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## The Spectacle of Love and Death in Plutarch's *Life of Antony*

CLEOPATRA:

‘If it be love indeed, tell me how much’.

ANTONY:

‘There’s beggary in the love that can be reckon’d’.

(Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra*, I. 1. 14–15)

**Abstract:** Plutarch’s *Life of Antony* provides a fascinating insight into a character of man, who was obsessed by a ruinous love passion toward the Egyptian queen Cleopatra. The main topic of the article is Plutarch’s judgment of the Roman hero’s notorious love affair. It is argued that while being highly critical toward Antony’s numerous flaws, the writer does not condemn him totally. Here the essential reason is love that makes Antony a really tragic figure. His downfall is for Plutarch a kind cautionary tale but the spectacular failure of Antony as a politician and commander not only deserves understanding or reflection but – in some sense – should also be excused.

**Key words:** Plutarch, biography, character, love passion

### Passions and Other Calamities

Let the *lector benignus & candidus* be not worried: the title of this small contribution, bizarre enough and melodramatic as it looks, does not suggest that I venture to retell again a legendary story. Yet, in daring to paraphrase the

title of Romain Rolland's well-known play,<sup>1</sup> I only would like to pay attention to the fact that it perfectly summarizes the core of the excellent biography of Mark Antony by Plutarch.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, to many of us the love fortunes and misfortunes of the Roman consul and triumvir as depicted here present a dream screenplay, as if written for one of the Hollywood grand moguls – like Cecil B. de Mille (the one who in 1934 directed *Cleopatra*, starring Claudette Colbert). Poor Antony! Unfortunate, as he became a paradigm of a hero whose great (perhaps too great) plans and ambitions have totally failed; miserable, since his fate was to be the slave to a woman (a serious, inexcusable fault in the eyes of the ancient machos); and lastly, unlucky because his afterlife was to become an eternal symbol of a muddle and cheap melodrama.

But was it really a “cheap” love affair? Was Antony a “poor” and ridiculous figure? Of course, you are right: there is no doubt that – if measured by modern standards – his fate looks as a bad melodrama. But following such interpretation, one is at risk to adopt a contemporary, ironical (if not cynical sometimes) attitude towards the theme of love. This is because the modern reader's irony betrays, in some sense, a slightly derogatory stance – otherwise well understandable, as the conception of “romantic love” became nowadays hopelessly trivialized and stereotyped in a real deluge of the worst paperback novelettes and TV shows without any hope to be ended – like the notorious and mercilessly ridiculed *The Bold and the Beautiful*. On the other hand, what is and what is not a bad literary romance remains certainly a matter of audience expectations and sensibility. Read without modern prejudices, Plutarch's narrative still remains great and this is true especially if we measure greatness of a literary work by something else than by its formal features only. As a result, it is clear that in the hands of such a sensitive compiler Plutarch certainly was, this archetypical romance from Graeco-Roman antiquity brought a fascinating literary piece whose eternal allure trespasses its earthly triviality.<sup>3</sup> The best evidence for this was given by the genius from Stratford, whose own version of the fate falling upon the tragic lovers was based on the Plutarch's,<sup>4</sup> but became – understandably – a far more “classical”

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<sup>1</sup> Rolland's *Le jeu de l'amour et de la mort* (English title *The Game of Love and Death*) was published in 1925.

<sup>2</sup> On Plutarch as an author of biographies and his intellectual environment, see F. Leo: *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form*. Leipzig 1901, pp. 146–177; U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf: “Plutarch als Biograph.” In: *Reden und Vorträge* II. 4. Berlin 1926, pp. 247–279; cf. A.E. Wardman: “Plutarch's Methods in the Lives.” *Classical Quarterly* 1971, vol. 21, pp. 254–261.

<sup>3</sup> Already in 1953 Philip de Lacy argued that Plutarch did not evaluate highly the genre of tragedy. He quotes the biographer's opinion from *De cohibenda ira*, 426b, where one acknowledges that tragedy (that is, theatrical play) arises from frenzy (Greek *mania*) coupled with anger: P. de Lacy: “Biography and Tragedy in Plutarch.” *American Journal of Philology* 1952, vol. 73, p. 166.

<sup>4</sup> Also recently *Plutarch, Caesar*. Translation with an Introduction and Commentary Ch. Pelling. Oxford 2011, p. 64.

piece to the modern European audience than the Greek original of the Chaeronian biographer.<sup>5</sup>

Many of modern readers would likely agree with Professor Christopher Pelling's perceptive statement that among Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, the *Antony-vita* remains his best biography.<sup>6</sup> This opinion certainly is shared by many other authorities in Plutarch's literary output. The present short paper is devoted to the question what is the source of such and similar, highly affirmative judgments? Particularly, I would like to argue that what makes the *Antony* so unique and exceptional in Plutarch's biographical *corpus* relies essentially on two factors. The first of them is less important, but it has – I believe – some consequences for author's treatment of the whole story: it is the biographer's personal reminiscence of the episodes told him by his grandfather. This indirect link to the *Antony*-story Plutarch stresses out enriches his narrative with an emotional tone, not so frequent in the other biographies of this author. It makes the *Antony* not quite antiquarian study in character but shapes the story that, changing its character, becomes far more personal and looks like a distant reminiscence from the writer's own youth.

