

ANGELO CASANOVA (ED.)

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VI

THE TRAGIC ACTOR IN PLUTARCH

T.S. Eliot in his popular *Murder in the Cathedral* wrote the following verses regarding the actor's work:

You know and do not know, what it is to act or suffer.
You know and do not know, that acting is suffering, and suffering action.
Neither does the actor suffer nor the patient act. But both are fixed
in an eternal action, an eternal patience.

These verses of T.S. Eliot connect acting with human suffering, a romantic metaphor in which the poet equates the dramatic actor with the human being. With these poetic words the author is no doubt trying to bestow dignity upon a despised job, but can this positive vision of the actor be traced in all periods? I think it cannot. A brief review of Aristotle's, Plato's, and Plutarch's opinions in this respect seems to support this assumption, insofar as in their view the tragic actor is far from being a respectable person. To begin with, he modifies the immortal texts of tragedies. Then, he acts as a sorcerer by infusing diverse feelings in the audience, without taking into consideration whether audiences like it or not. Finally, the actor uses words for his own advantage. Consequently, we gather that, according to these views, the actor is regarded as a sort of sophist, namely as someone with special skills who is interested in the form only, and not in the meaning behind it.

In our view Plutarch is a pivotal witness in order to assess the value assigned to dramatic actors in ancient Greek literature¹. However, we must highlight, in the first place, that the Chaeronean is split between two different conceptions of Greek drama. On the one hand, it is well known that Plutarch was a good reader of tragic plays, whose quotations he uses frequently², but, on the other, it can hardly be denied that he was able to enjoy classical plays merely as reruns to be played in his own time³. When evaluating his testimony, we also realize that he is influenced by two quite different worlds: ancient Greece on the one hand, where actors enjoyed such a great esteem that *poleis* even used them as ambassadors⁴, and the Roman world on

¹ On the meaning of ὑποκριτής, cf. Easterling 1997, 14.

² Cf. Papadi 2007, 44-45 and n. 2.

³ In fact, Plutarch seems not to notice the great importance of drama during the Classical age; cf. *Mor.* 348F-349A. See also Papadi 2007, 58. Regarding the essential changes from classical theatre to Plutarch's era, cf. Easterling 1997, 156, 213, 220. About the kind of theatre that Plutarch was able to enjoy, cf. Papadi 2007, 4; Pickard-Cambridge 1968, 82; Jones 2001, 205-218.

⁴ On the relationship between dramatic actors and cities, cf. Easterling 1997, 14, 26, 156;

the other, where actors were considered as effeminate, lying, profligate, and unlawful foreigners, as attested, for example, by Livy⁵. This is the reason why Plutarch's views are very interesting in view of an assessment of the influence exerted by actors in Antiquity.

As Plutarch's philosophical background should mainly be sought in Plato and Aristotle, an overview of the positions of his predecessors will equip us with a framework allowing to evaluate Plutarch's conceptions in a better way. As far as Plato is concerned, it is interesting to observe that his attack against tragedy, and hence against the tragic actor, is based on a series of metaphysical, anthropological, and ethical assumptions. To begin with, the first argument against theatrical performance is based on Plato's theory of *mimesis*⁶. Indeed, if for Plato our world is a copy of the intelligible realm, it follows that dramatic art is nothing more than a poor imitation of this imitation. Therefore, this re-enacting of reality, being a copy of a copy, is most remote from the Ideas – in his own words, τρίτος ἀπὸ τῆς ἀληθείας⁷. From this perspective it is easier to understand Socrates' censure against «slanderer actors», who entertain the audience by imitating natural sounds⁸. The second Platonic argument against theatre is based on his conception of the internal balance within the human soul and the influence that viewing a tragedy may have on the individual. Passions have a preeminent place in drama and the abundance of affections of all kinds on stage may negatively influence human beings by disrupting the natural balance of their soul⁹. Last but not least, there is the ethical aspect: theatre does not produce any profitable effects for the individual, since due to the representation of different modes of behaviour on stage, it may lead the audience to suffer *apate*, that is 'deception'. Thus according to *Cratylus* 408c: «falsehood dwells below among common men, is rough and like the tragic goat; for tales and falsehoods are most at home there, in the tragic life»¹⁰. Moreover, Plato warns that due to the dramatic interplay between reality and fiction, the spectator

Develin 1989. The professionalization of their job took place during the fifth century thanks to the economic growth of Athens; cf. Ghiron-Bistagne 1976, 179-191. See also Csapo 2010, 102-103.

