ἐπέσκωψεν) the old age of the King. Similarly, Vagises' laughter at Crassus' boastful reply (cf. κομπάσαντος) to the kind message sent from Arsaces, who was ready to show moderation and pity towards Crassus (*Crass.*, 18, 1), throws all the more sharply into relief Crassus' extreme love of command and ambition, which led him, as Plutarch shows throughout the *Life of Crassus*, to undertake the Parthian expedition heedlessly and drive the Romans to disaster.¹ Plutarch's knowledgeable readers may also feel some sinister connotations in Vagises' laughing reply,² since Crassus will not live to see Seleucia (cf. *Crass.*, 32, 1-2).

The derisive laughter of secondary characters is exploited again to give information about a negative aspect of the protagonist's character, associated with his upcoming catastrophe, in the *Demetrius-Antony* book. In the *Life of Demetrius*, we are told that when Lysimachus showed Demetrius' ambassadors the wounds on his body after his fight with a lion, the latter laughingly (cf. γελῶντες) replied that their own king had on his neck the bites of an equally horrible beast named Lamia, thus humorously defaming their king by underestimating him in his comparison to Lysimachus (*Demetr.*, 27, 6-7). In the course of the *Life of Demetrius* it becomes clear that sexual behaviour is part of Plutarch's negative portrayal of Demetrius, and that Demetrius' ineffective balance between the public and private spheres caused his catastrophe.³ His lifestyle of luxury and enjoyment is what eventually causes the Macedonians (as they themselves declare) to abandon Demetrius and go over to Pyrrhus (*Demetr.*, 44, 8).

In the *Life of Antony* Plutarch narrates a tale that his grandfather Lamprias had heard from Philotas, the physician of Amphissa (28, 3-7). When Philotas was studying in Alexandria, a friend of his, who was one of the royal cooks, invited him to take a view of the extravagant royal supper. Once he entered the kitchen and saw the abundance of provisions and eight wild boars a-roasting, Philotas was amazed at the great number of guests. Yet, the cook, according to Plutarch, laughingly (cf. γελάσαι) revealed that there were about twelve guests, thus poking fun at the overindulgence of Antony's lifestyle.

¹ On Plutarch's presentation of Crassus' defective character, see DAVID BRAUND, *Dionysiac Tragedy in Plutarch*, Crassus, «CQ», XLIII, 2, 1993, pp. 468-474; ALEXEI ZADOROJNYI, *Tragedy and Epic in Plutarch's Crassus*, «Hermes», CXXV, 1997, pp. 169-182; CHRYSANTHOS CHRYSANTHOU, *Plutarch's Parallel Lives*, cit., pp. 116-120.

² On Plutarch constructing the reader of the *Lives* as learned and educated, see esp. CHRISTOPHER PEL-LING, *Plutarch and History: Eighteen Studies*, London-Swansea, The Classical Press of Wales-Duckworth, pp. 267-282; TIMOTHY DUFF, *Plutarch's Lives and the Critical Reader*, in *Virtues for the People: Aspects of Plutarchan Ethics*, ed. by Geert Roskam, Luc Van der Stockt, Leuven, Leuven University Press, 2011 («Plutarchea Hypomnemata»), pp. 59-82; CHRYSANTHOS CHRYSANTHOU, *Plutarch's Parallel Lives*, cit., pp. 26-43.

³ E.g. *Demetr.*, 23-24; 27.1-5. Cf. TIMOTHY DUFF, *Plato, Tragedy, the Ideal Reader and Plutarch's Demetrius and Antony*, «Hermes», CXXXII, 3, 2004, pp. 271-291; 283; JEFFREY BENEKER, *The Passionate Statesman: Eros and Politics in Plutarch's Lives*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, p. 166.

