One tends to look into the *Moralia* for examples of Plutarch’s views on poetry, or his uses of theatrical language. There is indeed quite a big amount of quotations from tragic poets, and Plutarch comments on them developing a dynamic relationship with the tragic poets and with their words, by accepting, rebutting or amending them according to the specific purpose of the essay. Yet, in the *Lives* it is rather the theatrical imagery, the theatrical scenes than the direct use of tragic citations in which one finds analogies to tragedy and the theatrical world, and in this sense ‘theatricality’ and the ‘tragic’ are here subtler and more complex notions than in the *Moralia*.

The *Life of Pompey*, which lies at the heart of the present paper, is an interesting example where both explicit theatrical references and tragic metaphors are employed by Plutarch to describe important moments and characters. The ‘theatrical’ atmosphere of the *Life* is even more emphasised by the ‘visual’ setting of scenes, which transfers events and characters to the context of a theatrical performance, as it were. Like other *Lives*—*Antony*, *Demetrius*, *Alexander*, *Pyrrhus*, *Marius*, *Crassus*, and *Themistocles*1—*Pompey* is full of theatrical elements, tragic value, subversions and dramatic tension. It is not just the air of a personality which is rich in tragic conflicts at which Plutarch hints straight from the beginning of this *Life* (in the anecdotes about his personal life),2 but there is also a theatrical atmosphere, reinforced by all those instances which Plutarch stages as if putting on a play, that makes *Pompey* so rich in theatrical moments and dramatic power, especially in its second half. There, self-destructive actions and external adverse factors co-operate in a nexus which leads Pompey to disaster. Tragedy will no longer contrast with reality, but it will rather specify it and finally take over Pompey’s reality.

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1 Those *Lives* have been thoroughly discussed, with a special focus on their dramatic value by De Lacy, Wardman, Mossman 1988 and 1992, Braund 1993 and 1997, Zadorojnyi, Pelling 1988 and 2002b; see also generally Fuhrmann, esp. 241 ff., and others.

2 See the anecdote about his relationship with Flora (chap. 2): although he loved her he passed her over to his friend Geminius. For more on Pompey’s marriages, and their connection with the rise and fall of Pompey, see Stadter, esp. pp. 233–35, and Beneker 2005b.
So, in the second half of the *Life*, and as the signs of Pompey’s tragic downfall become clearer, the tragic atmosphere is prevailing and the theatrical vocabulary is more often employed to describe Pompey’s course to his end. There are actually scenes that are set as theatrical, as it were. After Caesar had decided to confront Pompey’s troops we are told that his men were enthusiastic at his decision and were eagerly drawn up for battle, like the members of a chorus: (68.7) ὄσπερ χορός, ἄνευ θορύβου μεμελητημένως εἰς τάξιν καὶ πρόχως καθίσταντο. The simile is lucid, and the theatrical image (ὄσπερ χορός) efficient and vivid. Pelling rightly remarks that the whole image is close to tragedy, with Plutarch’s style and imagery adopting an appropriate tone. A visual image is combined with theatrical vocabulary to produce a theatrical effect that transposes theatre into real-life. Chapter 70, too, where bystanders are reflecting on human blindness and greed, presents strong similarities to a choral ode. A crowd that ponders on flaws of the human nature can be compared to a tragic chorus who is making reflections on similar issues on stage, and invites the audience to do the same; this is at least the image to which Plutarch alludes and projects on these Greek and Roman people which are not taking part in the war but are deeply concerned about their future. The parallel becomes even more explicit if one thinks that it is typical of a tragic chorus to be less closely involved in the emotions than the principals, but directly affected by the outcome of what is happening on stage.