The second factor, far more important as it seems, is to focus the attention on Plutarch's attitude towards an old problem how does passion operate and what influence has it on the man's character and deeds (his φύσις, cf. *Ant.* 25. 1).<sup>7</sup> In the investigation of this somewhat exploited theme, I would like to stress out Plutarch's somewhat surprising reluctance to condemn his *Antony* totally; on the contrary, regarding this particular example of a great love passion, it will be argued that Plutarch's attitude was philosophical and therefore deeply human,<sup>8</sup> having nothing to do with adopting any ironical stance that abounds with jokes or ridicules: the actuality of *Antony's* case, both for Plutarch as many centuries later for Shakespeare, too, probably lay in what the former has called: μεγάλοι μεταβολαί (*Comp. Dem.*

<sup>5</sup> It is today agreed that Shakespeare's play was staged around 1606; C.B.R. Pelling: *Plutarch, Life of Antony*. Cambridge 1988, reminds that Shakespeare did not know Greek and he read Plutarch in the English translation produced by Sir Thomas North. North's translation (*The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes, Compared*. London 1579) was made, in turn, not from Greek original but from the French edition by the Abbot Jacques Amyot; cf. also C.F. Tucker Brooke: *Shakespeare's Plutarch* II. New York–London 1909; see especially H.S. Canby: *The Yale Shakespeare. The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*. New Haven 1921, p. 143.

<sup>6</sup> Pelling: *Life of Antony*..., p. vii: "Plutarch's finest *Life*"; cf. R.H. Carr: *Plutarch's Lives of Coriolanus, Caesar, Brutus, and Antony in North's Translation*. Oxford 1906, p. xxvi: "In the character of *Antony*, Plutarch achieved a masterpiece"; nowadays one of the most thoughtful and detailed works also remains: F.E. Brenk: "Plutarch's *Life 'Markos Antonios'*: A Literary and Cultural Study." In: *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II. 33. 6. Hrsg. W. Haase. Berlin–New York 1992, pp. 4348–4469, with the indices, pp. 4895–4915.

<sup>7</sup> See T. Duff: *Plutarch's Lives. Exploring Virtue and Vice*. Oxford 1999, pp. 78f.

<sup>8</sup> On Plutarch's place in the Greek literary production at that time, cf. S. Swain: *Hellenism and Empire. Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World, AD 50–250*. Oxford 1996, pp. 135f; see also Idem: "Hellenic Culture and the Roman Heroes of Plutarch." In: *Essay on Plutarch's Lives*. Ed. B. Scardigli. Oxford 1995, pp. 229f.

*Ant.* 1. 1), meaning something that the ancient moralists were particularly eager to narrate: a complete reversal of fortune the heroes have experienced – here the king Demetrius Poliorcetes (the Macedonian counterpart in Plutarch’s parallel *vita*<sup>9</sup>) and the Roman commander. To be sure in its fundamental conception the *Antony* still remains, as do other *vitae*, a Plutarch’s moral warning since Antony was for him a “bad guy” and – generally – an example of the dishonest and even depraved character, not to be followed by the reader.<sup>10</sup> But in fact, just due to the peculiar theme – that is, love – the traditional and straightforward Plutarchan divide into the negative and good heroes, appears this time far from being obvious. Given the biographer’s vivid interest in the theme of love, the story of Antony’s disaster provides instead a more interesting case: it was Antony’s overwhelming affection (or, should we say infatuation) toward a woman that made him the figure deserving not only a purely human understanding or pity but forgiveness, in fact.

### *Quorum scriptor pars fuit?*

In the chapters XXVIII–XXIX of his Antony-story, Plutarch makes an important interval in the main narrative and decides to insert his personal memories into the text. Of course, this digression (cf. 28. 3: *diegeito*) is strictly connected with the main topic of the *vita*, yet within the whole biography it works in an usual way.

The events in question described in the digression took place at Alexandria in 40 BC where Antony – like the half-legendary Sardanapallus (cf. Athenaeus, 12. 528ff) – wasting time jauntily lives with Cleopatra among innumerable banquets and other pastimes of this type.<sup>11</sup> In order to show the lecturer what degree of luxury reached these sumptuous entertainments, Plutarch introduces the tales he had heard from his grandfather, Lamprias.<sup>12</sup> The episodes were reported in turn to Lamprias by Philotas of Amphissa, then an adept of medicine at Alexandria. In the first of them Philotas remembers his acquaintance with one of the cooks working in the kitchen of the Ptolemaic royal court; thanks to it, the physician gained the opportunity to inspect the preparations made in the royal kitchen and see what was

<sup>9</sup> See de Lacy: “Biography and Tragedy...”

<sup>10</sup> This idea appears in the famous essay *De audiendis poetis*, ch. 8 (= *Mor.* 25e), concerning the heroes of poetry, see the notes by R. Hunter and D. Russell: *Plutarch, How to Study Poetry (De audiendis poetis)*. Cambridge 2011, pp. 144–157.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. R. Flacelière, E. Chambry: *Plutarque, Vies*. Tome XIII: *Démétrios – Antoine*. Paris 1977, p. 217.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. K. Ziegler: *Plutarchos von Chaironeia*. Stuttgart 1949, p. 7 (published also as the entry in the *Realencyclopädie*).

prepared for Cleopatra's dinner. In effect, the reader receives an eyewitness' report of how gargantuan and expensive were this and other Ptolemaic-Roman table-pastimes: so, as an example of this extravagant Oriental luxury,<sup>13</sup> mention is made of eight roasted boars, prepared for twelve guests: the dishes were not given in one time but on a guest's individual behalf – in order to retain their freshness.<sup>14</sup> In the second episode Philotas tells the story how generous was Antony's eldest son in making to him a great gift of the golden vessels used on the banquet table – a clear evidence for lavish luxury.