⁵ Cf. Liv. 24.24. See also Rawson 1991, 468-487, and 508-545.

⁶ About *mimesis*, cf. Koller 1954; *contra* Keuls 1978, 9-30. See also Papadi 2007, 26-27.

⁷ We could refer, for example, to the metaphor of the three beds, cf. Plat. *R.* 596-599d; cf. Keuls 1978, 25-28.

⁸ Cf. Plat. *R.* 397a.

⁹ Cf. Plat. *R.*, 605d-606d; Halliwell 1996, 343-345.

¹⁰ Regarding the theory of *apate* in both Plato and Plutarch, cf. Papadi 2007, 60-62; De Lacy 1952, 159-171.

could be tempted to copy tragic actions in his daily life¹¹.

When we look at Aristotle's conception of tragedy, we find similar conclusions. Admittedly, the concept of *mimesis* has gone through an overhaul by the Philosopher¹², but it is not difficult to find contexts in which Platonic contents are used in a similar way. An example that could illustrate our point is the well-known Aristotelian definition of «tragedy» as μίμησις πράξεως... δρώντων, «the enactment of action of persons performing deeds»¹³. In line with Plato, the Philosopher includes his non-favourable opinions in both *The "Art" of Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*. As far as the former is concerned, we must consider the comparison he makes between actors and poets, on the one hand, and the decadent politicians of his time, on the other:

«Those (*scil.* actors) who use these (*scil.* volume, harmony, and rhythm) properly nearly always carry off the prizes¹⁴ in dramatic contests, and as at the present day actors have greater influence on the stage than the poets, it is the same in political contests, owing to the corruptness of our forms of government»¹⁵.

Aristotle's opinion in his *Poetics* is rather similar, since he accuses actors of forcing poets to create bad dramas with the aim of showing off their own personal brilliance: «such plays are composed by bad poets for the sake of the actors: for in composing show pieces, and stretching the plot beyond its capacity, they are often forced to distort the continuity»¹⁶.

From these Platonic and Aristotelian precedents we may easily understand Plutarch's negative views of drama and actors. Both aspects have been sufficiently dealt with in a recent monograph by Diotima Papadi, *Tragedy and Theatricality in Plutarch*, which includes an excellent overview of this topic. It is interesting in any case to summarise some of her conclusions:

– To begin with, it is noteworthy that Plutarch did not devote a special work to the tragic genre; however, most of his opinions on the issue proceed

¹¹ See, for example, *Philebus* 50b: «so our argument shows that pains and pleasures are mixed together in lamentation and in tragedies and comedies – not only in stage-plays, but in the entire tragedy and comedy of life». Also, Halliwell 1996, 337-338, calls our attention in the same sense to *Phaedo* 115a, in which Socrates would play the main character of scene.

¹² Aristotle uses the term in a less pejorative way than Plato, including, in the case of the Philosopher, all creative writings; cf. Papadi 2007, 27.

¹³ Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1449b24; 1447a. See also Lucas 1968, 96-97.

¹⁴ Regarding the prizes of actors, cf. Easterling 1997, 26, 152, 224.

¹⁵ Cf. Arist. *Rhet.* 1403a4-5. Kennedy 1991, 218 and n. 6, highlights the following concept: «This point [...] seems to reflect the Platonic view that political oratory under democracy had become a form of flattery and that it offered entertainment to the mob». Plutarch will use this conception in his direct attack against actors, as we shall see below.