The same simile taken from the theatrical world (ὄσπερ χορός) was again used at an earlier instance. When Pompey was accused by Clodius for devoting much of his time to his wife and neglecting public affairs, Clodius used, both his popularity at the time, and the opportunity offered to him at a court case where Pompey was also present, to publicly reproach him with several accusations. He posed questions such as: ‘Who is a licentious imperator’, and ‘What man seeks for a man?’. Such questions would fill people with anger against Pompey. The crowd, like a chorus trained in responsive song, shouted out to each question the same answer: ‘Pompey’:

4 Pelling, *ibidem*.
5 Cf. Gould, who explains how this particularity of the marginalised tragic chorus allows them to see the truth and have more appropriate views on different issues than those who are too close to the events to see clearly.
6 By this time Clodius had started using his own power and popularity to destroy Pompey, whereas before he was his companion. Examples of the action he took against him are listed in the paragraph preceding this incident described: he sent Cicero to exile, and Cato off to Cyprus, thus interfering with Pompey’s eastern settlement; he took away Tigranes, Pompey’s prisoner, by force; he prosecuted some of Pompey’s friends, and tried to repeal some of his political measures which were taken to please the people (48.9–10). See again Pelling 1980=2002a, 98–100, who remarks that Plutarch’s treatment of Clodius is a further aspect to Pompey’s tragedy (p. 98).
And they, like a chorus trained in responsive song, as he shook his toga, would answer each question by shouting out ‘Pompey’.

It may be true that some of the incidents which Plutarch describes relate to what historically happened. That is to say, it is possible that some stage-managing and orchestration by people (politicians, generals, orators, etc.) in public life actually went on in those years (like Clodius is doing here). But it is perhaps only due to Plutarch’s literary technique that the reader is invited to think that politicians of that time saw their public life as a performance on stage, as it were. The fact that in some cases we may be in a position to know that what Plutarch describes in theatrical light did not necessarily happen in that way, makes all the clearer Plutarch’s technique of creating theatrical atmosphere out of his non-theatrical material.

In the last chapters of Pompey (chap. 70 – 80), and as we are approaching Pompey’s end, theatrical imagery runs through all the important moments of the general’s life and of the circle of people around him. At the same time, what might have been sensed before as ominous and as a sign which was foreboding disaster, now comes true. ‘Tragedy’ invades and pervades Pompey’s reality. After the defeat of Pompey’s infantry (72.1), Plutarch tries to understand why Pompey just walked away from the camp. He says, ‘it is very difficult to say what thoughts passed through his mind’ at that very moment (ἐὰν μὲν ἔχρησατο λογισμὸν χαλεπτόν εἶπεν). To the reader’s surprise, a few lines further down (73.1 – 2), Plutarch speaks as if he knew what crossed Pompey’s mind – one notices the repetition of the word λογισμός here, referring to his calculations, as is also the word ἔννοοῦμενον:

(73.1) Πομπήεος δὲ […] ἀπήγγελε καὶ ἔσχισαν, ἐν διαλογισμῷ ὡς οἷς εἰκὸς λαμβάνειν ἀνδριατῶν ἐπὶ τέτταρα καὶ τρίακοντα νικῶν καὶ κρατεῖν ἀπάντων εἰσι σύμμενον, ἦττος δὲ καὶ φυγής τότε πρῶτον ἐν γήρα λαμβάνοντα πείραν. 

(73.2) ἔννοοῦμενον δ’ εἰ ὅσον ἐγόνον καὶ πολέμῳ ἠζυγημένην ἀποβαλλόν ὄρα μεθ’ ὀξέος ἀκαθά, καὶ δύναμιν, [ὁ] πρὸ μικροῦ τοσοῦτος ὀπλίσφος καὶ ἅπτοις καὶ στόλοις διαφορούμενος, ἀπέρχεται μικρὸς οὕτω γεγονὼς καὶ συνεσταλμένος, ὡστε λανθάνειν ἥττοῦρτας τοὺς πολέμους.