The details of both stories remain essentially less material to my arguing; rather, what is at stake is Plutarch's purpose in their juxtaposing: suffice it to say that it is evident that the writer's motives in reminding these episodes are plainly – as is often happens in the case of this writer – moralizing. Here Antony's way of spending time is therefore apparently contrasted with the political activity of his wife Fulvia, as well as to the (neglected) military preparations against the Parthians in Mesopotamia. In both cases a reverse of the traditional order and values is suggested: the woman (the Roman woman, let us add) acts like a man while man lives as women usually do. To complicate this situation, Antony, already the married man, is far from his wife but instead enjoys in the company of his Egyptian mistress. In both cases Plutarch's unmasked aim, then, is to show an unique moral weakness on Antony's part, if not his downfall when regarding this aspect.<sup>15</sup>

But the Plutarchan narrator ends the digressions with a remarkable closure: ταῦτα μὲν οὖν ἡμῖν ἔλεγεν ὁ πάππος ἐκάστοτε διηγείσθαι τὸν Φιλώταν (*Ant.* 28. 12: "Such details, then, my grandfather used to tell to me, Philotas would recount at every opportunity"; ed. K. Ziegler, Teubner; trans. B. Perrin, Loeb). This is, however, interesting as it is a clear indication of nostalgia with which the Boeotian philosopher deals with the event of the relatively near past. A very true closure appears at the end of the biography (*Ant.* 87. 4), when the author goes about to tell of the fate of Antony's offspring. When he relates who the children by Antony and Octavia were, he passes to Lucius Domitius, better known as the emperor Nero,

<sup>13</sup> It was a characteristic manner of the Greek and Roman writers to insert detailed descriptions of the Oriental banquets; cf. G. Anderson: *The Second Sophistic. A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire*. London–New York 1993, pp. 174f.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ch. Pelling: "Putting the – viv – into 'Convivial': the *Table Talk* and the *Lives*." In: *The Philosopher's Banquet. Plutarch's Table Talk in the Intellectual Culture of the Roman Empire*. Eds. F. Klotz, K. Oikonomopoulou. Oxford 2011, p. 230.

<sup>15</sup> Which accords, of course, with a general moral purpose in writing biographies, see especially D.A. Russell: *Plutarch*. London–New York 1971, pp. 100f; also P.A. Stadter: "Introduction." In: *Plutarch, Greek Lives*. Trans. R. Waterfield. Oxford 1998, p. ix; cf. J. Geiger: "Plutarch's Parallel Lives: The Choice of Heroes." *Hermes* 1981, vol. 109, pp. 85f (a paper reprinted in: *Essays on Plutarch's Lives...*, pp. 165–190; cf. n. 8, above). Interesting remarks contains the first chapter of L. van Hoof's book: *Plutarch's Practical Ethics. The Social Dynamics of Philosophy*. Oxford 2010, pp. 19f.

the son of Agrippina the Younger (she was a great grand-daughter of Antony; see Suetonius, *Nero*, 5).<sup>16</sup> As usual, Plutarch issues a highly derogatory verdict on this megalomaniac descent of Antony (οὗτος ἄρξας ἐφ' ἡμῶν ἀπέκτεινε τὴν μητέρα καὶ μικρὸν ἐδέησεν ὑπ' ἐμπληξίας καὶ παραφροσύνης ἀνατρέψαι τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίαν, πέμπτος ἀπ' Ἀντωνίου κατ' ἀριθμὸν διαδοχῆς γενόμενος) but again, in the biographer's judgment one phrase is revealing and emotive: ἐφ' ἡμῶν, "in my time."<sup>17</sup>

Both this last ending as well as the formal beginning of the digression at *Ant.* 28. 3 (διηγείτο γοῦν ἡμῶν τῷ πάππῳ Λαμπρία Φιλώτας ὁ Ἀμφισσεὺς ἱατρός<sup>18</sup>) are worth remembering since they contain a strikingly emotive tone that the reader rightly should interpret in one way: recognizing, the writer's emotional bond with the story, the addressee detects out a kind of a subtle empathy Plutarch shows toward his "ugly" hero. It is especially necessary to emphasize here that the same emotive line of thought may be found in his *Dialogue on Love* (*Amatorius*, 26 = *Mor.* 771d), that also provides a kind of memory; also in this case the writer closes the dialogue with a strikingly similar sentence: "Here, as my father told me, ended the discourse concerning Love in the neighborhood of Thespieae" (Ἐνταῦθα μὲν ὁ πατήρ ἔφη τὸν περὶ Ἔρωτος αὐτοῖς τελευτῆσαι λόγον, τῶν Θεσπιῶν ἐγγὺς οὖσιν).<sup>19</sup> To sum up this subsection, we may recapitulate it with a conclusion that for some may ring oddly enough: although on the first look there was for the sage no better candidate for the condemnation than that scoundrel Antony, a proper evaluation of life and behaviour of that villain seems to have been by no means a straightforward matter for the writer.

<sup>16</sup> The passage was quoted in full by F.E. Brenk: "Markos Antonios...", p. 4367 claiming that the Antony-biography closes "Nerogonia."

<sup>17</sup> Pelling: *Life of Antony...*, p. 1 maintains that the story of Antony's life was of special importance for Plutarch (and for his Greek readers) as far as Antony's failure at Actium had direct consequences for the Greek world in Plutarch's own day: had the consul won the battle, the political situation in Greece, including the status of many generations of the elite men like Plutarch himself, would have been (probably) quite different; cf. generally G.W. Bowersock: *Augustus and the Greek World*. Oxford 1969; also G. Shipley: *The Greek World after Alexander 324–30 BC*. London–New York 2000, p. 213 and J. Lightfoot: "Romanized Greeks and Hellenized Romans: Later Greek Literature." In: *Literature in the Greek and Roman Worlds. A New Perspective*. Ed. O. Taplin. Cambridge 2000, pp. 257–262.

<sup>18</sup> See also another touching anecdote told Plutarch by his great grand-father (68. 4): ὁ γοῦν πρόπαππος ἡμῶν Νικαρχος διηγείτο.

<sup>19</sup> Concerning the *Amatorius* see K. Korus: "Artyzm dialogów diegematycznych Plutarcha." *Collectanea Classica Thorunensia* 2002, vol. 13, pp. 88f.; also his: "Wstęp." In: *Plutarch, Dialog o miłości*. Trans. Z. Abramowiczówna. Kraków 1997, pp. 21f.