¹⁶ Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1451b35-1452a. It seems likely that the actors demanded long speeches from the authors as show-pieces, to show off their acting skill; cf. Lucas 1968, 125-126. See also Easterling 1997, 207.

from *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* and from *Were the Athenians more Famous in War or in Wisdom*.

– Also interesting is the fact that Plutarch tends to follow Plato's conception, or even to radicalize it¹⁷. A good example is the metaphysical perspective of Plato's argument against tragedy. In fact, Plutarch accepts the main principles of the aforementioned theory of *mimesis*¹⁸, but he then goes a step further: if in Plato's view theatre and actors were nothing but a scenic rendering of the material realm, which is itself a copy of the intelligible one, Plutarch further develops this theory further by distinguishing between actors and dramatic works. He metaphorically refers to theatre as a statue, but «they (*scil.* the actors) were painters and gilders and dyers of statues»¹⁹. Therefore, in Plutarch's opinion, actors do not even rise to the level of “tragedy as a statue”, since they are conceived of as simple decorators.

The same may be seen in the attack on tragedy from an ethical perspective. In this regard, Plutarch equates the tragic actor and the flatterer, an attitude which seems to be inspired by Socrates's words about the sophists in Plato's *Gorgias* 463a²⁰. According to Plutarch, the flatterer is similar to the actor²¹ in the following aspects:

- making use of falsehood, exaggeration, and variation of voice²²;
- pretending to be who he is not²³;

¹⁷ Cf. Papadi 2007, 27, n. 25: «He (*scil.* Plutarch) charges it with a more pragmatic meaning; he closely relates imitation to reality and life».

¹⁸ Cf. Van der Stockt 1992, 21-55.

¹⁹ Cf. Plut. *Bellone* 348E. See also 345E-F, where Plutarch equates actors to historians who have not taken part in the events they are writing about: «exhibiting themselves with their characters as tradition records them, in order that they might share in a certain effulgence, so to speak, and splendour».

²⁰ Cf. Plat. *Gorgias* 463a: «It seems to me then, Gorgias, to be a pursuit that is not a matter of art, but showing a shrewd, gallant spirit which has a natural bent for clever dealing with mankind, and I sum up its substance in the name *flattery*».

²¹ Plutarch seems to be confused regarding the borderline between reality and fiction, which, in our opinion, accounts for his arguments, as we can see in *Quaest. conv.* 5.1, 673C-674C: «Why we take pleasure in hearing actors represent anger and pain, but not in seeing people actually experience these emotions». See also Papadi 2007, 45-47; Tagliacchi 1960, 124-142; O'Donnell 1975, 73-76.

²² However, this conception must be clarified, due the fact that Plutarch in other parts of his works – for example, in *Demetr.* 18.3-5 or 44.9 – does not reproach actors for their variation of voice, gestures and stances, except if these theatrical actions influence reality. See also Papadi 2007, 190. It is also interesting to notice how Plutarch uses text-structures and different details from tragedies in his biographies; cf. De Lacy 1952, 59-71; Braund 1993, 468-474. About the importance of voice in classical theatre, see Damen 1989, 318 and n. 12.

²³ Plutarch, *Quom. adul.* 53D-E, assimilates the flatterer to a chameleon. In such a statement, the definition of the dramatic actor is included as well. See also Papadi 2007, 55.

– secretly pursuing his own benefit – which in the case of the flatterer could be different, but for the actor, is unfailingly the approval of audience, and consequently fame and wealth²⁴;

– basing his performance on illusion in order to be persuasive, even under the risk of causing *apate* to the audience²⁵;

– having an expensive job, but useless to the city's interests;

– needing a chorus and secondary players²⁶.

To sum up, it is easy to conclude that Plutarch did not hold actors in high esteem. However, in what follows we will provide a survey of his views, taking the list of actors included in his *On the Fame of the Athenians* 348D-F²⁷ as a starting point:

«Let their tragic actors accompany them, men like Nicostratus and Callippides, Myniscus, Theodorus, and Polus, who robe Tragedy and bear her litter, as though she were some woman of wealth».

