

NON-VERBAL JESTING IN PLUTARCH'S LIVES

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INTRODUCTION

The Roman theoreticians of humour, Cicero and Quintilian⁽¹⁾, devoted little attention to non-verbal jesting because it was of minor importance to the orator: the jokes it produced were, except for verbal concomitants, intended for the spectator, not for the listener. Its existence is recognized in the *Institutio oratoria*: "Things designed to raise a laugh may be either said or done" (VI 3.25), and its appeal to the sense of sight is opposed to that made by *cavillatio* and *dicacitas*: "*ridicula* (sources of laughter⁽²⁾) may be pointed out to the eye (*ostenduntur*) or narrated (*narrantur*, q.e. *cavillatio*) or censured by a some *mot* (*dicto notantur*, q.e. *dicacitas*)" (VI 3.37).

Among the non-verbal *ridicula* there are jokes appealing to the sense of sight without involving action: in the first place the funny results of figurative creation or remodelling; in the second place jocular teaching by illustration, based on comparison with ugly or common objects; thirdly, amusing imitation by means of either mimicry and gesture or fancy dress. The instruments of teaching by illustration were seldom available in the orator's proximity⁽³⁾; *gestus*, on the other hand, and *imitatio volutus et vocis* were to be used very sparingly⁽⁴⁾.

There are, among the non-verbal *ridicula*, also jokes which were at the same time visual and prankish⁽⁵⁾. They were either allusive, or

⁽¹⁾ Part of the information available in ancient literature has been quoted in translation; the translations used here are those of the *Loeb Classical Library* by B. PERRIN (Plutarch, *Vitae parallelae*), J.C. ROLFE (Suetonius, *Vitae XII Caesarum*), E.W. SUTTON & H. RACKHAM (Cicero, *De oratore*) and H.E. BUTLER (Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*).

⁽²⁾ *Ex corpore aut ex animo aut ex iis quae sunt extra posita* (VI 3.37).

⁽³⁾ *Haec* (scil. *ridicula*) *aut ostenduntur aut narrantur aut dicto notantur. Rarum est ut oculis subicere contingat* (*Inst. or.* VI 3.37-38).

⁽⁴⁾ *Mimorum est enim ebologorum, si nimia est imitatio, sicut obscenitas* (*De or.* II 2.42).

⁽⁵⁾ Quintilian quotes two examples of this kind of jokes in support of his assertion that *facto risus conciliatur interim admixta gravitate (...)* *interim sine respectu pudoris*:

retorting, or seemingly absurd, or they pulled one's leg, or they were of a nature completely disregarded in treatises intended for the orator, such as the pranks that are recorded now and then in Suetonius' *Vitae*: dirtying someone's face, having his hair shaved⁽⁶⁾, dressing him in rags and tatters⁽⁷⁾, pelting him with various sorts of 'unconventional' projectiles, giving him a ducking, throwing him up and down by means of a blanket⁽⁸⁾, and other instances of what is now called pantomimic humour.

Jocular teaching by illustration had a pendant in *verbal* humour, namely simile and comparison referring *ad aliquid inferius leviusque* in order to move to laughter (*Inst. or. VI 3.57*); *imitatio vocis*, on the other hand, was situated on the borderline between humour *in verbis* and the non-verbal *ridiculum*. As for pranks in the strict sense, they shared with certain types of verbal humour the *suspiciosum* (presence of innuendo), the retorting, the *subabsurdum* (absurdity, when acceptable on second thought), or the unexpected element.

It is quite obvious that Plutarch, at least in consulting the evidence on Roman statesmen and politicians, must have come across various instances of non-verbal humour. The question is whether he was as receptive as Suetonius to data on that kind of *faciétiae*.

I. JOKES NOT INVOLVING ACTION

I.1. *Funny results of figurative creation or remodelling*

I.1.1. Graphic⁽⁹⁾

The *Institutio oratoria* may be referring to this type of *ridiculum* where it indicates the circumstances in which a certain Manius Curtius

they are the *sella curulis loris intenia* offered by M. Caelius to consul Isauricus (cf. infra 2.1), and what he calls the *pyxis Caeliana*, instrument of a practical joke perpetrated by the same M. Caelius at the expense of Clodia, his former mistress (*Inst. or. VI 3.25*).

⁽⁶⁾ Cf. *Cal. 35.2*: *pulchros et comatos, quotiens sibi occurrerent, occipitio naso deturpabat*.

⁽⁷⁾ E.g. *Cal. 35.2*: *... constringi sine mora iussit et pannis obsitum vicatim circumducti*.