## The Roman Hercules on the (Plutarchan) Crossroads

There is plenty of passages in the *Life of Antony* that point to the hero's moral deficiencies but for my purposes one of the most interesting is presented in the chapter LIII. Let us remind it briefly. The situation depicted there is highly dramatic: Antony is actually returning from the unsuccessful campaign against the Parthians; the retreat is difficult, the Roman army suffered from heavy losses during its march from Armenia.<sup>20</sup> The commander-in-chief stops with the army near Sidon (chapter LII) expecting money brought by Cleopatra in order to inflict a new war, this time also with a help of king of Media. Indeed, Cleopatra arrives. Meanwhile, like in a scenic drama, suspecting the presence of the rival queen, Octavia, then Antony's legal wife, also wants to meet with her husband and support him with new troops, draught animals, money and many gifts for Antony's staff-officers.<sup>21</sup> To be sure she reaches Athens but on Antony's demand (sent by letters, as her husband's new expedition actually is in progress) she must stop and remain there.<sup>22</sup> No one can hope today to know how the situation was really perceived by Antony himself but for Plutarch, at least, it provides a proverbially crucial moment in the career of the Roman Hercules, in short – a test case of his ἦθος (*ethos*, habit), so to speak.<sup>23</sup> The situation is that whatever decision will the triumvir make, he must choose between his legal wife (*uxor*) and mistress (*amica*).<sup>24</sup> As a writer, the Boetian moralist probably was happy here since the information he has found in the sources enabled him to (re)construct a paradigmatic situation; so Plutarch places his reader in the middle of a moral conflict and in this way the pleasure of reading the whole story thereby becomes a pleasure of expectation mingled with curiosity: How will Antony proceed?<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See on this M. Cary, H.H. Scullard: *Dzieje Rzymu I*. Trans. J. Schwakopf. Polish edn. Warszawa 1992, p. 576; on this see recently D.W. Roller: *Cleopatra. A Biography*. Oxford 2010, p. 97; see also M. Goodman: *The Roman World 44 BC-AD 180*. London–New York 1997, p. 37. See esp. R. Syme: *The Roman Revolution*. Oxford 1960, p. 265.

<sup>21</sup> Plutarch knew already the version that Octavia's journey was essentially political, with a full approbation of her cunning brother: it was undertaken on Octavian's behalf who sought to find a pretext to conflict with Antony, if the latter make offence to him by dismissing her sister (cf. J.H.C. Williams: "Spoiling the Egyptians: Octavian and Cleopatra." In: *Cleopatra of Egypt*. Eds. S. Walker, P. Higgs. Princeton 2001, pp. 190–199. Looking from Octavia's point of view things were certainly seen differently, hence the admiration Plutarch expresses towards her.

<sup>22</sup> A. Goldsworthy: *Antony and Cleopatra*. New Haven–London 2010.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. T. Whitmarsh: *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire. The Politics of Imitation*. Oxford 2001, p. 54.

<sup>24</sup> See also the commentary by Rita Scuderi: *Commento a Plutarco "Vita di Antonio"*. Firenze 1984, p. 90.

<sup>25</sup> See recently the analysis by J. Beneker: *The Passionate Statesman. Eros and Politics in Plutarch's Lives*. Oxford 2012, pp. 153f.; also F.E. Brenk: "Antony-Osiris, Cleopatra-Isis: the End



Soon, however, the lecturer reveals that Plutarch was not entirely interested in Antony's decision (all of all, the reader knows it), as if it was *a priori* assumed – there were many indications for such a decision, if inferred from the hero's youth excesses – what step should be expected from the Roman consul. For Antony is presented at this moment as a highly passive, indulgent man and almost defenseless (anti)hero,<sup>26</sup> enormously weakened by excesses and uncontrolled wine drinking.<sup>27</sup> Instead, interestingly, the Plutarchan narrative is then focused on contrasting behaviour of both great female rivals.<sup>28</sup> The reader is of course right: in this case Cleopatra, is cast – unsurprisingly – in a role of the bad heroine:<sup>29</sup> she is insidious and uses all the charms she gets at disposal to control Antony and steer his feeling and steps (cf. chapters. XXV–XXVI):<sup>30</sup> she just aims to use her lover

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of Plutarch's *Antony*." In: *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition*. Ed. P.A. Stadter. London–New York 1992, pp. 159–182 (= Idem: *Relighting the Souls. Studies in Plutarch, in Greek Literature, Religion, and Philosophy, and in the New Testament Background*. Stuttgart 1998, pp. 128–152).

<sup>26</sup> Rightly pointed out by P.A. Stadter: "Antony. Introduction." In: *Plutarch, Roman Lives*. Trans. R. Waterfield. Oxford 1999, p. 361; cf. especially Ch. Pelling: "Plutarch: Roman Heroes and Greek Culture." In: *Philosophia togata. Essays on Philosophy and Roman Society*. Eds. M. Griffin, J. Barnes. Oxford 1989, pp. 199–232.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. M. Tröster: "Hellenism and *Tryphe* in Plutarch's *Life of Lucullus*." In: *Statesman in Plutarch's Works II. The Statesman in Plutarch's Greek and Roman Lives*. Eds. L. de Blois, J. Bons, T. Kessels, D.M. Schenkeveld. Leiden–Boston 2005, pp. 304f, who rightly points out Plutarch's interest in luxury that is a criterion, by which he evaluates the Roman politicians. According to Pliny, *NH*, 14. 22, Antony, being presented by hostile rumors as an alcoholic, replied by a pamphlet *De sua ebrietate*, cf. K. Stott: "Octavian's Propaganda and Antony's *De Sua Ebrietate*." *Classical Philology* 1929, vol. 24, p. 139.

<sup>28</sup> On Plutarch's portraits of women see J. McInerney: "Plutarch's Manly Women." In: *Andredia. Studies in Manliness and Courage in Classical Antiquity*. Eds. R.M. Rosen, I. Sluiter. Leiden–Boston 2003, pp. 319f. Generally, it is well known that Plutarch was really interested in women's characters and devoted a separate essay to this topic: *Bravery of Women (Mulierum virtutes = Mor. 242e–263c)*. His attitude towards womenfolk, far from chauvinism, differed conspicuously from the views held by many of the Greek *litterati*.