(a) Nicostratus

Although Plutarch does not offer too many details on Nicostratus' life, we can certainly state that he was famous, if we can rely on the information collected from Greek inscriptions. So, *IG II² 2325s* confirms that Nicostratus won thrice the Lenean competition of 425; *IG II² 2318*, line 862 also attests that he won the Dionysia contest of the year 400/399, and, finally, the fragment p of *IG II² 2325* assures again that he was the winner some other time, even though the exact date is uncertain. Hence, it is not surprising that classical literature abounds with references to this actor²⁸.

The oldest reference to him can be found in Xenophon's *Symposium*²⁹, when Hermogenes asks Socrates if his answer must be accompanied by the flute, «the way the actor Nicostratus used to recite tetrameter verses». Indeed, Socrates' answer is affirmative³⁰. Philodemus³¹ is even more emphatic when stating that, in his opinion, Nicostratus and Callippides are *πάν ἐν τραγωδίᾳ* («everything in tragedy»). The *Suda*³² also preserves a proverb that was surely inspired by the actor we are dealing with. It goes as follows: Ἐγὼ ποιήσω πάντα κατὰ Νικόστρατον («I will do everything Nicostratus'

²⁴ Plutarch, besides, regards empty this kind of fame: cf. *Quaest. conv.* 7.6, 709C.

²⁵ Cf. Plut. *Bellone* 348B-C, supports this conception in Plato's *Gorgias*; see also Papadi 2007, 58-62; Di Gregorio 1976, 172.

²⁶ Cf. Plut. *Quodomo adulator* 63A-C; 65C-D; *Quaest. conv.* 7.6, 709C. See also Papadi 2007, 49.

²⁷ Cf. Plut. *Bellone* 348DF.

²⁸ Cf. Ghiron-Bistagne 1976, 18-19 and 26.

²⁹ Cf. Xen. *Symp.* 6.3.

³⁰ See also Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.

³¹ Cf. Philod. *Rhet.* I p. 197 Sudhaus.

³² Cf. *Suda*, s.v. Νικόστρατος (v 405 Adler); Ghiron-Bistagne 1976, 147.

way»). The meaning of the proverb, cf. *App. Prov.* 2.9 (CPG I 395), is «doing everything the right way». This is due to the fact that Nicostratus was considered the best tragic actor, especially when he played the character of the messenger. Actually, there is a variation in the sense of this proverb, which can also mean «I will express everything in speech as Nicostratus did»³³.

The latest reference to the actor comes from Polyaeus³⁴, who highlights that Athenian artists enjoyed great fame even beyond the city's borders. Moreover, he asserts that Nicostratus was regarded, with Callippides, as the best actor that could be hired by Alexander of Thessaly. Alexander wished to gather all citizens in a theatre where both actors would perform in order to be able to capture his enemies that would gather there. His plan was a success.

(b) Callippides

As far as Callippides is concerned, we are faced once more with one of the greatest actors of the classical period. If we take into account the Greek inscriptions³⁵, we learn that he was five times the winner of the Lenaia of 425 (427) and in the year 419-418 he won with two dramas written by Calistratus, *Amphilochus* and *Ixion*. Regarding the characters he played, even though his career seems to have been prolific, we only know that in Aristophanes' lost comedy *Σκηνᾶς καταλαμβάνουσαι* he was said to sit on the ground³⁶.

At the same time, Plutarch offers some curious information concerning the life of this tragic actor in his *Life of Alcibiades*³⁷ and in the *Sayings of Spartans*³⁸. In the former work he tells us that Callippides took part in the procession that accompanied Alcibiades on his way back to Athens during the spring of 407, though he does not believe every detail of the story. Plutarch calls in doubt the information given by Duris the Samian, who stated that Callippides and Chrysogonus – winner in the Pythian games – were both dressed richly, and that Alcibiades' ship was carrying a purple sail, just like «after a drinking bout, he were off on a revel». In Plutarch's opinion, such a pretentious display for soldiers coming back from exile can hardly be true.