Antony's submissiveness to Cleopatra, like Demetrius' lusting after Lamia, provides further ground for laughter. A glaring example occurs in chapter 29 of the *Life of Antony*, where Plutarch describes an incident in which Antony falls victim to Cleopatra's cunning and becomes a laughing-stock to a great number of her friends. Plutarch's story is that once Antony went fishing and had bad luck. Accordingly, he was angry because Cleopatra was present to see it. He thus invented a trick – he secretly ordered his fishermen to fix to his hook a fish that had been caught previously – which Cleopatra understood. Pretending that she knew nothing and that she admired Antony's skill, she invited her friends to be spectators of it. However, Cleopatra ordered one of her friends to fasten onto Antony's hook a salted Pontic herring. So when Antony pulled it up, there was naturally great laughter (cf. γέλωτος οἷον εἰκλός γενομένου), and Cleopatra said to Antony: «Give your fishing-rod to the fishermen of Pharos and Canopus; your sport is the capture of cities, regimes, and continents» (*Ant.*, 29, 5-7). Cleopatra gets the upper hand, while Antony is exposed to ridicule.¹ We are confronted with another occurrence of laughter that marks the distorted insight of the main character, here Antony's childish state of mind under the influence of Cleopatra and his complete submissiveness to her.² This caused most of Antony's public mistakes and his final catastrophe, as Plutarch repeatedly stresses throughout the *Life of Antony*.³

III. «HE WHO LAUGHS LAST, LAUGHS BEST...»

Laughter, as we shall see next, can become suggestive of the character flaws or faulty intellect not only of the individuals who are the butt of the laughter but also of those who laugh.

The scornful laughter of Cato the Elder at (cf. καταγελῶν) those who admire Greek culture (*Cat. Ma.*, 12, 5) denotes his opposition to Hellenism;⁴ Lucullus' laughter at (cf. γέλασας) Pompey, who blames Lucullus for having buildings near Tusculum that are uninhabitable in winter, adds to the portrayal of Lucullus as a

¹ Cf. *Art.*, 17, 8, where Parysatis gets the upper hand over Artaxerxes and ironically laughs at him (cf. εἰρωνευομένη μετὰ γέλωτος).

² Cf. Plutarch's focus on Antony's childish behaviour in Alexandria, esp. *Ant.*, 28, 1: ἐκεῖ δὲ μεिरακίου σχολὴν ἄγοντος διατριβαῖς καὶ παιδιαῖς χρώμενον («there, indulging in the sports and diversions of a young man of leisure»). Plutarch notes that Antony's involvement in childish amusements with Cleopatra gave great pleasure to the Alexandrians, who used to say that «with the Romans he used the tragic mask (τῷ τραγικῷ [...] προσώπῳ), while with them the comic mask (τῷ δὲ κωμικῷ)» (29, 1-4). Cf. *Ant.*, 30, 1: Τοιαῦτα ληροῦντα καὶ μεिरακιευόμενον τὸν Ἀντώνιον («While Antony was indulging in such trifles and youthful follies»).

³ E.g. 25, 1; 53; 66, 7; 76, 6; cf. *Comp. Demetr.-Ant.*, 3, 4-5.

⁴ Cf. *Mar.*, 2, 2: «He [i.e. Marius] never used the Greek language for matters of real importance, thinking it ridiculous (ὡς γελοῖον) to study a literature the teachers of which were the subjects of another people». In a series of studies, Simon Swain suggests that deficient education in Plutarch's Roman *Lives* is used to explain the flaws of the historical figures. See SIMON SWAIN, *Plutarch's Lives of Cicero, Cato, and Brutus*, «Hermes», CXXVIII, 2, 1990, pp. 192-203; IDEM, *Plutarch's Characterization of Lucullus*, «RhM», CXXXV, 3/4, 1992, pp. 307-316; and IDEM, *Hellenism and Empire: Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World AD 50-250*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, pp. 140-144.

man of luxury and extravagance – «Do you suppose, then, that I have less sense than cranes and storks, and do not change residences according to the seasons?», Lucullus laughingly states (*Luc.*, 39, 5). Crassus' laughter at (cf. γελάσας) Pompey's cognomen 'Magnus' ('the Great') reflects his great ambition and jealousy (*Crass.*, 7, 1), just as Pompey's derision of (cf. κατεγέλα) those who were afraid of the war with Caesar illustrates his excessive pride and (false) sense of security and superiority (*Pomp.*, 57, 8).