<sup>29</sup> G. Marasco reminds that some accused Cleopatra of being responsible for destroying the marriage of Antony and Octavia: G. Marasco: "Donne, cultura e societa nelle *Vite Parallele* di Plutarco." In: *The Unity of Plutarch's Work. Moralia Themes in the Lives, Features of the Lives in the Moralia*. Ed. A.G. Nikolaidis. Berlin–New York 2008, p. 672 (a very important volume in the studies on Plutarch).

<sup>30</sup> Naturally, a hotly debated theme of how pretty was Cleopatra (a debate beginning with Pascal's famous statement about Cleopatra's nose) must be omitted here as essentially unanswerable (on this see: G.M.A. Richter: *The Portraits of the Greeks*. Revised by R.R.R. Smith. Oxford 1984, p. 237, nos. 218–220); suffice it to say that for Plutarch (*Ant.* 27. 3–5; cf. Pelling: *Life of Antony*..., pp. 191–192, ad loc.) she was of no especial beauty, although he concedes that her presence made a great impression on everyone. Elsewhere, however, Plutarch repeats the opinion (but without citing his source) that the queen: γυναῖκα σοβαρὰν καὶ θαυμαστὸν ὅσον ἐπὶ κάλλει φρονούσαν; see also the judgement of Cassius Dio (42. 34. 4–5), to whom Cleopatra: περικαλλεστάτη γυναικῶν ἐγένετο, καὶ τότε τῇ τῆς ὥρας ἀκμῇ πολὺ διέπρεπε, τό τε φθέγμα ἀστειότατον εἶχε καὶ προσομιλῆσαι παντὶ τῷ διὰ χαρίτων ἡπίστατο, ὥστε λαμπρὰ τε ἰδεῖν καὶ ἀκουσθῆναι οὔσα. The Bithynian historian agrees, however, with Plutarch that the last quality became highly dan-

for her political goals. Accordingly, Plutarch certainly follows the Roman hostile tradition about the queen's motives, repeating after his sources that at that time she only perfectly played "love" game and deceived Antony, this stupid and naive, in fact, villain;<sup>31</sup> in doing so, the lustful Oriental seductress employed all the possible repertoire of the trickeries the cunning women usually use in such cases, including these "classical" and well known, as if taken from poems resembling the later Ovidian love poetry (grieving, weeping, a learned, artful blue in the face) and more unusual (weight loss!<sup>32</sup>). As a result, like in the shocking, well-known myth about Hercules and Omphale, the outcome must have been following: οὕτω πολλάκις Ἀντώνιον δ' [...] Κλεοπάτρα παροπλίσασα καὶ καταθέλξασα συν ἔπεισεν ἀφέντα μεγάλας πράξεις ἐκ τῶν χειρῶν καὶ στρατείας ἀναγκαΐας ἐν ταῖς περὶ Κάνωβον καὶ Ταφόσιριν ἀκταῖς ἀλύειν καὶ παίζειν μετ' αὐτῆς.<sup>33</sup> Quite conversely the noble Octavia. As woman in love, she suffers too but quite differently – in a true Roman (Stoic) manner: she knows of her Egyptian rival (cf. chapter XXXVI, briefly reporting Antony's previous donations to Cleopatra, made in Syria after his departure from Rome to the East) but – again, as a true Roman matron does – her pain is proud and silent, say, Stoic; dismissed and despised by the unfaithful husband she worthily returns to Rome. There is much of admiration in Plutarch's report how careful was she in fulfilling her further duties of wife: later we realize that she even did not leave Antony's house, although he openly has offended her; instead – really a fine and true mark Octavia's honesty and noblesse – she took care of *all* Antony's children, including also Cleopatra's daughter – Cleopatra Selene (*Ant.* 87. 1).<sup>34</sup>

The episode in the chapter LIII constitutes thus a symbolic boundary in the Plutarchan narrative about the development of Antony's character. Like Hercules, an archetypal macho in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (2. 1. 21–34),<sup>35</sup> Antony found himself in his spiritual crossroads and like the mythical beast-slayer the Roman

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gerous one, as the queen καὶ τούτου πάντα τινὰ καὶ δυσέρωτα καὶ ἀφηλικέστερον ἐξεργάσασθαι δυναμένη.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the same observations in *Coniug. praec.* 139a: Ἡ διὰ τῶν φαρμάκων θήρα ταχὺ μὲν αἰρεῖ καὶ λαμβάνει ῥαδίως τὸν ἰχθύν, ἄβρωτον δὲ ποιεῖ καὶ φαῦλον· οὕτως αἱ φίλτρα τινὰ καὶ γοητείας ἐπιτεχνώμεναι τοῖς ἀνδράσι καὶ χειρούμεναι δι' ἡδονῆς αὐτοὺς ἐμπλήκτοις καὶ ἀνοήτοις καὶ διεφθαρμένοις συμβιοῦσιν.

<sup>32</sup> Called by Professor Duane Roller, *Cleopatra...*, p. 98, "a weight-loss program." Losing weight is perceived today – as far as I know – as a more popular strategy the women use to catch the sympathy of their beloved. It is difficult to ascertain how popular was the practice in antiquity or how great commitment it was on their part. Be that as it may, here Plutarch's remark certainly and undoubtedly is highly ironical.

<sup>33</sup> See J. Tyldesley: *Cleopatra. Last Queen of Egypt*. London 2008, p. 146.

