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'MAKING MYTH LOOK LIKE HISTORY': PLATO IN PLUTARCH'S *THESEUS-ROMULUS*

The proem to *Theseus* suggests some distancing from the material, even a certain playfulness. This *Life*, and (perhaps to a lesser extent[1]) *Romulus* too, are not to be quite like the others.

> "Let us hope, then, that the mythical (τὸ μυθῶδες) may submit (ὑπακοῦσαι, literally 'listen submissively') to us, cleaned up through *logos*, and take on the appearance of history. But when she obstinately defies credibility (τὸ πιθανόν) and refuses to admit any commingling with plausibility (τὴν πρὸς τὸ εἰκὸς μεῖξιν), we shall ask our listeners (ἀκροατῶν) to be indulgent and to accept ancient history (ἀρχαιολογίαν) in a gentle mood" (*Thes.*1.5).

There is a triangle here of author, material, and audience. Plutarch hopes that he may be able to tame the material into a sort of submissive 'listening' (ὑπακοῦσαι), accepting the appearance of history; if not, then perhaps his real 'listeners' can be the one who will be tamed and receptive, accepting gently this 'ancient history'. One form of λόγος will be the λόγος Plutarch applies to the material, trying to 'clean it up' to make it look better, as one might clean out a ditch, perhaps, or polish up steel[2]. Earlier in the chapter he has characterised the material of the other *Lives* as the period which is 'reachable εἰκότι λόγῳ (by a λόγος which is both 'reasoning' and 'reasonable', 'plausible') and accessible to ἱστορία'. He will now apply

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1 The geographical analogy of *Thes.* 1.1-4 suggests that the shift to Romulus is less bold than that to Theseus. To move into such territory at all is to go beyond the area 'accessible' (βάσιμον) to history which he has so far traversed (διελθόντι); he might do what the geographers do and mark the area beyond as 'monstrous and tragic ... no longer commanding belief or clarity'. But Numa had brought him 'close' in time to Romulus, so he thought it reasonable to 'go on' to him; Theseus is then selected as the natural partner. The implication seems to be that Romulus is only the other side of the boundary; Theseus can be more distant.

2 Ditch: *Mar.* 16.7. Steel: *Mor.* 433b. Also of medical treatments at e.g. 130c, 647e. The nearest metaphorical use seems to be 735a, 'clarifying' a murky sentiment of Democritus - in other words, clearing off the surface murk which makes a formulation or a story harder to accept or understand.

A. PÉREZ JIMÉNEZ, J. GARCÍA LÓPEZ & R. Mª AGUILAR (Eds.), *Plutarco, Platón y Aristóteles. Actas del V Congreso Internacional de la I.P.S. (Madrid-Cuenca, 4-7 de mayo de 1999)*, Madrid, 1999.

a similar process to this material, but the most he can hope for is τὴν πρὸς τὸ εἰκὸς μεῖξιν, a 'commingling' with τὸ εἰκός; and even this will not always be achieved, and in such cases his audience will have to accept this ἀρχαιολογία as something different from the λόγος of those other *Lives*. He can hope for 'credibility'; he can hope that the mythical material might λαβεῖν ἱστορίας ὄψιν, '*look like* history' - look, in fact, like those other *Lives* which were more 'accessible to ἱστορία'. But it will be a matter of appearance; it will not, or at least not all the time, be the real thing.

That leads us to expect 'rationalisation', the reduction of mythical and especially supernatural material to look like more everyday reality. But 'rationalisation' is a lazy word, and can mean several things. One mode is the preference for the less miraculous variant. Thus Poseidon is not Theseus' father: that is simply a story put around for propaganda purposes by shrewd old Pittheus (*Thes.* 6.1). Nor is Mars the father of Romulus, though Plutarch is tempted by the story that Amulius got up in Mars kit to impress and seduce Romulus' mother (*Rom.* 4.3).

A rather different mode is what we might call the 'explaining away' of a story, the provision of a plausible explanation why a mythical version might have grown up. There are so many variants within the Cretan chapters that it is hard to find a main narrative line, but on the whole we seem to have a local general of unpleasant character called Taurus, and the Minotaur is a legendary misunderstanding (this was the version of Philochorus and Damon: *Thes.* 16.1, 19.3-7, 25.3). Nor does Theseus go down to Hell and get trapped into sitting in stone (hence there is no room for that delightful Athenian aetiology using this to explain why Athenians have such small bottoms[3]). Instead he and Peirithous visit a Molossian king called Aidoneus with a wife called Persephone, a daughter called Kore, and a dog called Cerberus *(Thes.* 31.4-5, 35.1): Theseus is kept captive, and Peirithous 'made to disappear' through execution by dog (ἀφανίζειν, 31.5). That is a choice word, used usually of more sinister and mysterious disappearances such as that of Romulus himself[4]. It is borrowed here from the more miraculous version of Theseus and Peirithous, and transfused into the naturalistic account which Plutarch prefers - an interesting way in which Plutarch nods to the alternative way of telling the story *even without explicitly mentioning it*. This is one of the cases (there are several) where his narrative would not make much sense except to someone who knew the alternative version;