But Pompey […] went quietly away, indulging in such reflections as a man would naturally make who for thirty-four years had been accustomed to conquer and get the mastery in everything, and who now for the first time, in his old age, got experience of defeat and flight; he thought how in a single hour he had lost the power and glory gained in so many wars and conflicts, he who a little while ago was guarded by such an array of infantry and horse, but was now going away so

7 Contrast here Agesilus’ attitude: although wounded, he refused to retire to his tent (Ages. 19.1).
in insignificant and humbled as to escape the notice of the enemies who were in
search of him. (73.1–2)

What seems to trouble Plutarch here, at 73.1–2, is the reason why Pompey
withdrew without saying anything and without being able to do what the
situation required. However, the situation does not concern only Pompey the
Great and his failure to behave as somebody who deserves his title. The issue
involves all those great leaders and epic heroes, like Ajax, who failed to act as
such. The example of Ajax is explicitly mentioned by Plutarch in the
following lines (72.2),\(^8\) offering a direct parallel to Pompey’s decision to
withdraw, since Ajax, too, was taken by fear at the Trojan troops’ sight and
retreated, unable to defend both his name and fame. Plutarch creates the image
of a tragic hero, as it were, who self-destructs. At the same time he encourages
the reader to look inside Pompey himself, into his own character, words and
deeds, in order to explain his downfall, while putting aside the role of the
people around him, a kind of ‘supporting actors’.

Not only does Plutarch implicitly invite us to think of Pompey in tragic
terms, but he also quotes directly from tragic plays. Pompey’s withdrawal both
offers another example of passivity and signals the course towards his end. The
defeated imperator was finally taken on board by a man called Peticius, who
provided him with all he needed. Moreover, one of Pompey’s attendants, who
was a free man, behaved to him as if he were his slave, letting Pompey live the
illusion that he was still his master (73.4–11). It seems that a kind of acting on
both sides is going on here. The attendant is playing the role of Pompey’s
slave, and Pompey himself pretends to be still the king. The role-playing
transposes the scene from the real world into the theatrical world. The
attendant even washed his feet and prepared his meals thinking perhaps that ‘to
generous souls every task seems noble’ (φεῦ τοῖς γενναίοις ὡς ἀπαν καλόν)
(fr. 961) (73.11),\(^9\) a tragic verse which Plutarch quotes from Euripides, and
which gives at this stage even stronger tragic texture to Pompey’s life and
career.

Direct quotations from tragic plays, like this one, show that in Pompey
there is, beyond the theatrical background, an explicit connection between the
Life and the ‘tragic’. Pompey cites Sophocles at one of the most crucial
moments of his life (78.7), when he sees his wife for the last time, adding thus
more dramatic tension to the scene. The lines are from an unknown play of
Sophocles (TGF, p. 316):

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\(^8\) The quotation is verbally reproduced from Homer, *Iliad* 11.544–6.

\(^9\) The same line is again quoted at 85A of *On Progress in Virtue*, where some examples of
virtuous people are given and it is argued that such people always need to be honoured.
Anyone who goes to traffic with a tyrant
is his slave, even if he goes there free.