<sup>34</sup> On this see P. Southern: *Marek Antoniusz*. Trans. R. Kulesza. Polish edn. Warszawa 1998, pp. 159–160; also general introduction by M. Golden: "Other People's Children." In: *A Companion to Families in the Greek and Roman Worlds*. Ed. B. Lawson. Malden, MA–Oxford 2010, pp. 262f.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Hesiod, *Op.* 287–292; also Prodicus of Ceos, 84, B 2 (in: H. Diels, W. Kranz: *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* II. Berlin 1952, p. 313); cf. Athenaeus, 12. 510c.

commander at this moment had to make a choice. Yet since his Herculean nature (4. 1: “Antonii were Heraclidae”: ἦν δὲ καὶ λόγος παλαιὸς Ἡρακλείδας εἶναι τοὺς Ἀντωνίου) presupposed not only his physical similarity to the hero or ‘Heracleian’ garments, but – above all – Hercules’ promiscuity (cf. Antony’s striking arguing at 36. 6 that ὅφ’ Ἡρακλέους τεκνωθῆναι τὸν αὐτοῦ πρόγονον, οὐκ ἐν μιᾷ γαστρὶ θεμένου τῇ διαδοχῇ), the triumvir’s decision was understandable. Small wonder, then, that in the face of such philosophy – Octavia’s efforts must have failed.

Any reader of these passages cannot doubt on which side the sympathy of Plutarch stands. But, as it has been already observed, although the sage of Chaeronea does not conceal his great friendliness for Octavian’s sister, he does not deny it for Antony, too. Is therefore a paradox, an apparent lack of consistency, if not a contradiction in Plutarch’s moral judgment?<sup>36</sup>

Let us begin by two statements about the Roman scion of Hercules. The first comes from the *Comparison of Demetrius and Antony*, 1. 2. It follows that μαρτύρια δὲ τοῦ μεγέθους αὐτῶ καὶ δι’ ἃ κακῶς ἀκούει (“[...] even the things that brought him ill-repute bear witness to his greatness”).<sup>37</sup> It may be interpreted as an unexpected confession, given Plutarch’s moral standpoint. Nevertheless “the message” – if we can use this word – is clear enough: simply Antony appeared to Plutarch a man who escaped mere evaluation or condemnation. It is a peculiar feature of this writer’s art of characterization in this case that the dark qualities of Antony’s dark personality are constantly contrasted to those good. Concerning the former, the reader quickly acknowledges that the triumvir was a handsome man (chapter II); a good speaker (chapters II and XIV); ambitious (chapter II; note that in itself, ambition is a dubious quality). There was, generally, “a noble dignity of form” in him (4. 1). He could be loyal to his old friends: he remained loyal to Caesar (chapter I) and after the dictator’s murdering – despite Cicero’s fear of Antony’s tyranny – he showed a good political sense. Above all, he was a good soldier (cf. the example of his endurance: 17. 3: θαυμαστὸν ἦν παράδειγμα τοῖς στρατιώταις); most often a brilliant and successful commander; he excelled in bravery – chapters III and VII–VIII (the battle of Pharsalus). His military talent

<sup>36</sup> As an eminent Polish scholar once has observed (in a somewhat sarcastic manner), Plutarch has read too much to have his own consistent judgment (T. Sinko: *Zarys historii literatury greckiej* II. Warszawa 1959, p. 445). Concerning the biographies, it has been observed that sometimes Plutarch had no firm conception of a hero he was actually describing, and presented instead a random choice of the data from sources he actually had at disposal: a good example of such approach would be the case of the *Pericles*, as some scholars have maintained, being an artificial contamination – without any attempt at offering a consistent picture – of the two opposite views: Thucydidean (positive) and Platonic (hostile); see Ch. Pelling: “Plutarch’s Adaptation of His Source-Material.” In: *Plutarch and History. Eighteen Studies*. London 2002, pp. 91f.

<sup>37</sup> See G.W.M. Harrison: “The Semiotics of Plutarch’s Συγκρίσεις: The Hellenistic Lives of Demetrius – Antony and Agésilas – Pompey.” *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 1995, vol. 73, pp. 98–99.

shined in the clash at Philippi (chapter XXII).<sup>38</sup> One important exception (disastrous in political terms) to this was his behaviour at Actium, where he fled from the sea. But there were his great campaigns in the East which are related by Plutarch in the *vita* with some details and positively evaluated by the writer in the *synkrisis* of the figures of Demetrius and Antony (*Comp. Dem. Ant.* 1. 2). To be sure, Antony's acquaintance with soldierly life fitted his rude behaviour (chapters IV and IX) and lack of polish and manners (chapter XXVII) but it was something that was understandable, to some degree. Above all, it was not out of importance that average soldiers loved his *strategos*.<sup>39</sup> On the other hand, all the Antony's defects, mistakes and errors were even more notorious: tellingly Plutarch writes of his "countless faults" (4. 3: *μυρίων ἄλλων ἀμαρτημάτων*).<sup>40</sup> The consul abused alcohol (chapters II and IX), as he loved sumptuous banquets (chapter XXIV: Ephesus; chapters XXVII–XXIX and LXXI: Alexandria), so he was extremely wasteful (chapters IV, IX and XXIX).<sup>41</sup> In the chapter VI, § 3 Plutarch critically refers to his exaggerated ambitions, undoubtedly too enormous and vast, comparing him thus to such heroes as Cyrus the Great, Alexander of Macedon and Caesar himself.<sup>42</sup>

So far, so good. Given so many examples of Antony's drawbacks here an intriguing question arises: Where comes, then, a suggested above pity (and, let us say, a kind of – *sui generis* – admiration) of Plutarch towards him from? The an-

<sup>38</sup> Cf. S.M. Burstein: *The Reign of Cleopatra*. Westport, CT 2004, p. 73.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Pelling, *Life of Antony*..., pp. 123–126.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Leo: *Biographie*..., p. 180. Plutarch's catalogue of Antony's vices to some extent overlaps with those enumerated by Cicero in his second *Philippic*. We should remember that according to Juvenal, *Sat.* 10. 114–129 that admired speech was the cause of the killing of Cicero: fortunately, at the time of the composing the *Antony* Plutarch was safe. On this speech see S. Morton Braund: *Latin Literature*. London–New York 2002, pp. 92–93.