3 For this aetiology cf. Σ Ar., *Knights* 1368 and Suda, s.v. λίσποι, with S. MILLS, *Theseus, Tragedy and the Athenian Empire* (Oxford, 1997), p. 12 n.40.

4 *Rom.* 27.4 bis, 27.6, 29.12, 32.7, 33.9-10; the word is used of other eery and mysterious or sinister destructions at e.g. *Fab.* 3.4, *Dion* 44.8, *Brut.* 37.1; of autocratic liquidations at *Pomp.* 80.6, *Alex.* 74.1.

and that informed reader would also catch Plutarch's implication that this explains how the more usual miraculous version arose from a misunderstanding. That reader would appreciate, too, what Plutarch has done with the myth to make it more everyday. This is 'commingling with τὸ εἰκός', indeed.

Such cases would seem to conform with what Paul Veyne called 'the doctrine of present things'[5]. Minotaurs do not exist now, and would not have existed then; nor do gods regularly appear now, and so talk of their appearance then must have been some sort of human fiction or misunderstanding. But not everything was quite the way it is now, and there are times when that 'doctrine of present things' does not apply. Thus the Lapiths and Centaurs are simply there, without apology or explanation, at *Thes.* 30.3. Tales like those of Sinis and Sciron and Procrustes and the Crommyonian boar are again not easy to explain naturalistically (*Thes.* 6-11). True, here too the text tends to play down the miraculous elements: thus Sciron is just a brigand (with even a hint that he might have been quite a good fellow after all), and his foot-washing technique is hardly mentioned - and there is certainly no man-eating tortoise waiting at the bottom of the cliff (*Thes.*10). But Plutarch still has to concede that travelling from Troezen to Athens was much more dangerous then, with vastly perilous Bad People along the way. In such cases the 'rationalisation' is rather different, not so much 'explaining away' as simply 'explaining', providing some sort of naturalistic explanation which can give a context where such things could have happened and clarify how the world could have been different from the world today.

This is where, rather unexpectedly, we find Plato. Consider the context at 6.4-6, where Plutarch sets out to explain how such bad people could flourish.

> "This age, it seems, produced a race of men who, for sheer strength of arm and swiftness of foot, were indefatigable and surpassed the human scale, but who did not apply these gifts of nature to anything proper or helpful; rather they rejoiced in their overwhelming *hubris* and took advantage of their strength to behave with savage inhumanity and to seize, outrage, and murder all who fell into their hands. They thought that shame and justice (αἰδῶ δὲ καὶ δικαιοσύνην) and equality and human spirit had nothing to do with anyone who could gain advantage (τοῖς πλέον ἔχειν δυναμένοις): no, it was just that most people praised such qualities because they did not dare to do wrong and were fearful of being wronged themselves (ἀτολμίᾳ τοῦ ἀδικεῖν καὶ φόβῳ τοῦ ἀδικεῖσθαι). Heracles went round displacing and destroying some of these, but others cowered out of sight as he went by, and withdrew and were disregarded as too abject for his notice. But then Heracles' fortunes turned, and he killed Iphitus, went to Lydia, and spent a long time in slavery to Omphale there,

5 P. VEYNE, *Did the Greeks believe in their myths?* (tr. P. WISSING, Chicago 1988, Fr. original 1983), p. 14.

imposing this punishment on himself for the killing. At that point affairs in Lydia had deep peace and security, but in Greece the former evils came into flower and burst out again, for there was no-one to repress or restrain them..."