Although the formerly powerful imperator finds, at last, shelter – however, in
words only – in Ptolemy’s land, and freely decides to embark on his boat,\(^{10}\) he
realises that, after he will have done that, he will be a slave in Ptolemy’s hands,
and a pawn in the hands of Fate.\(^{11}\) As Pompey approaches his tragic end, he
resembles tragic heroes (like Ajax) more often than before and sets himself,
with his words and actions, into a Greek tragedy context. It is within this
context that he remembers the Sophoclean lines quoted above, which reveal
his inner conflicts and feelings at that moment. It is certainly not without
importance that his last words to his friends and wife are quoted from
Sophocles. Pompey is clearly aware of the tragic implications of his
‘submission’ to Ptolemy. Plutarch, too, encourages us to think about this
moment as the start of the last ‘act’ of Pompey, firstly, by putting in some tragic
lines, and secondly, by describing Cornelia as already lamenting Pompey’s
death, fully aware of the approaching end: προσπορθηνούσαν αὐτόν τὸ τέλος
\((78.7)\). One notices the mirroring of the story-denouement in Plutarch’s
choice of words. Cornelia is lamenting in advance as Plutarch is disclosing
Pompey’s end in advance. This 'lamenting in advance for somebody who is
still alive' alludes to a common topos in tragedy, or epic, which Plutarch’s
learned reader can easily recognise: Hecuba (\(Il. 24\), 200–216) is weeping for
Priam while he is still alive; Andromache does the same for Hector (\(Il. 405\) ff.);
Antigone (\(Ant. 839–51, 858–71, 891–928\)), or Polyxena (\(Hec. 402\) ff.), too,
lament for their own death in advance. The downfall of Pompey has a strong
impact on those closest to him, as it also has an impact on the state. The same
point about the oikos and its relation to the state is made in \(Caesar\), where
Pompey’s mourning of Julia’s death and the break of the link between himself
and Caesar (which was achieved via Julia), becomes a sign of the political
upheaval to follow and of their personal conflict.

Plutarch does not refrain from describing Pompey’s downfall from another
angle too, that of the circle of people surrounding him, since those are equally
affected. His wife, Cornelia, after finding out from a messenger Pompey’s
sufferings, throws herself onto the ground and laments, thus generating an

\(^{10}\) ‘Freely’, in the sense that nobody really forces him to do so, but in reality he is forced
by the circumstances; he has reached an impasse and has no other choice.

\(^{11}\) Cf. 75.4, where he is taken by metaphysical fears, as it were, and expresses his worries
on philosophical matters, such as the role of Providence – he questions his fair
treatment by Providence, and complains about it in a friendly discussion with the
philosopher Cratippus. On \(tyche\) and providence in Plutarch see, among others, Swain.
authentic tragic scene. The scene is rich in emotions, and the characters involved are overwhelmed by their feelings for the disaster which has struck them. Even the messenger delivers his speech in tears (74.3). He seems to play the role of the messenger who appears in tragedies towards the end of the play to give details of something, usually bad, which happened off stage and which the characters on stage (here, Cornelia) are ignorant of.\(^\text{12}\) Cornelia cannot believe her misfortunes and the serious impasse to which her husband has come, and remains speechless for quite a long time (\(\text{I} \delta \) δικοῦσασα προήκατο μὲν αὐτήν χαμάζε καὶ πολὺν χρόνον ἐκφροῦν καὶ ὄναυδος ἐκεῖτο) (74.4).\(^\text{13}\)

This first part of the scene, in which Cornelia throws herself to the ground, presents significant analogies to tragedy. Plutarch helps us understand the scene in theatrical terms by the vocabulary he employs in his vivid description of Cornelia, evoking feelings among his readers, partly by the stirring visual image and partly by the actual disaster that has caused Cornelia's laments. A parallel which comes to mind is Euripides' \textit{Hecuba}. There the protagonist also throws herself to the ground, covers her head with her clothes as a way of lamenting (vv. 486–7: (chorus) αὕτη πέλας σου νῶτ’ ἔχουσ’ ἐπὶ χθονί, / Ταλθύβιε, κεῖται συγκεκλημένη πέπλος – There, close to you, on the ground outstretched, Talthybius, lies she muffled in her robes), and lies there for some time (from v. 438 to v. 500), unable to believe the new misfortune that has fallen upon her. Hecuba laments over her daughter's fate (Polyxena), and about her own fate, bereft of children and of any divine or human (here, Odysseus') mercy. She will raise herself from the ground, only to find out the details of her daughter's brave death. Cornelia, too, in the second part of the scene, regains her senses after some time, realising that this is not the time for tears and lamentations, but time to proceed to action. The connection may be not explicit, yet the similarities between the Cornelia-scene and the Hecuba-scene are poignant and lend to the Plutarchan scene some tragic value.