An artful example of Plutarch's use of laughter as a means of sketching the negative aspects of the laugher's character appears in the *Life of Antony*, where Plutarch dwells on Antony's reception of others' jokes as well as his own use of jokes:

(11) ἡ δὲ περὶ τὰς παιδιὰς καὶ τὰς ἐπισκώψεις ὕβρις ἐν αὐτῇ τὸ φάρμακον εἶχεν· ἀντισκῶψαι γὰρ ἐξῆν καὶ ἀνθυβρίσαι, καὶ γελῶμενος οὐχ ἦττον ἢ γελῶν ἔχαιρε. (12) καὶ τοῦτο διελυμήνατο τὰ πολλὰ τῶν πραγμάτων. τοὺς γὰρ ἐν τῷ παίζειν παρρησιαζομένους οὐκ ἂν οἴηθεις σπουδάζοντας κολακεύειν αὐτόν, ἠλίσκετο ῥαδίως ὑπὸ τῶν ἐπαίνων, ἀγνοῶν ὅτι τὴν παρρησίαν τινὲς ὡς ὑποστῦφον ἥδυσμα τῇ κολακείᾳ παραμειγνύντες ἀφήρουν τὸ πλήσμιον, τῇ παρὰ τὴν κύλικα θρασύτητι καὶ λαλιᾷ διαμηχανώμενοι τὴν ἐπὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ὕψειν καὶ συγκατάθεσιν μὴ πρὸς χάριν ὀμιλούντων, ἀλλὰ τὸ φρονεῖν ἡττωμένων φαίνεσθαι. (*Ant.*, 24, 11-12)

(11) And his wantonness in mirth and jest carried its own remedy with it. For a man might pay back his jests and insolence, and he delighted in being laughed at no less than in laughing at others. (12) And this harmed seriously most of his undertakings. For he could not believe that those who spoke frankly in jest could flatter him in earnest, and so was easily captivated by their praises, not realising that some people were mixing candour as an astringent seasoning with their sycophancy to avoid surfeiting him, ensuring by their boldness and chatter over the wine-cups that their docile readiness to assent in serious matters did not seem the mark of men who were trying to please, but of those who were genuinely outdone in wisdom.¹

A few lines earlier Plutarch mentions two character-traits of Antony, his simplicity (ἀπλότης) and his slowness of perception (βραδεῖα αἴσθησις), which led him (in Plutarch's words) to ignore most of what was happening and trust his men blindly (*Ant.*, 24, 10). Here Plutarch comments in particular on Antony's vulnerability to flattery lying behind the jest of others in the midst of drinking. Antony is unable to grasp the real dangers of flattery; instead, he enjoys being laughed at as much as he himself laughs at others.

Plutarch, as we saw above, elaborates in the *Moralia* on the proper use of jesting in the *symposia*. In the *Quaestiones Convivales* he acknowledges that in a sympotic setting laughter can be useful and that seriousness can be pleasant (621D), but he suggests that a good symposiarch must blend seriousness with playfulness in order to ensure the happiness of his guests (620D; cf. 621D). He stresses, more-

¹ I adopt at many points here the translation of CHRISTOPHER PELLING, *Plutarch: Life of Antony*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 183.

over, that playfulness should be free from offence (cf. παιδιὰν ἀνύβριστον), that delight should be useful (cf. τέρψιν ὠφέλιμον), and that laughter (γέλως) should not accompany ridicule and insolence but grace and friendliness (cf. μὴ μώμου μηδ' ὑβρεων ἀλλὰ χάριτος καὶ φιλοφροσύνης ἑταῖρον) (622B; cf. 634F). In the essay, Plutarch alerts his readers to the dangers of insult, hostility, and malice lurking in ill-bred and incompetent jesting at drinking parties (622B; 631C-E; 633E; cf. *De ad. et am.*, 68C-D).