There is a fair amount of Plato around here. This draws on several passages where Plato's speakers explored the nature of society, especially society's virtue, by affecting a style of historical reconstruction. The bad people's rejection of αἰδῶ ... καὶ δικαιοσύνην summons up Protagoras' great speech (*Prot.* 322c); the idea of a social contract not to ἀδικεῖν or ἀδικεῖσθαι, and the consequent restraint on those who want to πλέον ἔχειν, has a lot of the beginning of the *Republic* (343d6, 349b ff., then for the social contract idea the beginning of Book 2); the notion that it is only ἀτολμία which would hold back people who want to ἀδικεῖν has something of the *Gorgias* as well (483c-d, 488b5, 490a ff). But in Plutarch this is Plato with a difference: this is *playful* Plato, the sort of playfulness which the proem encouraged us to expect. In Plato's own text it is natural to take these historical 'reconstructions' as heuristic or hermeneutic tools rather than literal 'history' (that is especially clear in Protagoras' case), ways of phrasing or presenting the nature of justice and society in mock-historical terms as a way of capturing their essence: Cynthia Farrar brought this out particularly clearly[6]. Is Plutarch not here being *faux naïf* in taking such a picture over in this wide-eyed, uncritical way? Consider in particular that notion that Greece was suffering because Heracles was away with Omphale, while Lydia was correspondingly peaceful: it is hard to take that as anything other than tongue-in-cheek. But if it is, we should not take that playfulness as a keynote of the whole pair. Many things, including Platonic intertextuality, become more earnest as the pair continues. *Romulus* will end with a purple passage on the potential immortality and divine nature of the soul (*Rom.* 28.7-10), which again re-evokes Plato and is much more intense.

In *Theseus* the suggestions of Plato continue, or at least of texts which Plutarch would have taken to be Platonic. Chapter 16 ends with an extended borrowing from the pseudo-Platonic *Minos*, to which we will return[7]; chapter 23 has a verbal allusion to the opening of the *Phaedo*, as Plutarch refers to the ship from Delos whose arrival famously (though Plutarch does not mention it here) delayed Socrates' exe-

6 C. FARRAR, *The Origins of Democratic Thinking* (Cambridge, 1988), esp. pp. 87ff.

7 *Thes.* 16.3-4, exploiting *Minos* 319d, 320d-321b: see below, p. 443. Plutarch seems to combine this with a further quotation, probably from poetry ('φωνήν - μοῦσαν *ex aliquo poeta petitum?*', ZIEGLER): that is the point of ὄντως at the beginning of 16.3, 'it seems that it really is [as the poet says] a hard thing to become hated by a city with a voice and a Muse...'

cution[8]. Together with some other suggestions, particularly of Thucydides[9], such passages help to introduce hints of a different, more modern world, a world of fifth- and fourth-century intellectual confrontation - and of violence and intolerance too, if the hints of Socrates' execution are caught.

Such suggestions, both of Plato and Thucydides, are relevant when we move to the last great political movement of the *Life*, begun with the synoecism of 24. The synoecism itself borrows material and even language from Thuc. 2.15[10]: that may become important in a moment, for the parallel with Pericles can be argued to be more suggestive. Notice too the strong, 'modern', *Realpolitik* tone with which the politics of the synoecism are managed (24.2).

> "So he now travelled around Attica and strove to convince them town by town and clan by clan. The common people and the poor responded at once to his appeal, while to the more influential classes he proposed a constitution without a king: there was to be a democracy, in which he would be no more than the commander of the army and the guardian of the laws, while in other respects everybody would be on an equal footing (ἰσομοιρίαν). Some were convinced by his arguments without any difficulty; others, because they feared his power, which was already great, and his enterprising spirit (τόλμαν), preferred to be persuaded rather than forced into agreement".

It is a very democratic Theseus, the Theseus we know on the tragic stage (most notably in Euripides' *Supplices*); and it is by now a very fifth-century Athens too, with his opponents fearful of his δύναμις, and also of his τόλμα, that highly Athenian catchword. Those enemies are just biding their time, we shall see.

There may be some Plato too in the following chapter, with Theseus' avoidance of 'undisciplined and unmixed democracy' (25.2). Some of his fears there sound very much like the *Republic*. In that case it becomes interesting that Theseus introduces three classes, the Eupatridae, the Geomoroi, and the Demiourgoi (25.2), each doing their own thing: not quite the same things as the three classes of the *Republic*, it is true, but still a rather neighbouring idea.

That could affect an issue which has troubled constitutional historians, for most of this chapter looks as if it is borrowing from *Athenaion politeia*. Plutarch

8 *Thes.* 23.1: notice especially the rhythm τὸ πλοῖον ... ἐν ᾧ ἔπλευσε καὶ πάλιν ἐσώθη (the *Phaedo* refers to τὸ πλοῖον ... ἐν ᾧ ... ἔσωσέ τε καὶ αὐτὸς ἐσώθη).