\(^{12}\) (74.3): ἐν τούτοις οὐσαν αὐτήν καταλαβὼν ὁ ἀγγέλος ἀσπάσασθαι μὲν οὐχ ὑπέμεινε τὰ ἰδίᾳ πλείστα καὶ μεγίστα τῶν κακῶν τοῖς δάκρυσι μάλλον ἢ τῇ φωνῇ φράσας […] (The messenger, finding her in this mood, could not bring himself to salute her, but indicated to her the most and greatest misfortunes by his tears rather than by his speech […]. De Jong in her book on the Euripidean message-scenes brings out how often the messenger’s presentation and own reaction are important and influence other characters’ reaction on stage. The messenger-speech, as ‘narrative’ and ‘drama’, awakens emotions in other characters and also among the audience. See pp. 77–78, 105, 108–110, 115, 136–139, 173–177.

\(^{13}\) The word χαμάζε is again found in a genuine tragic context, in Euripides’ \textit{Bacchae}, v. 633.
Pompey’s murder is charged with a special theatrical tone. As the boat with Pompey, a few attendants, and his future killers is rowed in silence to the shore, Pompey tries to be friendly breaking the silence and addressing Septimius – an old familiar and comrade-in-arms – but gets no response. So he takes his roll with the speech which he had prepared to deliver to Ptolemy, written in Greek (79.2–3). The tragic irony is evident; the dark atmosphere prevailing gives the reader a hint that the speech will not be used. Silence and anxiety together, mainly on the side of the viewers, illustrate that the situation is beyond control. Cornelia, naturally chosen by Plutarch as the most important person among the viewers to focus on, is full of anxiety about what is going to happen next. For a minute anxiety gives place to hope, when she notices all those people of the king gathering at the shore, as if they were to give an honourable welcome to Pompey. But soon the positive picture is again reversed – a kind of tragic peripeteia? The time for the final act in Pompey’s life has come. Septimius approaches Pompey and runs him through with his sword; Salvius, and then Achillas also stab him. Ironically enough, now, that he has lost all his power, Pompey behaves as a true imperator. He endures their blows with patience and in silence, ‘without an act or a word that was unworthy of himself, but with a groan merely’, remarks Plutarch, ‘after drawing his toga down over his face with both hands’, a very theatrical scene: ἀπὸ δὲ ταῖς χερσίν ἀμφοτέραις τὴν τίθεντον ἐφελκυσάμενοι κατὰ τοὺς προσώπους, μηδὲν εἰπτῶν ἁνάξιον ἐσωτερικόν μηδὲ ποιῆσος, ἀλλὰ στενάχας μόνον, ἑνεκαρτέρησε ταῖς πληγαῖς (79.5); the scene has its parallel in Hecuba, where Polyxena covers her face and silently follows Odysseus to her death (Hec. 432–7: κομίζ’, ‘Οδυσσέω, μ’ ἀμφισβεῖς κάρα πέπλους…– Muffle my head, Odysseus, and lead on…). The parallel may not be direct but if the initial tragic context of the scene is recalled, then Pompey’s end is cast under a tragic light that presents him as a Euripidean character, as it were.

There is a different use of ‘tragedy’ and its implications much earlier in the Life, when Plutarch refers to Pompey’s enmity to Lucullus, which drove him to extreme action in many cases. He wanted either to show that Lucullus had no authority at all, or just to satisfy his base ambition that he could interfere with Lucullus’ settlements and even subvert them (31.2). He also used to


15 Compare Caes. 66.6.

16 The harshness which Pompey showed towards Lucullus can easily be paralleled to Agesilaus’ treatment of Lysander. In Ages. 7 Plutarch stresses how annoyed and irritated Agesilaus was about Lysander’s popularity among the people and success as a commander in Asia Minor before him. He was also too ambitious and competitive not
belittle Lucullus’ achievements, declaring that he had waged war against kings from dramas and paintings, whereas the real enemy, Mithridates, was left to him to fight:17

(31.10) διασύρων τά έργα ἐμφανῶς ἔλεγε τραγῳδίαις καὶ σκηνογραφίαις πεπολεμόκεναι βασιλείαν τὸν Λεύκολον, αὐτῷ δὲ πρὸς ἄλληθινην καὶ σεσωφρονισμένην τὸν ἁγώνα λείπες ταῖς δύναμιν.