In the *Life of Cleomenes*, Plutarch praises Cleomenes for his pleasant amusement of his friends over the wine: «he managed (<δι>επαιδαγῶγει) the drinking-bout (τὸν πότον) himself by his conversation, now asking questions, now telling stories, and his discourse was not unpleasantly serious (cf. οὔτε τὴν σπουδὴν ἀκηδῆ τῶν λόγων), but had a sportiveness that charmed and was refined (τὴν τε παιδιὰν ἐπίχαριν καὶ ἀσόλοιον ἐχόντων)» (*Agis-Cleom.*, 34, 7). In the *Life of Sertorius*, moreover, Plutarch mentions the decorum and restraint of the suppers at which Sertorius was present and stresses that Sertorius «would not consent to see or hear anything that was disgraceful, but held his associates to the practice of indulging only in amusement and cheerfulness that was decorous and restraint (cf. εὐτάκτοις καὶ ἀνυβρίστοις παιδιαῖς χρῆσθαι καὶ φιλοφροσύναις)» (*Sert.*, 26, 7).¹

Antony, unlike Cleomenes and Sertorius, fails to live up to Plutarch's high standards of needful laughter and jesting.² His jests and laughter are neither free from insolence (cf. ἡ δὲ περὶ τὰς παιδιὰς καὶ τὰς ἐπισκώψεις ὑβρις [...] ἀντισκῶψαι γὰρ ἐξῆν καὶ ἀνθυβρίσαι) nor dovetail seriousness with play. They are rather a display of his «soldierly (τὸ στρατιωτικόν) and vulgar (βάνουσον) manner» – to use Plutarch's words in describing Cleopatra's view of Antony's jesting (cf. τοῖς σκώμμασι) (*Ant.* 27.2).

Laughter is also entangled with Plutarch's fundamental concern about Antony's failure of insight in Plutarch's account of Antony's treatment of the dead Cicero:

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

(3) 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. (4) 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.

¹ Cf. *Brut.*, 34, 8: καὶ παιδιὰν ὁ πότος ἔσχεν οὐκ ἄχαριν οὐδ' ἀφιλόσοφον («And over the wine mirth and jest abounded, seasoned with pleasure and philosophy»).

² See also *Demetr.*, 25, 7-8; *Sull.*, 2, 3-5; *Alex.*, 50, 7-11 for other examples.

The word ἀνακαγχάζων, literally ‘guffaw’, carries clear connotations of derision,¹ which are coupled with Antony’s abuse (cf. ὑβρίζων) of Cicero’s corpse. Antony is drawn into a cruel and dishonourable action that Plutarch clearly disapproves of.² The καθάπερ (‘just as’/‘as if’) explicitly introduces 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.³ 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. The distance between the ‘alternative’ and ‘actual’ realities is effective in drawing the reader to engage with Antony’s altered state of consciousness, which (as we already mentioned) is central to his final downfall.

Antony is not the only character in the *Lives* who laughs in thoughtless ignorance only to find later that «he who laughs last, laughs best». In the *Life of Lucullus*, Plutarch dwells upon the reactions of Tigranes, King of Armenia, and his men when they see Lucullus’ army before the Battle of Tigranocerta:

(3) καὶ παρὰ τὸν ποταμὸν ἐν πεδίῳ μεγάλῳ καταστρατοπεδεύσας, παντάπασι μικρὸς ἐφάνη Τιγράνη, καὶ τοῖς κολακεύουσιν αὐτὸν διατριβὴν παρεῖχεν. οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἔσκωπτον, οἱ δ’ ὑπὲρ τῶν λαφύρων ἐν παιδιᾷ διεβάλλοντο κλῆρον, τῶν δὲ στρατηγῶν καὶ βασιλέων ἕκαστος ἠτεῖτο προσιῶν αὐτοῦ μόνου γενέσθαι τὸ ἔργον, ἐκεῖνον δὲ καθέζεσθαι θεατὴν. (4) βουλόμενος δὲ τι καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Τιγράνης χαίρεις εἶναι καὶ σκωπτικός, εἶπε τὸ θρυλούμενον· «εἰ μὲν ὡς πρεσβευταί, πολλοὶ πάρεσιν· εἰ δ’ ὡς στρατιῶται, ὀλίγοι». καὶ τότε μὲν οὕτως εἰρωνευόμενοι καὶ παίζοντες διετέλεσαν. (*Luc.*, 27, 3-4)