³³ Ἐγὼ τοι φράσω πάντα κατὰ Νικόστρατον (see CPG I 395, in appar.).

³⁴ Cf. Polyaeus. 6.10. This information can be dated in 392 BC thanks to Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.18. Ghiron-Bistagne 1976, 147 and 347, wrongly quotes 4.8.10.

³⁵ Cf. *IG* II² 2325r and 2319.

³⁶ Ar. fr. 490 K.-A.; Kock 1880, 514 suggested that he had played either Telephus or Odysseus. It is possible that Strattis' play *Callippides* (frs. 11-13 K.-A.) also refers to the actor.

³⁷ Cf. Plut. *Alc.* 32.

³⁸ Cf. Plut. *Laced. sent.* 212F.

Moreover, Plutarch was intrigued even more by the fact that historians such as Theopompus, Ephorus, or Xenophon did not mention the episode at all. In any case, Athenaeus also records the arrival of Alcibiades with some minor differences³⁹.

The other reference to Callippides in the *Sayings of Spartans* recreates a meeting between king Agesilaus and the actor. As Plutarch asserts, the artist was so tired of strutting in front of the sovereign without getting his attention, that he eventually approached Agesilaus, and asked whether he knew him. In response the king said: «'yea, are you not Callippides the buffoon?' For this is how the Lacedaemonians describe actors»⁴⁰.

Plutarch's criticism against this excessive behaviour in actors seems, in any case, to have been a *communis opinio*. As a matter of fact, in Xenophon's *Banquet*⁴¹ Philip is accused during the symposium of being self-conceited by Lycon, another guest. He responds by saying «My pride is better founded, I think [...] than that of Callippides, the actor, who is consumed by vanity because he can fill the seats with weeping audiences».

Plutarch does not seem to know anything about Callippides' professional background. Aristotle, however, in his *Poetics*⁴², describes the difficult confrontation between the old and the new school of Athenian actors. As the Philosopher reports, Mynniscus, another famous actor who worked with Aeschylus, used to call Callippides *πίθηκον*, a «monkey», because he resorted to extreme overacting⁴³. Aristotle also⁴⁴ criticises the way of representing female characters by the new school and, especially, the way Callippides did it. In Aristotle's opinion, to represent *οὐκ ἐλευθέραις γυναῖκας* («non free women») disgraces the tragic genre⁴⁵.

³⁹ Ath. 12, 535d-e, adding that someone, dressed with theatrical clothes, said: «Sparta could not have put up with two Lysanders, and neither could Athens have put up with two Alcibiadeses». As a result, we must understand that this is a critic against Callippides and Alcibiades as well, for being dressed with rich clothes and, consequently, having adopted the Persian way of life.

⁴⁰ The same conversation is referred in Plut. *Ages.* 21.4, where the author uses it as an example of excess, against the concept of *μετρίως*, widely defended in Plutarch's works. See also Ghiron-Bistagne 1976, 144.

⁴¹ Cf. Xen. *Symp.* 3.11; see also Ghiron-Bistagne 1976, 135.

⁴² Arist. *Poet.* 1461b 32-1462a; see also Ghiron-Bistagne 1976, 143.

⁴³ Moreover, Pindar confirms this epithet; see also Ghiron-Bistagne 1976, 2 and 143. See also *contra* Csapo 2010, 117-118.

⁴⁴ Cf. Arist. *Poet.* 1462b 7-8.

⁴⁵ Origen criticises Euripides' works in the same way, cf. *Contra Celsum* 7.36.34-36. See also the ironic reference to the realism of Callippides' performances in Ar. fr. 490 K.-A. (mentioned above): «All like Callippides, I am sitting on the floor in sweeping». See also Csapo 2010, 119-120.

Finally, a last reference comes from the anonymous *Life of Sophocles*⁴⁶, which reports that Callippides sent to the poet the grapes that eventually killed him.