9 There is no room here to pursue the Thucydidean suggestions in the early part of the *Life*. It is conceivable that they begin with the proem's reference to τὸ μυθῶδες (~ Thuc., I 22.3). 2.2 then alludes verbally to Thuc., II 15.2; 3.1 'corrects' Thuc., I 9.1.

10 Especially at 24.1 on the previous internal fighting (~ Thuc., II 15.1 fin.) and 24.3, πρυτανεῖα καὶ βουλευτήρια καὶ ἀρχάς (~ Thuc., II 15.2, τά τε βουλευτήρια καὶ τὰς ἀρχάς ... ἓν βουλευτήριον ἀποδείξας καὶ πρυτανεῖον...).

'borrows' with some freedom, certainly, as his quotation of Aristotle's view ὅτι δὲ πρῶτος ἀπέκλινε πρὸς τὸν δῆμον (25.3) is a strong overstatement[11] of *Ath.pol.*'s μικρὸν παρεγκλίνουσα τῆς βασιλικῆς: so strong, indeed, that some have preferred to posit a different Aristotelian source, but this degree of source-manipulation is clearly within Plutarch's range, as he seeks to highlight the 'demos' theme. Yet *Ath.pol.* itself seems initially to have only two classes[12], though by *Ath.pol.* 13.2 we have three: Rhodes argues that in the lost early section of *Ath.pol.* Ion introduced two classes, then Theseus expanded this by adding the Eupatridae as a third[13]. If that is right, then we have Plutarch simplifying by having Theseus introduce all three at once. That may be a routine instance of what Stuart called the 'law of biographical relevance', highlighting the contribution of the central figure[14]; but again the Platonic texturing may be playing a part. If so, the intertext would not be casual, for the end of the *Life* will develop the dangers of the *demos* when empowered, the slipperiness and instability of βασιλεία, and the people's manipulability by the ambitious demagogue, Menestheus, as he cements his own power. These are all hackneyed themes, especially in the fifth and fourth centuries, but ones to which Plato had given particularly strong and thoughtprovoking expression. And we would here have Theseus recognising the dangers, being a Plato before his time, and *still* not being able to do anything about it: a powerful, almost tragic, picture.

That brings us to the final chapters of the *Life*, where the forces of the demos are turned against Theseus by Menestheus. The opportunity was offered because Theseus was away with Peirithous on his amorous adventures, and was therefore unable to protect the city when the Dioscuri, inflamed by the abduction of Helen, attacked from the Peloponnese (*Thes.* 32-4). Menestheus was always an extremely malleable figure: he was known from the *Iliad* as the leader of the Athenian contingent at Troy[15], but does not actually *do* much in the *Iliad* (Page described him

11 'Una semplificazione eccesiva', C.AMPOLO-M. MANFREDINI, *Le Vite di Teseo e di Romolo* (Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, 1988), p. 238.

12 That is the picture in fr. 3 KENYON, a division 'before Cleisthenes' into georgoi and demiourgoi: this was presumably introduced in the lost first part of the *Ath.pol.*

13 P. RHODES, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford, 1981), p. 67, following H.T. WADE-GERY, *Essays in Greek History* (Blackwell, 1958) on the Ion suggestion; *cf.* also RHODES, pp. 88-92, 74-6, and on 41.2.

14 D.R. STUART, *Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography* (Berkeley, 1928), p. 78.

15 *Il.* 2.552-6, 4.327, 12.331-63, 373, 13.195-6, 689-90, 15.331.

merrily as 'a ninny and a nonentity'[16]), and could therefore be more or less elaborated at will. Here it is those currents of ill-will and fear surviving from the synoecism, combined with the forces of the *demos* that Theseus had himself built up, which offer Menestheus his demagogic chance:

> "Meanwhile Menestheus, the son of Peteus, grandson of Orneus and great-grandson of Erechtheus, had taken a hand in affairs. He was the first man, they say, to cultivate the arts of the demagogue and to ingratiate himself with the people. He began by uniting the nobles and stirring up their resentment. They had long harboured a grudge against Theseus, because they felt that he had deprived each of the country magnates of his rule and authority and then herded them all into a single city, where he treated them as subjects and slaves. At the same time he also set the masses in a ferment with the accusations he brought against Theseus. He told them that while they might delude themselves with the dream of liberty, the truth was that they had been robbed of their native cities and their sacred rites, and all to make them look up to a single master who was an immigrant and a follower..." (*Thes.* 32.1).

Thus Theseus is destroyed by the very forces which he himself had unleashed, and which were to make his Athens what it was.