He would belittle the achievements of Lucullus, declaring that he had waged war against kings from dramas and paintings, while to himself there was now left the struggle against a real military force.

The explicit reference to tragedy and painting (πραγμάτα καὶ σκηνογραφία) to signify the fake danger which Lucullus sees and fights, makes the reader recall the dramatic context, and think about the dispute between Pompey and Lucullus in theatrical terms. The contradiction between tragedy and reality may be only implicit, but is nonetheless intriguing. The kings of the tragic myths are juxtaposed to the real enemy, king Mithridates and his troops. The former can only be a fictitious danger, but Mithridates is the true, lurking danger.

Pompey, sometime after his third triumph in 61, started building the famous and beautiful theatre of Rome (40.9). He also had the chance to attend the traditional poetic contest, which took place in this theatre and had as its one theme his exploits. Pompey’s life has become a theme of art, and this, while he is still alive.18 It is impressive that a great, living personality offers material (his actual life and career) for dramatic productions. There is an interesting detail at the opening of Pompey’s theatre in Rome. Apart from the athletic and musical contests which Pompey held, there was a combat of wild beasts. The most terrifying spectacle was an elephant duel (52.9). Cassius Dio (Rom. Hist. 39.38.2) mentions eighteen elephants, not two. Plutarch’s deviation from Cassius Dio may not be accidental. The battle between two elephants may be understood as a hint for the upcoming personal conflict between Caesar and Pompey, a truly terrifying conflict.19 Already from its opening day Pompey’s theatre itself is not presented as the place for celebrations and performances only, but also as a place for battles. Thus the reader may see in this battle-picture something dark and ominous which is connected to Pompey’s fate at the tragedy of Pharsalus. Apart from the allusion to Pompey’s fate, the battle-image includes a cross-Life hint to the killing of Caesar, too. At the end of the Caesar Plutarch describes in every detail the

17 On Pompey’s command against Mithridates and the reallocation of the East see Seager, 44–55, Kallet-Marx, and Hoff.
18 Another example of the stage-management theme made earlier in this chapter.
scene of Caesar’s murder (66.1 ff.): it all happened in front of a statue of Pompey, in a building which was attached by him to his theatre. In fact, Plutarch says, it seemed that a higher power was responsible for what happened there. There are two striking details in Plutarch’s description of Caesar’s murder; the one is that Cassius, just before the attack started, looked at Pompey’s statue as if invoking his approval and aid; and the other one is that, after being violently struck by his assassins, Caesar fell to the ground by the pedestal of the statue of Pompey, drenching it with blood, so that it seemed that Pompey himself was leading the attack and taking revenge on his rival. The link between theatre and death is certainly one to keep in mind.

Although he presents at times Pompey as a leader who was not able to defend his name and carry out his own decisions, Plutarch never really lets us forget how exceptional he was. This is made clear, for example, earlier, at the ceremony where he was acknowledged the right to move directly from a knight to a consul. Plutarch sees the ceremony as a spectacle (θέαμα) – the word θέαμα at 22.4 may also imply that Pompey’s way of entering the forum was itself spectacular and unexpected, since the people, we are told, were very impressed to watch a general who had achieved two triumphs coming back as an ordinary man, obeying the laws and being even prepared to disband his army in order to show his devotion to the people (see 21.7):

(22.4) ἡδίστον δὲ θέαμα τῷ δήμῳ παρέσχεν αὐτὸς ἐαυτὸν τὴν στρατείαν παραιτούμενος.