⁽⁸⁾ Cf. *Orho 2.1*: *vagari noctibus solitus atque invalidum quemque obniorum vel potulentum corripere ac distento sago impositum in sublime iactare*.

⁽⁹⁾ In modern humour the main types of the graphic kind are the caricature and the cartoon.

ridicule negavit⁽¹⁰⁾, namely "when his accuser had produced a canvas, in every scene of which he was depicted either as naked and in prison or as being restored to freedom by his friends paying off his gambling debts" (*VI 3.72*).

Plutarch records in his life of Cicero a graphic joke of a different kind: "when he was quaestor in Sicily and was dedicating to the gods a piece of silver plate, he had his first two names inscribed thereon, the Marcus and the Tullius, but instead of the third, by way of jest (*εὐώπτερον*), he ordered the artificer to engrave a chick-pea"⁽¹¹⁾ (*Cic. 1.6*).

I.1.2. Plastic

This is the humour expressed by comic statuettes⁽¹²⁾ and also that of changing in an amusing⁽¹³⁾ way the dress or the outlook of statues erected in public places. An instance of the latter is recorded by Plutarch in his life of Alexander: having noticed that a statue of Theodectes had been erected in the market-place of Phaselis, "once, after supper and in his cups, he led a band of revellers to that statue and crowned it with their garlands, thus in pleasantry (*ἐν παιδιᾷ*) returning no ungraceful honour for the past association with the man which he owed to Aristotle and philosophy" (*Alex. 17.9*).

A naughty addition of attributes to statues of Nero is recorded by Suetonius: in the back of the neck of one of them a lock of curly hair was hung, around the neck of another a leather bag was tied, each with an explanatory label⁽¹⁴⁾ (*Nero 45.2*).

⁽¹⁰⁾ By asking with dry humour: *Ergo ego numquam vici?*

⁽¹¹⁾ According to *Cic. 1.4*, the cognomen Cicero was derived from *cicer*, 'chick-pea'. In actual fact it appears to have been a pet-name, related to *cicaro* in Petronius, *Sat. 46.3*: *etiam tibi discipulus crescit cicaro meus*.

⁽¹²⁾ Cf. e.g. P. BLOME *Alexandrinische Grottesken im Basler Antikenmuseum, in Akten XIII. Kongr. klass. Arch.*, 1988, pp. 452-453; ID., *Affen im Antikenmuseum, in Festschrift E. Berger*, Basel 1988, pp. 205-210; G. NACHTERGAEL, *La caricature d'un banquier à son comptoir, Sacris Erudiri 31* (1989-1990), pp. 315-322.

⁽¹³⁾ Amusement can hardly have been the reason why a life-size statue of Caligula, erected in his own temple, was clad day after day the same way as the emperor himself (*Cal. 22.3*).

⁽¹⁴⁾ The first of these *tituli* is rendered by Suetonius in indirect speech: *Nunc demum agona esse, et traheret tandem* (cf. J. DE DECKER, *A propos d'une épigramme contre Néron, Rev. Instr. publ. en Belg.* 1910, pp. 124-132), the second ran as follows: *Ego quid potui? Sed tu culleum meruisti*.

1.2. Jocular teaching by illustration

Its instruments, according to the Roman theoreticians of humour, are objects to which the orator points with his finger (*Inst. or.* VI 3.38) in tackling "ugliness or some physical defect by comparing it with greater ugliness (*cum similitudine turpioris*)" (*De or.* II 266).

In Cicero's *De oratore* the example of an object used in this type of jesting was "a Gaul depicted on the Cimbrian shield of Marius, which hung below the *Tabernae novae*, with the body twisted, the tongue protruding and the cheeks baggy", to which Strabo Vopiscus had pointed with his finger in order to show his adversary, Helvius Cinna, what he looked like (*De or.* II 266). That same example is also quoted by Quintilian in his *Inst. or.* VI 3.38, where the shield in question is said to have served as an inn-sign.

For lack of evidence as to the reason why Aemilius Paulus divorced Papiria, Plutarch tells the following story (λόγος), in which 'there would seem to be some truth': "A Roman once divorced his wife, and when his friends admonished him: 'Is she not discreet? is she not beautiful? is she not fruitful?', he held out his shoe, saying: 'Is this not handsome? is it not new? but none of you can know where it pinches my foot'" (*Aem.* 5.2-3). A similar type of visual *ridiculum* is quoted by Plutarch as having been used by Sertorius in order to allay the dejection of his Spanish allies, after a rash engagement of theirs with the regular Roman army had turned to their disadvantage. Sertorius' teaching by illustration implied two horses, a weak and a strong, and two men stripping, each in his own way, his horse's tail of its hair; Sertorius' horse-tails, standing for the regular Roman army, were no less *turpes*⁽¹⁵⁾ than Aemilius Paulus' shoe, representing his wife Papiria, but Plutarch's anecdote in *Sert.* 16.5-10 would be more amusing if it were shorter⁽¹⁶⁾.