(c) Mynniscus of Chalcis

Aristotle described Mynniscus as the most renowned member of the old school of actors. Indeed, his career is dated in the third quarter of the fifth century through epigraphical testimonies, in which Mynniscus of Chalcis appears as the winner at the Dionysia of 445⁴⁷, at the Lenaia of 427, and, again, at the Dionysia of 423-422⁴⁸. Additional information confirms these dates.

According to the anonymous *Life of Aeschylus*, we should place the poet and Mynniscus together as writer and performer of dramas composed by Aeschylus during his maturity. This text does indeed stress the fact that Mynniscus was the second of three actors that were hired by Aeschylus throughout his career⁴⁹.

One final reference to Mynniscus is transmitted by Athenaeus⁵⁰. From it we learn that Plato the poet ridiculed the actor in his comedy *Σύρραξ* («sweepings»), preserved only fragmentarily⁵¹, in which Mynniscus received the appellative «gourmet of delicacies», ὀσοφάγος.

(d) Theodorus of Athens

The fourth member of Plutarch's list is Theodorus of Athens, nicknamed πελεθοβάψ, «who washes away ordure», according to Hesychius⁵². He was one of the most famous actors in the 4th century⁵³, the winner of the Dionysia of 390⁵⁴, and again of the Lenaia of 380-375⁵⁵. Moreover, thanks to epigraphical sources related to donations to the Delphian sanctuary in 363, it

⁴⁶ Cf. *Vita Soph.* 14.56-59 (test. 1 Radt). It is also mentioned by Ps.-Luc. *Macrob.* 24.

⁴⁷ *IG II²* 2325 p.

⁴⁸ *IG II²* 2325 rs, 2318 line 584. Regarding the controversy about the existence of one or two actors with the same name, cf. O'Connor 1908, 118.

⁴⁹ Cf. *Vita Aesch.* 15 (test. 1 Radt).

⁵⁰ Cf. Ath. 8, 334D.

⁵¹ Cf. fr. 175 K.-A.: (A.) ὀδὶ μὲν Ἀναγυράσιος ὀρφῶς ἐστὶ σοι. / (B.) οἶδ', ὃ φίλος Μυννίσκος ἔσθ' ὁ Χαλκιδεύς. / (A.) καλῶς λέγεις: A. «You have got a great sea-perch with this Anagyrasius / B. I know, the one who has Mynniscus the Chalcidian as a friend. / A. You say well».

⁵² Cf. Hsch. s.v. πελεθοβάψ (π 1300 Hansen). See also Ghiron-Bistagne 1976, 143: «Peut-on expliquer le surnom «l'éboueur» que portait le grand Théodoros (Hésychius) comme un souvenir de son interprétation dans un rôle d'Héraclès nettoyant les écuries d'Augias?».

⁵³ Theodorus is mentioned in the comedy *Just Alike* or *The Obeliaphoroi* of Ephippus, fr. 16 K.-A.

⁵⁴ *IG II²* 2325 p.

⁵⁵ *IG II²* 2325 t.

is possible to conclude that Theodorus was indeed Athenian and that he probably was a very wealthy actor, given the sum he donated, namely 70 drachmas⁵⁶.

As far as the literary sources are concerned, it is worthwhile to note that Theodorus is the most cited actor in Plutarch's *Vitae* and *Moralia*, which allows us to reconstruct his life in chronological order.

First, Plutarch places Theodorus with Thettalus of Pheres, who took part in a dramatic competition organized by Alexander the Great. Both of them were regarded as the leading members of theatrical groups of their age⁵⁷, ca. 369-359. As the biographer explains, Alexander, on hearing the verdict of the king of Cyprus that Theodorus had won the prize, said: «I would rather [...] have lost half my kingdom than see Thettalus defeated». Plutarch, undoubtedly, would have disapproved of these words, which may be regarded as a paradigmatic example of how theatrical art was able to harmfully affect the ruler. Indeed, Plutarch returns once more to the same event in his *Life of Alexander*⁵⁸, where he gives some additional information on the matter. In this work the biographer explains that due to the fact that Theodorus had broken his commitment to Athens regarding his participation in the Dionysia of that year, Alexander once again displayed his passion for the theatre by asking the artist to write an apologetic letter to the city on his behalf, and also by promising that he would reimburse the agreed amount of money to Athens.