(3) When he [i.e. Lucullus] had encamped along the river in a great plain, he appeared utterly insignificant to Tigranes, and supplied the king’s flatterers with ground for amusement. Some mocked at the Romans, and others, in pleasantry, cast lots for their spoil, while each of the generals and kings came forward and begged that the task of conquering them might be entrusted to himself alone, and that the king would sit by as a spectator. (4) Then Tigranes, not wishing to be left behind entirely in this play of wit and scoffing, uttered that famous saying: «If they come as ambassadors, they are too many; if as soldiers, too few». And for the while they continued their sarcasms and jests.

Plutarch goes on to say that after the first movements of Lucullus’ forces, Tigranes thought that Lucullus was retreating and thus called Taxiles and asked him *with a laugh* (ἄμα γέλωτι) (27, 5):

¹ Cf. similar uses of the verb in Pl., *R.*, 337a where Thrasymachus indulges in a «highly sardonic guffaw» (cf. ἀνεκάγχασέ τε μάλα σαρδάνιον); ps.-Lucianus, *Philopatr.*, 22; Lucianus, *JTr.*, 31; ps.-Hp., *Ep.*, 17, 4. Cf. STEPHEN HALLIWELL, *Greek Laughter*, cit., p. 523, note 17.

² Jeering at a dead was subject to ethical restraints throughout Greek culture. See STEPHEN HALLIWELL, *Greek Laughter*, cit., pp. 26-30.

³ In the *Life of Cicero*, another perspective, that of the onlookers’ shuddering at Antony’s cruelty, is present (*Cic.*, 49, 1-2). Antony’s ‘guffaw’ is naturally not present in the *Cicero*, for the emphasis rests on Cicero’s final rehabilitation rather than Antony’s character. See CHRISTOPHER PELLING, *Plutarch and History*, cit., pp. 368-369 on the closing chapters of the *Cicero*.

«τοὺς ἀμάχους» ἔφη «Ῥωμαίων ὀπλίτας οὐχ ὄρᾳς φεύγοντας;» καὶ ὁ Ταξίλης «βουλοίμην ἄν» εἶπεν «ὦ βασιλεῦ γενέσθαι τι τῷ σῶ δαίμονι τῶν παραλόγων, ἀλλ' οὐτ' ἐσθῆτα λαμπρὰν οἱ ἄνδρες λαμβάνουσιν ὁδοιποροῦντες, οὔτε θυρεοῖς ἐκ κεκαθαυμένους χρῶνται καὶ κράνεσι γυμνοῖς, ὥσπερ νῦν τὰ σκῦτινα τῶν ὀπλων σκεπάσματα περισπάσαντες, ἀλλὰ μαχουμένων ἐστὶν ἡ λαμπρότης αὐτῆ καὶ βαδιζόντων ἤδη πρὸς τοὺς πολεμίους». (27, 6)

«Don't you see that the invincible Roman hoplites are taking to flight?» «O King», said Taxiles, «I could wish that some marvellous thing might fall to your good fortune; but when these men are merely on a march, they do not put on shining raiment, nor have they shields polished and their helmets uncovered, as now that they have stripped the leathern coverings from their armour. But, this splendour means that they are going to fight, and are now advancing upon their enemies».

Once again laughter, scoffing, and sarcasm (cf. εἰρωνευόμενοι) mark the state of ignorance and overconfidence of Tigranes and his men, and, as they are juxtaposed with Taxiles' thoughtful reply, signal the great disaster that is about to fall upon them.¹ At the same time, the laughter of the enemies brings about an effect of counter-suggestibility, for the emphasis on the wits and scoffing of Tigranes and his court contributes to magnifying Lucullus' victory. In the battle that follows Lucullus wins triumphantly (27, 7-28, 9), and Plutarch praises Lucullus warmly for his achievement (28, 9).²