1.3. Amusing imitation

Imitation played an important part not only in verbal humour (namely in *cavillatio*), but also in humour appealing to the sense of

⁽¹⁵⁾ The success of an *imago oculis subiecta* (*Inst. or.* VI 3.38) depended on its greater *turpitude* (*De or.* II 266: *cum similitudine turpioris*), just as verbal wit consisting in *similitudo* had the best effect *si ad aliquid inferius tenuisque referatur* (*Inst. or.* VI 3.57).

⁽¹⁶⁾ The anecdote is also in Valerius Maximus' collection of *Memorabilia* (VII 3.6), where the jocular character of Sertorius' teaching by illustration has entirely disappeared.

sight, both in the *depravata imitatio* by means of mimicry and gesture, and in wearing disguise or assuming inappropriate attributes.

1.3.1. By means of mimicry or gesture

In *De or.* II 242 this is called *depravata imitatio*⁽¹⁷⁾, and illustrated by a reference to an *altercatio* between Licinius Crassus and Domitius Ahenobarbus, in which Crassus, beseeching Domitius *per tuam nobilitatem, per vestram familiam, per tuas status, practised in a bulesque way voltus et vocis imitatio* (rather of his adversary⁽¹⁸⁾ than of a suppliant) and *patulum etiam de gestu addidit* by stretching out his arm.

In Plutarch's Roman lives there are first the jocular gestures made by Mediterranean pirates in front of their Roman captives in earlier days, before Pompey's war against them: "whenever a captive cried out that he was a Roman and gave his name, they would pretend to be frightened out of their senses, and would smite their thighs, and fall down before him entreating him to pardon them (...). And after thus mocking the man for a long time and getting their fill of amusement from him (*κατεφιωνουσαίμενοι; καὶ ἀπολογίασαντες τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*) at last they would let down a ladder in mid ocean and order him to disembark" (*Pomp.* 24.11-13). Another instance of the same kind is recorded in Sulla's biography: at the battle of Chaeronea (86 B.C.) the Roman troops, after repulsing Mithridates' scythe-bearing chariots, "clapped their hands and called for more, as they are wont to do at the races in the circus" (*Sull.* 18.6).

Suetonius has three instances of jocular gestures: Caligula was wont to offer Cassius Chaerea, whom he considered *mollem et effeminatum*, when he came to thank him for whatever reason and approached him for a hand-kissing, a hand "which he shaped and moved in an obscene way" (*Cal.* 56.2); Datus, an actor of Atellanæ, "had represented in a certain *canticum* the line *ὕλαίτε πάντες, ὕλαίτε μῆτερ* as if he were drinking and swimming, in order to allude to Claudius and Agrippina's end, and in pronouncing the final line *Orcus vobis ducit pedes* he had pointed at the senators present" (*Nero* 39.3); Vespasian, known for his avarice, told

⁽¹⁷⁾ The term may have been borrowed by Cicero from the author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* I 6.10, where it used to denote one of the several means available to the orator in order to provoke his listeners' laughter in the course of his exordium.

⁽¹⁸⁾ "Who was possibly disliked for his excessive family pride" (E.W. SUTTON - H. RACKHAM, cf. supra n. 1).

foreign legates announcing the decision of their people to erect a colossal statue in his honour, that they could do so immediately, if they wanted, "showing them the hollow of his hand and telling them that the pedestal was ready"⁽¹⁹⁾ (*Vesp.* 23.3).

1.3.2. By means of dress and attributes

In *Alc.* 19.1-2 it is reported that Alcibiades and his friends were accused by metics and slaves produced by Androcles "of making a parody (*ἀπομιμήσεις*) of the mysteries of Eleusis in a drunken revel. They said that one Theodorus played the part of the herald, Polytion that of the Torch-bearer, and Alcibiades that of the High Priest and that the rest of his companions were there in the rôle of initiates and were dubbed *Mystae*". An imitation of a drunken revel was arranged in Tarentum by a certain Meton when the day was at hand on which the Tarentines were to ratify the decree summoning Pyrrhus to their war with Rome: "when the people were taking their seats in the assembly, he took a withered garland and a torch, after the way of revellers, and came dancing in behind a flute-girl who led the way for him", this to show his fellow-citizens what would no longer be possible as soon as Pyrrhus came into the city (*Pyrrh.* 13.6-9).