The schema here is as early as Theophrastus' 'Oligarchic Man':

> "He goes around saying, 'when are we ever going to stop being ruined by the liturgies and trierarchies?', and 'how hateful are the tribe of demagogues! Theseus was to blame for introducing this bane to the city: he brought people together from twelve cities into one <and gave power to the people, so that the many had control of everything>[17] and the monarchy was dismantled; and he got what he deserved, because he was the first to be destroyed by them'." (Theophrastus *Characters* 26.6-7).

So Plutarch may well not have invented the schema himself. But we can see why he welcomed and doubtless elaborated this. It maps closely on to one of his own favoured patterns, whereby a hero can so readily be destroyed by the very forces which make him great and *which he himself has earlier fostered.* The great man comes to be haunted by versions of his own past: Caesar tottering when his friends misbehave, and alienate the troops and particularly the *demos*; Coriolanus living out a version of his Roman experiences among the Volsci, the very people who gave him his chance of vengeance; Antony falling when his jokes and excesses are sha-

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16 D.L. PAGE, *History and the Homeric Iliad* (Berkeley, 1963), pp. 145-7.

17 This translates DIELS' Oxford text, inserting <τὸν δῆμον αὐξῆσαι, ὥστε πάντων κρατῆσαι τοὺς πολλοὺς>. Other emendations or supplements are possible, but the point will remain the same.

red, not with his men, but with Cleopatra[18]. The same factors build a man, then destroy him. The insight is often a profound one, and it is central to *Life* after *Life*.

Another favourite Plutarchan technique is to make a *Life* evocative, not just of the great man, but also of his city. Marcellus' strengths, and more especially his emotional weaknesses, show the way Rome was at the time, so absorbed with wars that it did not have time for proper Greek education (*Marc.* 1); a similar point is made of Coriolanus (*Cor.* 1.6). The most elaborate example is *Philopoemen-Flamininus*, where both men are driven on by overwhelming ambition, but in ways which typify their two countries. Philopoemen's *philotimia* easily topples over into destructive *philoneikia*, whereas Flamininus' *philotimia* leads him to give Greece the freedom for which Philopoemen had so gloriously but ineffectively fought. At the Isthmia in 196 Flamininus proclaimed that freedom: the dumbstruck Greeks thought back to all the battles which Greeks had fought, but almost always against one another, so that every triumph had also been a disaster and a reproach for Greece. Their country, they reflected, had been destroyed by her own *philoneikia* - that *philoneikia* which is Philopoemen's as well as Greece's keynote[19]. That pair is not just about two men, it is about their countries; and we find something similar here with the comparison of Theseus and Romulus, as he puts it in the proem 'the founder of Athens, beautiful and celebrated in song, and the father of Rome, unconquered and great in glory' (*Thes.* 1.5).

So far I have presented this flavour of Athens as a rather general one, suggesting *demos* and demagogues. Is there a more specific suggestion as well? The stress falls on the distaste of those packed together into a city against their will, with the countrymen feeling resentment against the great man who was behind it: Thucydides himself, at 2.15, brought out the parallel between Theseus and Pericles at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. At the end of *Theseus* the fifth-century resonance recurs, though this time more of Alcibiades and 411: Theseus and his private excesses alienate the city, so that he is driven into exile (*Thes.* 35.5): the Dioscuri invade from Sparta, and there is internal dissension within the walls; Menestheus prefers to open the gates to the Spartans, blaming his internal enemy Theseus for it all (33.1).

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18 For these analyses see PELLING in, respectively, *Plutarch and his Intellectual World* (ed. J.M. MOSSMAN, London, 1997), pp. 215-32; "Shakespeare's Plutarch" (*Poetica* 48 (1997), ed. M.A. McGrail), pp. 26-31; *Plutarch: Life of Antony* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 13, 123.

19 *Flam.* 11, a very different emphasis from Plb., XVIII 44-6 and Livy, XXXIII 33.5-7. On this see PELLING, *Plutarco: Filopemene e Flaminino* (Rizzoli, 1997), esp. pp. 148-53.

The normal way of approaching this has been in terms of source-criticism: when did this story arise? Cantarelli argued that this demagogic characterisation of Menestheus dated from the late fifth century[20]. Gianfrancesco built on this, identifying what he thought to be 'sophistic' material in the last parts of the *Life*: he suggested that the origin of much of Plutarch's material was in a (not very well attested) speech of Antiphon, 'for the Pallantidae against Theseus', possibly put by Antiphon in the mouth of Menestheus himself (the wording of the testimonium is rather obscure)[21]. On this view, that speech would become a cross between a mythological exercise like Gorgias' *Helen* or *Palamedes*, and a contribution to contemporary propagandist debate. On Gianfrancesco's view, the oligarch Antiphon used the speech to lambast his democratic opponents in disguise, and to preach the virtues of opening the gates to Sparta.