A striking case of group laughter occurs in the *Life of Nicias*. In the Pylos debate, as Plutarch says, the Athenians encouraged Cleon to take up the command of the expedition. As soon as Cleon accepted their proposal and declared that «within twenty days after sailing he would either slay the men on island or bring them alive to Athens», the Athenians, Plutarch stresses, «were moved to hearty laughter (cf. γελάσαι μέγα) at this rather than believing it, for they were already in the way of treating his mad vanity as a joke with pleasantry (μετὰ παιδιᾶς οὐκ ἀηδῶς)» (7, 6).³

In her comparison of Plutarch's account of the Pylos debate with that of Thucydides (4, 27-28), Jacqueline de Romilly makes an important observation that is worth citing in full:

In Thucydides, we see that the Athenians could not help laughing at Cleon's confidence; and wise people thought that the result would be good in any case: either Cleon would

¹ Other instances of individuals or groups who laugh mockingly only to find the tables later turned on them include *Eum.*, 15, 3-13; *Cam.*, 28, 6-29, 6; *Mar.*, 18, 3 (but see 20-21); *Tim.*, 4, 8; *Lys.*, 5, 1-2.

² There are many other examples in the *Lives* where the scornful laughter of the secondary characters serves to augment some of the most important qualities of the character or leadership of the protagonists: *Pomp.*, 64, 7; *Aem.*, 31, 9-10; *Arist.*, 24, 6-7; *Agis-Cleom.*, 39, 2-4; *Phoc.*, 23, 1; *Ages.* 36, 9; *Alex.*, 6, 5-8; 14; *Dem.*, 29, 5-7; *Eum.*, 15, 3-13.

³ To reinforce his point, Plutarch cites an anecdote at *Nic.*, 7, 7: Once Cleon asked the Athenians to postpone a meeting of the assembly because he had already sacrificed to the gods and had guests to entertain. «The Athenians», Plutarch says, «burst out laughing (cf. γελάσαντας), then rose up and dissolved the assembly». Cf. *Praec. Ger.*, 799D.

succeed, or they would be rid of him. As could be guessed, the reckoning of wise people is simply left out in Plutarch as being too intellectual, and too much centered on the city. But he keeps the laughter. He even increases it, for what was in Thucydides some sort of laughter (τι καλ...) now becomes a big laughter (μέγα) and the text adds an impression of “agreeable game”. Alas, the game cannot be quite so much fun in Thucydides: the episode is too clearly connected, for him, with the miseries that were to come as a result of such behaviour.¹

Laughter, in Plutarch's *Lives*, as we have seen so far, is not necessarily playful or harmless, and here we have a case of malicious laughter – the Athenians may laugh with Cleon, but they laugh as they appoint him to command a mission in which they expect him to fail –² which indicates not only Cleon's frenzied state of mind but also the Athenians' deficient consciousness, particularly their failure to realise the dangers of their decision.³

Plutarch's omission of the reflection of the «prudent people» (Th., 4, 28, 5: τοῖς σώφροσι τῶν ἀνθρώπων),⁴ moreover, adds even more to the unsound like-mindedness of the Athenians. In the next chapter, Plutarch explicitly refers to the mischiefs that Cleon inflicted on the city, and his levity and impropriety that (as Plutarch says) «soon after confounded the whole state» (8, 5-6). The big laughter in Plutarch's account, therefore, does not add an impression of an «agreeable game». It is not funny, but (to put it in de Romilly's terms) is linked with the miseries that were about to come as a result of such behaviour. Phocion's words in response to the Athenians' laughter at his brows – an incident which Plutarch narrates in the *Life of Phocion* – beautifully illustrate this point: «No harm», said Phocion, «has come to you from this brow of mine; but these men's laughter (γέλως) has cost the city many a tear» (*Phoc.*, 5, 2). In Sicily, the Athenians are not different, and it is again scornful laughter (cf. καταγελῶντες) that marks their derisive contempt for Gylippus and their subsequent failure (*Nic.*, 19, 4-10).