In his life of Augustus Suetonius devotes quite a few lines to a *cena* *δωδεκάθεος* organized, at a time when the capital was famine-stricken, by Octavian, who, clad as Apollo, presided over *convivae* disguised as gods and goddesses; the dinner in question is represented, not only by Suetonius⁽²⁰⁾ but also in an anonymous poem quoted in full⁽²¹⁾, as a lascivious rather than playful initiative of the young Caesar (*Aug.* 70.1). The fact, on the other hand, that Gaius in his most tender years was clad, in his father's camps in Germany, *manipulario habitu* (to which he owed his nickname Caligula), is attributed by Suetonius to a *iocus castrensis* (*Cal.* 9.1). Even after he had acceded to the throne, Gaius now

⁽¹⁹⁾ This and similar anecdotes served to prove that Vespasian strove after *dicacitas* right in the middle of his ugly pursuit of gain, *ut invidiam aliqua cavillatione diliberet transferretque ad sales* (*Vesp.* 23.1); *dicacitas* in this particular case was accompanied by a comic gesture.

⁽²⁰⁾ Suetonius' report on the *cena* in question is part of his account of Augustus' *adulteria* (69-70.1).

⁽²¹⁾ Cf. on this poem R. VERDIÈRE, *A propos d'un souper régence d'Octavien*, *LEC* 40 (1972), pp. 294-301.

and then appeared in *speculatoria caliga* (*Cal.* 52), no doubt without jocular intentions (cf. n. 13), but merely because the aforementioned *iocus castrensis* of his father's soldiers, or his mother's yearning for popularity⁽²²⁾, had for the rest of his life made him very fond of appearing in strange clothes or with inappropriate attributes⁽²³⁾.

2. JOKES INVOLVING ACTION

2.1. Allusive

Caligula's hand, *formata commotaque in obscenum modum*, and Datus' gestures, recalling Claudius and Agrippina's exitus, were instruments of non-verbal jokes which had their counterpart in the field of verbal humour, namely the *dicta quae habent suspicionem*⁽²⁴⁾ *ridiculi absconditam* (*De or.* II 278). Gestures, however, were not the only non-verbal medium of allusive jokes; their effect could also be obtained by means of action.

Quintilian's example of how "laughter is sometimes caused by an act possessing a certain element of seriousness as well" (*Inst. or.* VI 3.25) is an allusive joke made at the expense of consul Isauricus by the notorious M. Caelius during his praetorship: "when the consul broke his curule chair⁽²⁵⁾, Marcus Caelius had another put in its place, the seat of which was made of leather thongs, [by way of allusion to the story that] the consul had once been scourged by his father".

An allusive prank is recorded by Plutarch in his biography of Galba in connection with Vinus, one of the emperor's advisers: learning that a

⁽²²⁾ Cf. Tacitus, *Ann.* I 41.3: "... quem militari vocabulo Caligulam appellabant, quia plerumque ad concilianda vulgi studia eo regimine pedum induebatur; I 69.5 (opinion of Tiberius): *tamquam parum ambiciose filium ducis gregali habitu circumferat Caesaremque Caligulam appellari velit* (Agrippina).

⁽²³⁾ Cf. *Cal.* 52: *vestitu calcianaque et cetero habitu neque patrio neque civili, ac ne virili quidem ac denique humano semper usus est*, and the details that follow thereupon.

⁽²⁴⁾ *Suspicio*, as in *Inst. or.* VI 3.88 (*quod dicitur per suspicionem*), means 'à faire indiction, suggestion, trace' (*OLD* s.v. 3); the adj. *suspiciosus* in Suetonius, *Dom.* 10.2 (*ob suspiciosos iocos*) has a similar meaning: 'full of innuendoes' (*OLD* s.v. 2b).

⁽²⁵⁾ This must have caused much more hilarity than Caelius' malicious reaction to Isauricus' piece of bad luck, cf. the beginning of an anecdote concerning Claudius' literary activities, told by Suetonius, *Claud.* 41.1: *cum initio recitationis defractus compluribus subillis obestitate civitadam risus exortus esset* etc.

guest of his, the Vinius in question, had purloined a silver drinking-cup, the emperor Claudius invited him to supper again the next day and had set before him only earthenware (*Galba* 12.4). This is one of the few *ridicula* that are recorded both by Plutarch and by Suetonius (*Claud.* 32)⁽²⁶⁾.