That last aspect brings out the weakness of the thesis. As oligarchic propaganda, in war-time, this is inept. 'Our opponents are no better than Theseus' - what a way to argue! One wins few adherents by associating one's enemies with a great national hero. And it is no better for the speaker to reveal that the oligarchs were planning to be treacherous and invite the Spartans in. It would be a gullible audience who would believe that they would be just like the Dioscuri in the story, who exploited their victory only so far as to seek permission to be initiated in the Mysteries (*Thes.* 33.1). After twenty years of war and atrocity, that would persuade no-one.

So oligarchic 'propaganda' does not work. The fifth-century resonance remains, though, and perhaps we should think less in terms of propaganda than in terms of commentary; perhaps we should look for an author who manipulates the distant past to make it play out in anticipation the themes of Athens' later history - rather as the narrative of Livy 1 foreshadows many of the themes of later Roman history, as *ambitio* comes in and violent discontent gathers until finally a Brutus overcomes a tyrant and inaugurates a new era of Roman history. In the present case, the 'patterner' *could* be a source, perhaps as Cantarelli and Gianfrancesco assumed a fifth-century one; but why should it not be Plutarch himself? He knew, and reminded his

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20 F. CANTARELLI, *Rend.Ist.Lomb.*, 108 (1974) 459-505.

21 L. GIANFRANCESCO, in *Storiografia e Propaganda* (ed. M. SORDI, Milan, 1975), pp. 7-20, building on *Rhet.gr.*, 7.5.26 W., λέγουσι δέ τινες δικανικὸν λόγον εἰρηκέναι πρῶτον Μενεσθέα τὸν στρατηγὸν τῶν Ἀθηναίων, ὃς καὶ ἐπὶ Τροίαν ἀφίκετο, ἄλλοι δὲ λέγουσιν Ἀντιφῶντα τοῦτον τὸν ῥήτορα, κατὰ Θησέως περὶ τῶν Παλλαντίδων. ('Some say that the first forensic speech was delivered by Menestheus, the general of the Athenians who also went to Troy, others say that this first speaker was Antiphon, 'For the Pallantidae against Theseus'...).

audience intertextually, that Thucydides had pointed the Theseus-Pericles parallel; and he had already introduced a lot of what we might crudely call 'sophistic' material, with all those Platonic motifs. He liked his *Lives* to tell tales about cities as well as about people; what could be neater than to make Athens' inaugurator sow the seeds, not merely of his own downfall, but of his city's downfall in the greatest crisis of her later history, the Peloponnesian War?

In that case it becomes interesting that the end of *Romulus* plays a similar game. Romulus too sows some seeds that turn against him. For Theseus the danger was in moving from being a king to being a democrat; for Romulus it was the opposite move[22] from being *demotikos* to becoming more of a king

> "This was Romulus' last war. Next came the experience which falls to most, indeed virtually all who are raised to power and majesty by great and paradoxical successes; Romulus did not escape this either. His career had given him (over?-)confidence (ἐκτεθαρρηκώς); he became haughtier in spirit and abandoned his popular manner (ἐξίστατο τοῦ δημοτικοῦ), shifting to a monarchy which gave offence and pain. This came about in the first place because of the way in which he presented himself..." (*Rom.* 26.1).

Then we move into a description of his purple robes, his kingly throne, his bodyguard and so on. The similarity to 44 B.C. is not far to seek, with Caesar's semi-regal outfit and golden throne, the humiliation of the senate, and the fears of *his* monarchy[23]. Then Romulus too dies, mysteriously. One version, aired by Plutarch though left uncertain, is that he is killed by the hostile senators (*Rom.* 27.6). The people are certainly suspicious, and threaten those aristocrats whom they see as the murderers. And the appearance of Proculus Iulius, announcing he has seen the dead Romulus in a dream (*Rom.* 28.1-3), pre-enacts the role of Cinna the poet (*Caes.* 68), though it does not turn out so murderously.

Naturally there is a similarity with the end of *Theseus* too, as both men's political programmes turn sour. That is even pointed by a verbal echo, for Theseus is disappointed that the democracy has turned out so rebellious, 'corrupted and wanting to be fawned on instead of silently carrying out their orders', ἀντὶ τοῦ ποιεῖν σιωπῇ τὸ προσταττόμενον, *Thes.* 35.4; now Romulus' patricians, much to their irritation, could do no more than 'listen silently to their orders', σιγῇ προστάττον-

[22] That chiastic rhythm is made explicit in the *Synkrisis*, 2.1-3.