CONCLUSION

To conclude, in this article I have examined a number of examples from Plutarch's *Lives* where the protagonists of the *Lives* or other secondary characters, including

¹ JACQUELINE DE ROMILLY, *Plutarch and Thucydides or the Free Use of Quotations*, «Phoenix», XLII, 1, 1988, pp. 22-34: 31.

² See CHRISTOPHER PELLING, *Plutarch and History*, cit., p. 125, who additionally mentions the Athenians' similar laughter at Hyperbolus after the *ostrakophoria* (*Nic.*, 11, 6).

³ Cf. *Alc.*, 16, 9: some of the Athenians laughed at (ἐγέλω) Timon's words that Alcibiades would grow big enough to destroy them. Cf. *Pyrrh.*, 13, 7, describing the reactions of the people of Tarentum to Meton: «then as will happen in a throng of free people (ἐν ὄγλῳ δημοκρατίας) not given to decorum, some clapped their hands at sight of him, and others laughed (ἐγέλω), but none tried to stop him».

⁴ DANIEL TOMPKINS, *The Death of Nicias: No Laughing Matter*, in *Clio and Thalia: Attic Comedy and Historiography*, eds. Emily Baragwanath, Edith Foster, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2017 («Histos suppl.», 6), pp. 99-128: 106 identifies irony in Thucydides: «Only here is σώφρων deployed ironically, tagging the real imprudence of 'safe-thinking' men who by selecting an apparent incompetent put Athenians at risk».

groups of people, appear to laugh in a derisory and mocking manner. This sort of laughter, as we have seen, can point to the superior character traits and/or moral status of the laugher; or it can signal the faulty state of mind and inadequacies of character of the persons who laugh or those who are being laughed at. In that case laughter is ominous and prepares the reader for, and often alludes to, an upcoming disaster.¹

This function of laughter in Plutarch's *Lives* recalls Herodotus' *Histories* in which, as Donald Lateiner has shown, laughter «is not funny; it is a symptom (although not the cause) of approaching catastrophe», and becomes part of Herodotus' modes of historical explanation and ethical instruction.² I have suggested in this article that in Plutarch too, laughter is part of the morally pedagogical purpose of the biographies. It tends to be both 'protreptic/expository' and 'descriptive/exploratory' for the reader:³ it is used to point to and give information about character, mental and emotional attitudes, thus drawing the reader to imitate or abstain from specific actions and behaviour; and at the same time it is designed to prompt considerable reflection on character and morality. To use Plutarch's own words in another context, laughter in the *Lives* «serves for many useful purposes» (cf. *Quaest. conv.*, 621D).

¹ One might compare Plutarch's treatment of 'laughter' with that of 'smiling/smile' (μειδιάω/μειδιάμα) in the *Lives*, which like laughter can mark a positive aspect of the character of the individual who smiles (e.g. *Aem.*, 17, 4; *Pyrrh.*, 20, 5; *Cim.*, 10, 9; *Alex.*, 32, 3-4; *Comp. Dio-Brut.*, 5, 4) or denote something negative about the person who smiles (e.g. *Pel.*, 10, 9; *Luc.*, 41, 2; *Dem.*, 25, 4), or even about the person at whom the smile is 'directed' (e.g. *Alex.*, 46, 4; *Dem.*, 25, 4; *Dio*, 20, 2-3). On the relationship between 'laughter' and 'smile' in ancient Greek literature and thought, see STEPHEN HALLIWELL, *Greek Laughter*, cit., pp. 520-529.

² DONALD LATEINER, *No laughing matter: a literary tactic in Herodotus*, «TAPhA», CVII, 1977, pp. 173-182. The quotation is from p. 180.

³ On these categories of Plutarch's moralism, see CHRISTOPHER PELLING, *Plutarch: Life of Antony*, cit., pp. 10-18; IDEM, *Plutarch and History*, cit., pp. 237-239. According to Pelling, Plutarch is less (or at least not only) concerned with 'protreptic' and 'expository' moralism – in the form of 'do that' or 'do not do that', 'this is what is good' or 'this is what is bad' – but rather with 'descriptive' and 'exploratory' moralism, which points towards, and prompts reflection on, ethical «truths about human behaviour and shared human experience» (p. 239).