2.2. Retorting

The *irridere* of an adversary *in eo ipso genere quo dixit* (*De or.* II 277) also has its counterpart in humour involving action. In Plutarch's life of Artaxerxes there is the story of how Artaxerxes, after he had given his concubine Aspasia, under constraint of a prevailing custom, to his son and appointed successor Dareius, took her away again shortly afterwards by appointing her a priestess of the Artemis of Ecbatana, in order that she might remain chaste for the rest of her life, "thinking that in this way he would inflict a punishment upon his son which was not grievous, but actually quite within bounds and tintured with pleasantry (*παρὰ δὲ μεμυγμένῳ*)" (*Art.* 27.3-4). A better example of jocular retort is available in his *Timoleon* in a digression on Dionysius II: "when one of those who wished to be witty, in mockery of Dionysius shook out his robe on coming into his presence, as if in the presence of a tyrant⁽²⁷⁾, Dionysius turned the jest upon him (*ἀντισχάζωντος*) by bidding him do so when he went out from his presence, that he might not take anything in the house away with him" (*Tim.* 15.6).

In Plutarch's Roman lives there are three instances of this type of pranks; the actors are Cato Minor, Cleopatra and Otho. Cato Minor turned the care of himself, which had been promised to his wife Attilia by his friend Munatius before they went off together for Macedonia⁽²⁸⁾, into a night-watch by himself over his friend (which the latter appears to have disliked), by telling Munatius after a day's journey, as soon as their supper was finished, 'Keep your promise and forsake me neither by day

⁽²⁶⁾ Plutarch mentions Claudius' joke in his account on Vinius' characteristics (*Galba* 12.4-5) and notes that the latter's mischief, "owing to the comic turn which Caesar's moderation took, was thought worthy of laughter, not of anger"; Suetonius, in his paragraph on Claudius' convivia, merely relates the basic data of the episode in question (without mentioning Vinius' name).

⁽²⁷⁾ Consciously afraid of an attempt on his life.

⁽²⁸⁾ A promise which Cato had welcomed with an ironical Πάρος μὲν ὄν, 'Certainly he will'.

nor by night' and ordering that two couches be placed in the same chamber for them; "and thus Munatius always slept — and that was the joke (*παρὰ δὲ*) — watched over by Cato" (*Cat. Mi.* 9.1-3). As for Cleopatra, after she had discovered that Antony, in order to avoid the shame of bad luck when fishing in her presence, had ordered his fishermen to dive and secretly fasten to his hook some fish that had been previously caught, she invited her friends to come and admire her lover's skill the following day, and when Antony had let down his line, she ordered one of her people to get the start of him by swimming to his hook and fastening on it a salted Pontic herring (*Ant.* 29.5-7). The third instance of jocular retort serves in Plutarch's life of Galba as an example of how Nero was well pleased to be rallied (*σχοπετόμενος*) by his friend Otho for parsimony and meanness: "Nero once anointed himself with a costly ointment and sprinkled a little of it upon Otho; whereupon Otho, entertaining the emperor in his turn the following day, suddenly brought into play gold and silver pipes on all sides of the room, out of which the ointment gushed freely, like so much water" (*Galba* 19.5).

In Suetonius' *Vitæ* this type of prank is represented by a *iocus perniciosus*⁽²⁹⁾ played by Caligula: after a *murmillo* with whom he was fencing in the arena, both of them using wooden swords, had feigned to fall down, the emperor stabbed him with an iron dagger and afterwards made a tour of the arena, a palm of victory in his hand (*Cal.* 32.2). Caligula's dispatch of a *lectica* to a Roman whom he had invited to be present at his son's execution and who had excused himself on the ground of ill-health (*Cal.* 27.4) was another vicious joke of that emperor; like Cato Minor's *παρὰ δὲ* it was a practical retort to a verbal reaction, not to an act. The same remark applies to part of Tiberius' equally cruel retort to a buffoon who, on seeing a funeral procession go by, had shouted to the deceased to go and tell Augustus that the legacy which he had bequeathed to the *plebs* had not yet been paid out: he had the man brought before him, made him receive the amount due, sentenced him to death and ordered him to go and tell Augustus the truth (*Tib.* 57.2).