<sup>41</sup> There is much validity in Agnieszka Fulińska's excellent paper ("The End of Hellenism and the Rise of a New World Order. The Battle of Actium and Propaganda on Coins: From Cleopatra and Antony to Augustus." *Classica Cracoviensia* 2009, vol. 13, pp. 40–41) that while avoiding the use of a formal title, the Roman statesman introduced purportedly himself as a follower of the Hellenistic kings (e.g., on the issued coins; cf. Cassius Dio, 50. 5. 2–3); see also Shelley Hales' observations in: "Men Are Mars, Women Are Venus: Divine Costumes in Imperial Rome." In: *Clothed Body in the Ancient World*. Eds. L. Cleland, M. Harlow, L. Llewellyn-Jones. Oxford 2005, p. 135. Regarding Plutarch's attitude toward Rome and Hellenistic monarchy, cf. Ch.P. Jones: *Plutarch and Rome*. Oxford 1971, p. 124. Especially the opinion from *De Alexandri fortuna aut virtute* B. 5 (= *Mor.* 338c) is revealing: here Plutarch despises the customs of the Hellenistic kings who "publicly styled themselves Benefactors, Conquerors, Saviours, or The Great; but no one would be able to tell the tale of their marriages one after another, like the matings of horses, as they spent their days with no restraint amid herds of women, their corruption of boys, their beating of drums in the company of emasculated men, their daily dicing, their flute-playing in the public theaters, the night that was too short for them at their dinners, and the day at their breakfasts" (trans. F.C. Babbitt, Loeb); see M.R. Cammarota: *Plutarco, La fortuna o la virtù di Alessandro Magno. Seconda orazione*. Napoli 1998, pp. 235–236.

<sup>42</sup> On the Plutarchan critique of the destructive ambitions in human life see A. Wardman: *Plutarch's Lives*. London 1974, p. 120.

swer I would like to suggest here is the following: there was one thing that saved Antony in the eyes of Plutarch. This thing was Antony's sincerity and total commitment in his love as well his emotional engagement in the relationship with Cleopatra. It was a decisive factor that made his feeling "great" and – in some sense – more sublime, too. What is more, it was this feeling that made Antony's final downfall something deserving a lot of compassion. In order to illustrate this reasoning, let us call to mind the following, particularly touching picture that resembles Herodotus' reflections on the downfalls of his heroes. After the loss of his most important naval battle Antony fell into a total apathy, if not a depression – to use a modern medical terminology. As Plutarch puts it (*Ant.* 67. 1), during the sea-escape from Actium he "sat down by himself in silence, holding his head in both hands" (ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ καθήστο σιωπῇ, ταῖς χερσὶν ἀμφοτέραις ἐχόμενος τῆς κεφαλῆς). Does this sentence provide a sign of a triumphal, moral condemnation Plutarch on this occasion issues on his fallen hero? That is not the case, I suppose.

The description is exceptionally suggestive and powerful: it concerns a man who brutally fell from his heights to the earth. But, to put it briefly, whatever aim Plutarch had in mind when reminding the touching episode, it was certainly no contempt on his part. Rather, paradoxically, one may legitimately say of the author's wonder for his hero – so to speak. Naturally, it is not a kind of wonder one usually thinks of. Bearing in mind all the previous faults of Antony, Plutarch just seems nevertheless to imply that the consul's final disaster was a natural, inevitable effect of his strange (a word that also cannot be taken in its usual meaning) fidelity – or persistence, at least – in his stubborn affection toward the queen. For Plutarch, it was an example of a feeling that simultaneously was both too slavish and deserving understanding, if not some kind of esteem.

## A Battle That Never Could Have Been Won

What does Plutarch, then, want to say to his addressees? In my view the situation he is describing in the *Antony* (and it was probably one of the main reasons he made an attempt to write down the misfortunes of the Roman hero) constituted a vicious circle, with no perspective for any happy ending and no effective solution – from this point of view a true tragedy, in fact. As the Plutarchan reader rightly expects, the key to the understanding the *Antony-vita* is, of course, love: this being so, makes matters more complicated.

For, the lost campaign at Actium was not, of course, the worst thing that happened to Antony. It is evident that Actium only constituted a logical consequence of something much worse. That *malum*, that notorious τελευταῖον κακὸν

(*Ant.* 25. 1) was just his romantic passion toward the exotic queen (cf. also Ap-  
pian, *Bell. Civ.* 5. 9: *arche kai telon ton epeita kakon*).<sup>43</sup> In other words, Plutarch  
was perfectly aware that there was a really fatal (for Antony's political plans and  
career, as well, from Plutarch's perspective, for Rome too) coincidence of the two  
things: the Roman consul's weak character and Cleopatra's physical attractive-  
ness, a time of her womanish flowering. Given that, how could one expect that the  
results might have turned out in a different, positive way? Could such a dangerous  
time bomb not burst out? In consequence, when seen in this light, Antony's choice  
while still stationing at Sidon becomes more understandable and obvious.

Let us remind again: when meeting Antony in Cilicia, the Ptolemaic queen was  
"at the very time when women have most brilliant beauty and are at acme of intel-  
lectual power" (*Ant.* 25. 3: ἐν ᾧ μάλιστα καιροῦ γυναῖκες ὥραν τε λαμπροτάτην  
ἔχουσι καὶ τὸ φρονεῖν ἀκμάζουσιν).<sup>44</sup> With this opinion Cassius Dio agreed (50.  
5. 4), observing that οὐ γὰρ ὅτι ἐκεῖνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄλλους τοὺς τι παρ' αὐτῷ  
δυναμένους οὕτω καὶ ἐγοήτευσε καὶ κατέδησεν. Plutarch, writing this time with  
open admiration, continues to observe that to "converse with her had an irresistible  
charm, and her presence, combined with the persuasiveness of her discourse and  
the character which was somehow diffused about her behaviour toward others, had  
something stimulating about it" (*Ant.* 27. 2: ἀφὴν δ' εἶχεν ἡ συνδιαίτησις ἄφικτον,  
ἣ τε μορφή μετὰ τῆς ἐν τῷ διαλέγεσθαι πιθανότητος καὶ τοῦ περιθέοντος ἅμα πως  
περὶ τὴν ὁμιλίαν ἦθους ἀνέφερε τι κέντρον).<sup>45</sup> Besides, in such circumstances an