But the most agreeable of all spectacles was that which he afforded the people when he appeared in person and solicited his discharge from military service. (22.4)

One could rightly ask oneself here whether the strong visuality of the passage is itself enough to suggest theatricality. As I will show in the following examples, the connection between visuality and theatricality is not direct and exclusive, but the theama-language easily suggests theatrical background and makes the ‘tragic’ come to feel all the more natural. So, at 22.4 the implications of this kind of spectacle are not directly related to the ‘tragic’, but the passage still suggests an important point here: all these other sorts of ‘spectacle’ will give way to tragic θέαμα at the end of the Life (chap. 73 ff.), where Pompey appears as a tragic hero, who has suddenly lost everything, a very sad θέαμα indeed.

Plutarch introduces the scene by presenting in full detail what was the custom to happen in such a procedure:

(22.5) ἔθος γὰρ ἦστι Ῥωμαίων τοῖς ἱππεύσιν, ὅταν στρατεύσωσεν τὸν νόμιμον χρόνον, ἄγειν εἰς ἄγοραν τὸν ἱππόν ἐπὶ τοὺς δύο ἀνδρας οὓς τιμήσας καλύπτω.[…]. (22.6) τότε δὲ προσκέκλησε ὁμίλοις καὶ Λέυτολος ἐν κόσμω, καὶ πάροδος ἢ τῶν ἱππέων ἐξεταζομένων, ὡφθη δὲ <καὶ> Πομπήιος ἀνὼδεν ἐπ’
(22.5) It is customary for a Roman knight, when he has served for the time fixed by law, to lead his horse into the forum before the two men who are called censors […]. (22.6) At this time, then, the censors Gellius and Lentulus were sitting in state, and the knights were passing in review before them, when Pompey was seen coming down the descent into the forum, otherwise marked by the insignia of his office, but leading his horse with his own hand.

This is what usually happens, says Plutarch. But Pompey does not keep to the beaten track; he goes against the ἔσος. The scene has the impact of a theatrical scene (22.6–9) – one notices the word πάροδος, which is reminiscent of the theatrical parodos, the entrance of the chorus on stage. The word is used again in the Political Precepts, referring to the entrance of a person upon the stage of public life. The most glorious entrance, Plutarch says, is achieved when one revolts against a bad man who by shameless audacity and cunning has made the city subject to himself:

(805C–D) τὸ μέντιοι φαῦλου ἀνθρωπον, ἀπονοίας δὲ καὶ δεινότητι πεποιημένον ύφ’ αὐτῷ τὴν πόλιν […] ἐπαναστάντα καθελείν καὶ ταπεινώσασι λαμπράν ποιεῖται τὴν πάροδον ὡσπερ δράματος τῆς πολιτείας.

On the other hand, to revolt against a bad man who by shameless audacity and cunning had made the city subject to himself […] and to pull him down and humble him provides a glorious entrance upon the stage of public life. (805C–D)

Just before that, at 804D, Plutarch uses a simile from the theatrical world. He says that often the masses accept the ‘beginner’ in public life with enthusiasm, ‘just as spectators at a show are glad to accept a new performer’ (καὶ γὰρ δέχονται προθυμότερον οἱ πολλοὶ κόρῳ τινὶ πληρομηνί τῶν συνήθων τῶν ἀρχόμενων, ὡσπερ ἁγωνιστὴν δεσταί […]).20 The theatrical vocabulary used at these two passages transfers us from the real (here, political) world to the world of theatre. The transferred use of parodos occurs elsewhere in the Lives, too. For example, when Plutarch refers to Alcibiades’ first entry into public life, he, strikingly, uses again the theatrical term parodos for ‘entry’: (Alc. 10.1) πρώτην δ’ αὐτῷ πάροδον εἰς τὸ δημόσιον γενέσθαι λέγοντα.21 Alcibiades’ remarkable entry into politics is compared to the first appearance of the tragic chorus on stage. In all these passages the use of ‘parodos’ for ‘entry’ powerfully creates a visual image which presents a political procedure, that of the entrance of a

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20 There is a relevant passage at Pomp. 14.4.; at Sulla’s refusal of Pompey celebrating a triumph, Pompey replied that, ‘More people worship the rising than the setting sun’, implying that Sulla’s power was fading away whereas his power was increasing.