2.3. Seemingly absurd

There is another prankish *ridiculum* which has been handed down by both biographers (and also by Pliny the Elder and Cassius Dio), namely

⁽²⁹⁾ The term is borrowed from the *Vita Commodi* 10.4 in the *Historia Augusta*.

the fact that Julius Caesar had with him, during his African campaign against Caecilius Metellus Scipio and king Juba, a despicable scion of the Corneli Scipiones, either "to make game of the predictions (*ad eludendas vaticinationes*) disclosing that according to Fate the *Scipionum nomen* would be *felix et invictum* in that province" (Suetonius, *Iul.* 59) or "flouting in pleasantry (*φλοσυφίζων ἐν περὶδῶν τῶν*) the Scipio who commanded the enemy, or trying in good earnest to appropriate to himself the omen" (Plutarch, *Caes.* 52-4-5). This was, whatever Caesar's real intention may have been, a practical counterpart of the verbal *subabsurdum*, an utterance apparently silly but acceptable on second thought (cf. *De or.* II 274).

Caesar's decision to have with him during his African campaign the Scipio in question may be compared with Caligula's intention to appoint Incitatus, his favourite race-horse, consul (*Cal.* 55.3), "a promise that he certainly would have carried out if he had lived longer" (Cassius Dio LIX 14-7). The acceptability on second thought of an Incitatus consul, i.e. the transition of that promotion from the field of sheer madness to that of the *subabsurdum*, was due to the fact that a horse as consul would have been an extreme insult to the emperor's great enemy, the Roman senate. Gaius' devotion to his horse⁽³⁰⁾ is quoted by Suetonius among the proofs that the emperor *quorum studio teneretur, omnibus ad insaniam favit* (*Cal.* 55.1). That *insania*, in my opinion, may have been in more than one case⁽³¹⁾ merely a sense of humour very keen on the production of nonsense.

2.4. Pulling one's leg⁽³²⁾

In the field of humour involving action the unexpected consisted in pleasant or unpleasant surprise produced by hoaxing. Plutarch has a sin-

⁽³⁰⁾ Cf. *Cal.* 55.3: *praeter equile marmoreum et praesaepe eburneum praeterque purpurea tegumenta ac monilia e gemmis domum etiam et familiam et suppellectilem dedit, quo lautius nomine eius invitati acciperentur.*

⁽³¹⁾ Cf. also what is represented by Suetonius as the culmination of Gaius' fondness of disguise: *atque etiam Veneris cultu conspectus est* (*Cal.* 52), and as the disconcerting outcome of his *canendi ac saltandi voluptas: et quondam tres consulares secunda vigilia in Palatium accitus multaque et extrema metuentis super pulpitem conlocavit, deinde magno tibiarum et scabellorum crepitu cum palla tunicaque talari prosiliit ac desaltato cantico abiit* (*Cal.* 54.2).

⁽³²⁾ Pulling the reader's leg is an important element of the humour produced by the author of the *Historia Augusta*, cf. his mystification of the reader by assuming the tone

gle example of that type of prank, namely the way in which a Spanish friend of Crassus, Vibius Pacciatus, blending *φιλοφροσύνη* with *πειθῶδία*, provided young Crassus, hiding out of fear for Marius' cruelty in a cave along the Spanish sea-shore, not only with food, but also, "considering the youth of his guest and the enjoyments appropriate to his years", with two comely female slaves (*Crass.* 5.1-5).

In Suetonius' *Vitae* there are various instances of actions whose jocular character was based on the creation of false fear or idle hope. It is said of Augustus that he celebrated *festos et sollemnes dies profusissime, nonnumquam tantum ioculariter*, the former by distributing *munera*, such as robes and gold and silver, the latter by offering his guests, under obscure and ambiguous labels, *nihil praeter cilia et spongias et rutabula et forcipes atque alia id genus* (*Aug.* 75). By summing in the middle of the night three former consuls to the palace, Caligula made them fear all sorts of evil (*multa et extrema metuentis*), except the pantomimic dance which the emperor was going to perform before their eyes (*Cal.* 54.2). On reaching in the course of his military expedition (39-40 A.D.) the coast of the Channel, the same Gaius behaved as if he were about to invade Britain, until he suddenly ordered his soldiers to collect shells and fill their helmets and pockets with them (*Cal.* 46). In each of these cases the victims of the ruler's humour must have concluded that the emperor was pulling their leg. As for the trick played by Caligula upon a certain Aponius Saturninus, it was a case of intentional misunderstanding⁽³³⁾ rather than a hoax: on noticing, in the course of an auction of amphitheater-remnants, that Aponius had dozed off on his bench, Caligula told the auctioneer not to overlook the man's continuous nodding in his direction, and put no end to the auction until thirteen slaves had been knocked down to Aponius without his knowledge, at a total price of nine million sesterces (*Cal.* 38.4).

of traditional historiography, by behaving as if he were living a full century earlier than he actually did, and by writing under no less than six pseudonyms. Although Plutarch enjoyed joining his own humour to that produced by his personalities, there is nothing even remotely similar in his *Parallel Lives*.