Similar conclusions can be gathered from Plutarch's reference in the *Life of Pelopidas*⁵⁹ to the meeting of Theodorus and Alexander, the tyrant of Pherae, when Epaminondas' troops had surrounded the city. In this case, after portraying the tyrant as a fearsome and bloody ruler, Plutarch describes how Alexander, who was watching the *Trojan Women* of Euripides, suddenly stood up and left the theatre. Later, in a letter sent to the actor, Alexander apologizes for leaving in the middle of the play, and also explains that it was not because of a poor performance. The reason he left was that he, who had never shown mercy to real people, was embarrassed at being seen by the citizens «weeping over the sorrow of Hecuba and Andromache». Aelian also refers to the same event⁶⁰, but with a switch from Hecuba and Andromache to Merope from Euripides' *Kresphontes*⁶¹.

⁵⁶ Cf. *FD* III 5, 3, 1.67; *SIG*³ 239.

⁵⁷ Cf. *Plut. Alex. Fort.* 334E.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Plut. Alex.* 29.

⁵⁹ Cf. *Plut. Pel.* 29.4-6.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Ael. VH* 14.40. See also *D.L.* 2.104.

⁶¹ Cf. Ghiron-Bistagne 1976, 157-158.

Regarding the theatrical skills of Theodorus, Aristotle in his *Rhetoric*⁶² asserts that what placed him above other actors was his use of modulation, because he was capable of modulating sublime words without sounding artificial. Aristotle also praises these linguistic qualities from both the practical and poetic point of view⁶³. Accordingly, Theodorus advocated innovation in the use of words in his own plays in order to create new metaphors, namely, τὸ καινὰ λέγειν. That is, he used words that the listener did not expect, aiming to produce a paradoxical effect.

Besides Theodorus's theatrical skills as actor and poet⁶⁴, we also know some training techniques he used. In his *Table Talks*⁶⁵, Plutarch attests that Theodorus used to sleep separately from his wife during the tragic competition, but after it was finished, «when he entered her room victorious», she received him with the following verse from Sophocles' *Electra*⁶⁶: «Agamemnon's child, you have permission now». Another trick that Aristotle reports in his *Politics*⁶⁷ is that, as he believed the first words of a drama to be the most pleasing and the best remembered by the audience, he never allowed any actor speaking before him⁶⁸.

The last mention we refer to comes from Pausanias⁶⁹, who was able to visit the grave of Theodorus. According to him, the grave was located on the Sacred Way of Attica, before crossing the Cephissus. In the same passage, Theodorus is called again «the best tragic actor of his day».

(e) Polus of Sosigenes of Aegina

The last of the actors we are going to deal with presents several problems of identification. The confusion arises, on the one hand, from the lack of

⁶² Cf. Arist. *Rhet.* 1404b 4-5.

⁶³ Cf. Arist. *Rhet.* 1412a 6-1412b 7.

⁶⁴ It is commonly assumed that Plutarch, *De aud. poet.* 18B-C relates that the audience enjoyed him imitating the sound of a windlass: however, the biographer does not explicitly mention Theodorus in this passage.

⁶⁵ Plut. *Quaest. conv.* 9.1, 737A-B.

⁶⁶ Soph. *El.* 2. It seems hardly plausible to infer from this reference that Theodorus was acting in this drama (*contra*, O'Connor 1908, 101). However, we agree with O'Connor on the fact that he used to work with Sophocles, according to Dem. *Amb.* 246 (= 19), especially in the *Antigone*, although he did not take part in Euripides' *Phoenix*.

⁶⁷ Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1336b 25-35.