21 Cf. Demetr. 34.6. Alcibiades’ entry into public life is described as accidental, as he becomes part of an assembly of the Athenian people (cf. the Athenian assembly in theatre at theatrical contests). On ‘tragic’ in this Life, see Duff, 221, and 236–240.
person onto political stage or, generally, into public life, in theatrical terms. The parallel drawn here between a theatrical image and public life reveals all the clearer another piece of the network of theatrical allusions which Plutarch uses.

Quite early in the *Life* it is mentioned that Pompey had already started to behave in a very authoritarian way, and the fear of a tyranny was spread among the people (την δὲ δύναμιν τοῦ Πομπήου βαρέως φέροντες ὡς τυραννίδα καθισταμένην) (30.3). Although everybody could see the danger arising from this, Pompey was assigned new powers but, surprisingly, he did not react with delight. People already knew all about his thirst for power, and this is probably why they were not taken in by Pompey’s ostensible reluctance to take on more responsibilities (30.6–7). They all, even his closest friends, regarded Pompey’s reaction as disingenuous. Plutarch presents Pompey as an actor, a very bad one indeed, since he cannot even convince his closest friends that he is being honest and genuinely modest when uttering the following words:

(30.7) ‘Φεύ τῶν ἀνηνύτων ἄδολου, ὡς ἄρα κρείττον ἥν ἑν τῶν ἁδόνων γενέσθαι, εἰ μηδέποτε παύσασμαι στρατημύνους μηδὲ τὸν φήσιν τοῦτον ἐκδύς ἐν ἁγρῷ διαιτήσομαι μετὰ τῆς γυναικὸς’.

‘Alas for my endless tasks! How much better it were to be an unknown man, if I am never to cease from military service, and cannot lay aside this load of envy and spend my time in the country with my wife.’ (30.7)

The use of direct speech at this instance, which is otherwise fairly unusual in Plutarch, certainly makes the scene more dramatic and vivid. The oikos at this instance, too, becomes once again a pointer to Pompey’s downfall. The exaggerated pathos which Pompey shows here for his family life is negatively charged by Plutarch, and described as a sign of falsehood and pretentiousness. Plutarch suggests that Pompey acts as if putting on a play; he is wearing the mask of modesty in order to hide his love for power and not excite greater animosity and anger among the people. But he is not convincing in his role. This false play-acting is for the moment the dominant sort of ‘theatre’ in

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22 For the role of the demos and its political power in Plutarch see de Blois 1992, Pelling 1995, Prandi, and Said.

23 As Watkins remarks (p. 258), Plutarch ‘combines detail of Pompey’s expression, action (καὶ τὸν μηρὸν πατάξα) and the use of direct speech so as to make his narrative more immediate’. Cassius Dio (*Rom. Hist.* 36.45.1) also describes this scene, but with far less emphasis, which indicates that it is Plutarch’s own choice to embellish their common, less dramatic source.

24 Exaggerated pathos, falsehood, theatrical ostentation, tragic or melodramatic twists, and the unreal, all describe here – as much as elsewhere, too – various forms of the ‘theatrical’ element, while at the same time their negative implications prepare for the downfall.
Pompey’s life, but this of course will change by the end of the Life, where, as already seen, he becomes a true tragic character in his own life.

Visibility and tragic language which at the beginning of the Life point to phenomena which we might rather describe as histrionic and sensational are gradually overtaken by a true tragic feeling. That feeling emerges from human misfortunes and passions, so that Pompey presents, at points, strong similarities to tragic heroes – and this is perhaps the image which Plutarch wants his readers to have in mind when reading the Life of Pompey.

Bibliography