⁽³³⁾ More often practised in interpreting words (cf. *De or.* II 259) than in interpreting facts.

2.5. *Pantomimic*

This is the clownish humour that consists mainly in falling, throwing and slapping, and that is professionally produced in our own time by the scenarists of slapstick-pictures. In antiquity this type of humour was not a monopoly of the stage: it was also practised in the streets⁽³⁴⁾ of large cities, especially by youngsters of important families and at night.

The laughter Cleopatra's hoax (*Ant.* 29.5-7, cf. sub 2.2.) elicited from the friends she had invited was undoubtedly no derision of Antony, but a compliment to her own wit in retorting. A large part of pantomimic *ridicula* quoted by Suetonius, however, was aimed at raising *derisus* of their victims: shaving their *comae*⁽³⁵⁾, making them appear in ill-timed or improper attire⁽³⁶⁾ or providing them with crazy attributes⁽³⁷⁾, giving them a ducking⁽³⁸⁾, forcing them to do ridiculous things⁽³⁹⁾. Most of these jokes are to be found in the life of Caligula, who upon his accession to the throne, did openly and in broad daylight much of what he had previously done *capillamento celatus* (*Cal.* II) and at night.

Plutarch apparently had little interest in this rather coarse kind of joking. In his lives of Greek statesmen it appears only in *Alc.* 8.1: "He once gave Hipponicus a blow with his fist, the father of Callias, a man

⁽³⁴⁾ In classical Rome amusement of this kind consisted mainly in thrashing, immersing in the *cloacae* and *furari per iocum*, cf. *Nero* 26.1: *redevitis a cena verberare ac repugnantes vulnerare cloacisque demergere assuevit*; 16.2: *vetiti quadrigariorum lusus, quibus in veterata licentia passim vagantibus fallere ac furari per iocum ius erat*.

⁽³⁵⁾ Cf. n. 6.

⁽³⁶⁾ Cf. *Cal.* 26.2: *quosdam summis honoribus functos ad esedam sibi currere togatos et cenanti modo ad pluteum modo ad pedes stare succinctos linteo passus est*.

⁽³⁷⁾ Cf. *Cal.* 27.2: *alterum qui se periturum (...) voverat, cunctantem pueris tradidit, verbenatum infulatunumque votum reposcentes per vicos agerent*. Unlike the amusing imitation by means of dress or attributes, discussed sub 1.3.2, the actions dealt with in n. 36 and 37 aimed at derision of the people who were forced to appear in those clothes or with those attributes.

⁽³⁸⁾ Cf. e.g. the treatment of the losers in the *certamen faciundiae* organized by Caligula in Lyon: *eos qui maxime displicissent (serunt) scripta sua ... delere iussos, nisi ferulis obviugari aut flumine proximo mergi maluissent* (*Cal.* 20). Cf. also *Cal.* 32.1: *Puteolis dedicatione pontis (...) cum multis e litore invitasset ad se, repente omnis praecipitavit*.

⁽³⁹⁾ Cf. *Cal.* 20: *eos qui maxime displicissent scripta sua spongia linguave delere iussos*; 26.5: *pro paenarum patres familias notos in bonam partem sed insignis debilitate aliqua corporis subiciebat*; 27.3: *multos honesti ordinis (...) bestiarum more quadrupes cavea coercuit*.

of great reputation and influence owing to his wealth and family — not that he had any quarrel with him, or was prey to anger, but simply for the joke of the thing (ἐπὶ γέλωτι), on a wager with some companions". In his biographies of Roman personalities it appears in the story concerning the treatment by Mediterranean pirates of their Roman captives: "Whenever a captive cried out that he was a Roman (...) some would put Roman boots on his feet, and others would throw a toga round him, in order, forsooth, that there might be no mistake about him again" (*Pomp.* 24.11-12).