[23] Especially in the Lupercalia affair: see *Caes.* 61 and *Ant.* 12, with PELLING 1988 (n.18) pp. 144-7, esp. pp. 145-6 on the Romulean elements. Fears of Caesar's monarchy: esp. *Caes.* 60.1, ὁ τῆς βασιλείας ἔρως. Humiliation of the senate: esp. *Caes.* 60.3-8. This caused wider offence, ὡς ἐν τῇ βουλῇ καὶ τῆς πόλεως προπηλακιζομένης, *Caes.* 60.5: *cf. Rom.* 27.3, (Romulus) ... ἔδοξε κομιδῇ τὴν γερουσίαν προπηλακίζειν.

τος ἠκροῶντο, 27.2. Romulus too has done something to establish the pattern that will ruin him, for playing the demagogue (δημαγωγῶν) he sets up dual annual magistrates in Alba, and it is this which encourages those in Rome to 'seek a monarch-free and independent *politeia*' with an alternation of ruling and being ruled, 27.1. The differences between the two *Lives* are also important. It is the mob which excludes Theseus, but the aristocrats who are so hostile to Romulus; and Romulus' last mysterious words strike a keynote of Roman history which is again rather different from the Greek, for the Romans 'are to practise σωφροσύνην μετ' ἀνδρείας[24] and thus come to the greatest portion of human power', 28.3.

Thus both men initiate their nations' style as well as the nations themselves, and both reversals look forward to later crises and catastrophes. Once again Plutarch is not drawing this from nothing. The Romulus-Caesar parallel was in the air in 44 B.C. itself, and it is likely that the conspirators were consciously modelling themselves on Romulus' eliminators. But that simply suggests that Plutarch's knowledgeable audience might already be primed to notice the parallels, just as they were already primed by Thucydides' suggestion of the Theseus-Pericles contact. We can still be sure that the elaboration of the pattern is Plutarch's own, and that he is not simply copying out a source: the similarity between the two *Lives*, evidently drawn from different sources as they are, renders that secure.

One thing is different between the ends of Romulus and of Caesar: the role of the gods[25]. The Ides of March had a religious dimension, but the twenty-three wounds were very human indeed. The end of *Romulus* is much more mysterious. On the whole it leans towards making Romulus' disappearance - ἀφανίζειν is again the recurrent word[26] - genuinely supernatural: the one naturalistic explanation - that he was cut up into little pieces and the senators divided him up and carried him out in their clothes - does not carry conviction (27.6). All the weight falls on the description of the omens, on Proculus Iulius who has surely seen *something*, and on the purple passage 28.7-10 defending the immortality of the spirit - though it is true that this leaves the fate of the body a little obscure.

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24 An echo of the claim of Thucydides' Pericles, φιλοσοφοῦμεν ἀνεὺ μαλακίας (Thuc., II 40.1), as Christina Kraus suggests to me? If so the Thucydidean intertext would again be thought-provoking, with the adaptation capturing national characteristics. (Roman) σωφροσύνη is a more practical pursuit than (Greek) φιλοσοφία, and the litotes ἀνεὺ μαλακίας gives way to the stronger positive μετ' ἀνδρείας.

25 I have discussed the role of the supernatural in *Alexander-Caesar* more fully in my paper in MOSSMAN's *Plutarch and his Intellectual World* (n.18), pp. 226-9.

26 Above, n.4.

The immortality of the soul: that returns us to Plato at the end of the pair, but with an earnestness far removed from that early, playful false naïveté. In Plato myth is a mode, employed in particular discourse for provisional and persuasive reasons, of conveying something more serious - the origin and nature of humanity, say, or of morality, or of the divine and its relationship to humankind. In *Thes.* 6 Plutarch had smilingly accepted in literal terms what for Plato was only the mythical vehicle to convey something more substantial; in *Rom.* 28 Plutarch is accepting not the vehicle but the cargo, not the myth but what the Platonic underworld myths convey - the immortality and intrinsic divinity of the human soul itself. That is no joke.