⁶⁸ On roles division see Jouan 1983, 63-80; Damen 1989, 320 and 324 n. 24. Admittedly, audiences were capable of distinguishing between different actors behind their masks, as Plutarch in *Lys.* 23.4 attests: «in tragedies it happens fairly often that the actor who plays some messenger or servant is a well-known protagonist and the other who plays a king is ignored even when speaking...». Then, we can understand that, due the fame of Theodorus, he used to choose the character who spoke the first words in the drama, to show off his acting talent.

⁶⁹ Cf. Paus. 1.37.3. See also Ghiron-Bistagne 1976, 112.

epigraphic or literary sources referring to Polus. On the other, postclassical authors like Strabo, Plutarch, Lucian, Pausanias, Aelian, and Gellius offer a good amount of information about him that presumably should be traced back to older sources. The modern scholar is therefore forced to combine these later views in order to reconstruct his life, but some contradictions remain unresolved. For example, Polus' place of birth differs from author to author. While Plutarch assures in his *Life of Demosthenes*⁷⁰ that his father was Sosigenes of Aegina, Lucian in his *Necyomantia*⁷¹ states that his father was Charicles of Sunium.

In any case, Plutarch's *De amicitia*⁷² affirms that the actor still enjoyed great fame in Plutarch's age⁷³, mainly for playing the characters of Sophocles' works, *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus Coloneus*. Those details are consistent with Aulus Gellius' reference to Polus taking part as the main character in Sophocles *Electra*.

Likewise, the reference to Polus in the *Vitae decem oratorum* seems to belong more to fiction than to reality⁷⁴. It relates an argument between Polus and Demosthenes, in which the former boasted of earning a talent in two days of acting, but, in response, the orator said that he made fifty talents for remaining silent. However, even if the meeting is plausible, some questions are raised by the fact that Aulus Gellius, citing Critolaus, reports the same event, but with different participants, Aristodemus and Demades⁷⁵.

The last story told by Plutarch, supposedly based on Eratosthenes and Philochorus, describes the longevity of Polus, who lived until about the age of seventy. Even at that age he «acted in eight tragedies in four days shortly before his death»⁷⁶. And his death seems surrounded by legend as well. Indeed, Aelian states that «when Polus, the tragic actor, died and his body was burning, the dog which he had kept sprang onto the pyre and was burned to death with him»⁷⁷.

It is time to draw some conclusions. In the first place, it is noteworthy that even though at first sight Plutarch does not seem to pay special attention

⁷⁰ Cf. Plut. *Dem.* 28.

⁷¹ Cf. Luc. *Necyom.* 16. We face similar problems concerning both his time and his very existence. Indeed, there could be two or even three actors with the same name, cf. O'Connor 1908, 128-129.

⁷² Cf. Plut. *De amic.* 7.

⁷³ On his capital importance, cf. Plut. *Praec. ger.* 816F-817A.

⁷⁴ Cf. Ps.-Plut. *Vitae decem* 848B.

⁷⁵ Cf. Gell. 11.9.2, 11.10.3.

⁷⁶ Cf. Plut. *An seni* 785BC.

⁷⁷ Cf. Ael. *NA* 7.40.

to actors, he constitutes one of the most abundant sources of information about them. Secondly, and perhaps more interestingly, the attitude of our author towards actors is generally negative, but this comes as no surprise, since the philosophical background of the *Moralia* is heavily influenced by both Plato and Aristotle, whose attitude towards actors is likewise negative. In the third place, we also see that Plutarch does not simply endorse the views of his predecessors. To Plato's views on *mimesis* and Aristotle's pronouncements in the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*, he adds his own ethical concerns, which results in his condemnation both of dramatic re-enactments of reality in general and by actors in particular. Fourthly, we also detect, beside this theoretical side of his disapproval, a more popular strand of criticism, which targeted actors probably due to their popularity and extravagance. This combination of philosophical sources with a more popular strand of reproach once more shows both the variety of Plutarch's sources and the creative combination of the information he receives from the tradition with his own opinions and views.

Israel Muñoz Gallarte

University of Cordova - University of Groningen

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