Whereas Suetonius⁽⁴⁰⁾ has various examples of unexpected projectiles (*olearum et palmularum ossa, fragmina panis, stercus et cenam, rapa, poma et obsonia*) thrown at or by his heroes, they are totally absent from Plutarch's Greek and Roman lives. The mischief committed by Suetonius' Nero and Otho in the course of their nocturnal rambling consists in action⁽⁴¹⁾, that of Plutarch's Antony is merely verbal: "When by night he would station himself at the doors or windows of the common folk and scoff (σζωπτοῦντι) at those within, she (Cleopatra) would go with him on his round of mad follies, wearing the garb of a serving maiden" (*Ant.* 29.2). The difference between Plutarch and Suetonius in dealing with pantomimic humor is also illustrated by juxtaposing Plutarch's note on the treatment of Geminus (who tried in 32 B.C. to reconcile Antony with Octavian) at Antony's Athenian residence, and Suetonius' details on the treatment of Claudius at the court of his nephew and predecessor Caligula: "Geminus was always put upon with jokes at supper and insulted with places of no honour at table, but he endured all this and waited for an opportunity to confer with Antony" (*Ant.* 59.2-3); "when Claudius appeared a little after the hour announced for dinner, he was only admitted with difficulty and after he had made the round of the triclinium, and ever so often as he fell asleep after eating (...) he was assaulted with stones of olives and dates, and now and then he was awakened as if for fun by the buffoons who used rod or whip. They also used to slip *socci* over the hands of the snoring Claudius, expecting that on being suddenly awakened, he would rub his face" (*Claud.* 8.1).

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Cf. *Claud.* 8.1, 18.2; *Vit.* 17.2; *Vesp.* 4.3; *Aug.* 98.3.

⁽⁴¹⁾ Cf. *Nero* 26.1, *Otho* 2.1. In the *Historia Augusta*, *Verns* 4.7, a new item was added to the catalogue of nocturnal exploits performed by rulers and future rulers: *iaciebat et nummos in popinas maximos, quibus calices frangeret*.

CONCLUSION

In his *Alex.* 1.2 Plutarch writes: "It is not Histories that I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a witty remark (*ῥῆμα = dictum*) or a jest (*παιδιά*) often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall, or the greatest armaments, or sieges of cities"⁽⁴⁷⁾. One may wonder, however, whether Plutarch's recording of verbal and non-verbal humour, instead of aiming at the reader's information (*docere*), did not rather serve the same purpose as his personal *practice* of verbal humour⁽⁴⁸⁾, that of diverting the reader (*delectare*).

Although in the passage quoted above Plutarch appears to attach equal importance to *ῥήματα* and *παιδιά*, in selecting humour produced by or inflicted on his heroes he actually shows less interest in *παιδιά*, i.e. in non-verbal jesting⁽⁴⁹⁾, and just like, when recording verbal humour, he complies with rhetorical precepts in avoiding *obscenitas* (humour on sexual behaviour), he is (unlike Suetonius) quite averse to recording the most turbulent and rowdy kind of non-verbal jesting, the so-called pantomimic humour.

As for Plutarch's attitude towards *Roman* humour in particular, it appears to have been marked by a greater interest in *dicacitas in verbis* of whatever quality than in non-verbal jesting. The reason therefor may be that his recording of Roman non-verbal humour posed no problem of translation⁽⁴⁵⁾, whereas Latin verbal wit based on wording⁽⁴⁶⁾ actually

did — however feeble and schoolmasterly it may have been — and consequently may have been experienced by Plutarch as a challenge to his dexterity in rendering in his mother-tongue the language of his sources on Latin puns.

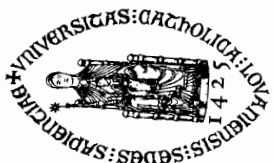
(47) *Alex.* 1.2: ὅτε γὰρ ἱστορίας γράφομεν ἀλλὰ βίους, ὅτε ταῖς ἐπιφανεστάταις πράξεσι πάντως ἐνεσσι δῆλοισι ἀρετῆς ἢ κακίας, ἀλλὰ πρῶγμα βραχὺ πολλάκις καὶ ῥήμα καὶ παιδιά τις ἔμψασιν ἥθους ἐποίησε μᾶλλον ἢ μάχη μυριόνηκροι καὶ παρατάξεις αἰ μέγιστα καὶ πολιορκίαι πόλεων.

(48) Cf. my paper on *Verbal Humour in Plutarch and Suetonius' Lives*, *AncSoc* 23 (1992), pp. 189-232 (in particular p. 232).

(49) Such is the meaning of *παιδιά* in *Alex.* 17.9, *Art.* 27.3-4, *Cat. mi.* 9.1-3, *Caes.* 52.4-5, *Crass.* 5.1-5; all of which have been quoted in this paper. In *Brit.* 34.8: παιδιὰν ὁ πότος ἔσχεν οὐκ ἄχαριν οὐδ' ἀφιλόσοφον, the term must refer either to verbal humour or to verbal concomitants of non-verbal jesting.

(45) Except, occasionally, for its verbal concomitants.

(46) In itself *dicacitas in rebus*, verbal wit based not on wording but on meaning, did not offer any particular resistance to translation; it did when it was couched in comic lines, satirical songs and ditto versets.



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