A final word on the synkritic epilogue itself, for there too Plato is in evidence. It begins with a Platonic quotation (indeed the only *explicit* quotation in the pair), once again from the *Phaedo*: unlike Theseus, Romulus became 'brave through fear', because of his determination to escape from slavery and imminent punishment (*Snk.* 1.1, citing *Phaedo* 68d). In the *Phaedo* the contrast is with the true philosophical nature which needs no such impulse; by implication, that may here be the nature of Theseus rather than Romulus. So initially Theseus seems to be the winner in the comparison. But as in the *Life* of Theseus itself, there is a shift of sympathy here, and the epilogue like the narrative moves on to dwell on Theseus' more disturbing aspects, especially those concerning his erotic life. After reflecting on various stories in which women suffered badly because of Theseus, Plutarch concludes:

> "... unless this story (that of Theseus' mother's captivity) is false - as it really ought to be false, along with most of the others (ὡς ἔδει γε καὶ τοῦτο ψεῦδος εἶναι καὶ τὰ πλεῖστα τῶν ἄλλων). The mythical stories about the divine aspects, too, show a great difference. For safety came to Romulus with great goodwill of the gods; but the oracle given to Aegeus, to abstain from women while abroad, seems to show that the begetting of Theseus was contrary to the gods' will." (*Snk.* 6.7).

That is an astounding thing to say about Theseus, the great national figure; just as it is astounding to have him come off worse, in erotic terms, than Romulus, the architect of the rape of the Sabine women.

Here too an extra twist is given by a Platonic original. In *Republic* 3 Socrates is attacking traditional stories of the gods:

> "Let us not believe such things, and let us not let the poets say that Theseus son of Poseidon and Peirithous son of Zeus hurled themselves in this way into dreadful rapes, nor that any other son of a god or any other hero would have dared to do such foul and impious deeds as the poets now falsely claim. ... For we have shown that it is impossible for bad deeds to come from the gods". (*Republic* 3.391d-e).

So Plutarch's 'really ought to be false' has good Platonic authority, one which centres particularly on those erotic stories which Plutarch finds so disturbing. Perhaps then they *were* false after all; perhaps, to revert to the terms of the proem, the narrative has not achieved that 'commingling with τὸ εἰκός' which would have given credibility (τὸ πιθανόν); perhaps we too have been taken in by all these sensational 'tragic' stories. If we remember another Platonic passage, that from the *Minos* in *Thes.* 16, we remember that 'it is a dreadful thing to become hated by a city which has a voice and a Muse', for the Athenian tragic poets have vengefully corrupted our view of Minos; perhaps they have corrupted our view of Theseus too.

So, like the end of (paradoxically) many tragedies themselves, the close of the pair invites us to reassess radically what we have heard, and to wonder if it was not, after all, built on uncertain foundations, not the stuff of true ἱστορία after all. The ring has taken us back to the suggestions of the proem, and we are still not sure how playful the whole exercise has been.

Some things, though, are certain: the subtlety and charm of this pair, one of Plutarch's most exploratory and enterprising productions; and the essential role in it played by intertextuality, especially Platonic and Thucydidean intertextuality.

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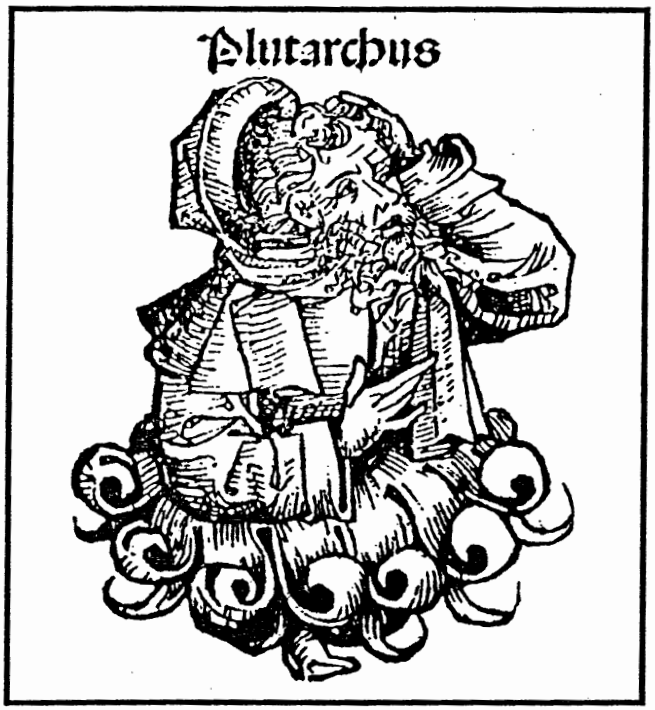
PLUTARCO, PLATÓN Y ARISTÓTELES

ACTAS DEL V CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL DE LA I.P.S. (MADRID-CUENCA, 4-7 DE MAYO DE 1999)



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