<sup>43</sup> It is true, as the scholars have observed, that politics and political consequences of this love  
affair, while constituting a background against which this fondness flourishes, are less important  
for Plutarch: in the centre of his tale are personal dramas. On this occasion it is also worth noticing  
that in similar terms sees Plutarch Caesar's affair with the queen: according to him war in Egypt  
("Alexandrian" war) was the result of the Roman commander's falling in love with charming Cleo-  
patra, so it was shameless and dangerous love (*Caes.* 48. 3: "As for the war in Egypt, some say that  
it was not necessary, but due to Caesar's passion for Cleopatra, and that it was inglorious and full of  
peril for him"; trans. B. Perrin, Loeb); cf. Ch. Pelling: "The First Biographers: Plutarch and Sueton-  
ius." In: *A Companion to Julius Caesar*. Ed. M. Griffin. Malden, MA–Oxford 2009, pp. 252f.  
There is a flood of books and articles on the nature of Caesar and Cleopatra's relationship, see e. g.,  
S. B. Pomeroy: *Women in Hellenistic Egypt. From Alexander to Cleopatra*. New York 1984,  
pp. 24f.; cf. S. Jędraszek; "W cieniu portyków: Kleopatra VII i jej otoczenie." In: *Człowiek w an-  
tycznym świecie. Księga pamiątkowa ofiarowana Profesorowi Aleksandrowi Krawczukowi*. Ed.  
S. Sprawski. Kraków 2012, pp. 193f. Malcolm R. Errington, at least, expressed an disillusioned  
opinion that in her political manoeuvres Cleopatra has no chances for saving Egypt independent  
of the influences or interventions of the Roman Republic: *Historia świata hellenistycznego...*,  
pp. 367–368.

<sup>44</sup> Generally on women's *acme*: M.R. Lefkowitz, M.B. Fant: *Women's Life in Greece and  
Rome*. London 2005, p. 27.

<sup>45</sup> Conspicuously, although Plutarch may be called a Greek inventor of the most famous, ar-  
chetypal stereotype of ancient *femme fatale* (that is, his biography was interpreted in such way: cf.  
K. Blomquist: "From Olympias to Aretaphila: Women in Politics in Plutarch." In: *Plutarch and  
His Intellectual World*. Ed. J. Mossman. London 1997), he seems to be far from issuing the verdicts  
like these expressed by the Roman writers, with Horace's famous invective ahead: *fatale monstrum*



additional factor was also to the same degree important, quite properly stressed out by Ms. Grace Macurdy, a leading expert on the role and status of the queens in the Hellenistic courts.<sup>46</sup> Cleopatra's second (and to the same extent – substantial) “weapon” was her royal power (she was not mere queen but pharaoh who reigned over the most ancient kingdom ever known) and her wealth – two sibling factors that impressed the simple nature as Antony was so enormously (cf. Cassius Dio, 50. 5. 1: βασιλὶς τε αὐτὴ καὶ δέσποινα ὑπ’ ἐκείνου καλεῖσθαι). At *Ant.* 25. 4 we are told how carefully was the queen prepared for the first meeting with Anthony: “she provided herself with many gifts, much money, and such ornaments as her high position and prosperous kingdom made natural for her to take.”<sup>47</sup> Plutarch de-

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(*Carmina*, 1. 37. 21; cf. also Virgil, *Aen.* 8. 688: *nefas Aegyptia coniunx*; Propertius, 3. 11. 39–58; Lucan, *Phars.* 10. 59–171). To be sure Plutarch's Cleopatra was also a really dangerous beast – in the sense as, say, Hesiod's mythical Pandora was (cf. *Ant.* 25. 2: τὴν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις δεινότητα καὶ πανουργίαν) – but it is not, strictly speaking, a sole blame put on her part: certainly she was “no mere sexual predator” (E. Gruen's term: “Cleopatra in Rome. Facts and Fantasies.” In: *Myth, History and Culture in Republican Rome. Studies in Honour of T.P. Wiseman*. Eds. D. Braund, Ch. Gill. Exeter 2003, p. 273). By the same token, however, the writer appears to be firmly convicted that Antony's own faults constituted here even more decisive factor. Let us observe one important point: namely, when Plutarch begins his *erotike diegesis* about Antony and the untypical woman, he states that the former's “slave” character towards women was already established. Especially striking is to remind that it was Fulvia who made Antony “womanish,” so Cleopatra – Plutarch concludes (10. 6) – should have given thanks to her for “teaching Antony to endure a woman's sway, since she took him over quite tamed, and schooled at the outset to obey women” (ὥστε Κλεοπάτραν διδασκάλια Φουλβία τῆς Ἀντωνίου γυναικοκρασίας ὀφείλειν, πάνν χειροῖθι καὶ πεπαιδαγωγημένον ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς ἀκροᾶσθαι γυναικῶν παραλαβοῦσαν αὐτόν). On Cleopatra's “bad” reputation and fame, see Stacy Schiff's fine biography: *Cleopatra. A Life*. New York 2010 (the book has appeared in Polish as: *Kleopatra. Biografia*. Trans. H. Jankowska. Warszawa 2011). For instance, she writes at p. 4: “Can anything good be said of a woman who slept with the most two powerful men of her time? Possibly, but not in an age when Rome controlled the narrative”; cf. also D.E.E. Kleiner: *Cleopatra and Rome*. Cambridge, MA–London 2005, p. 132; see M. Wyke's two important contributions in her book: *The Roman Mistress. Ancient and Modern Representations*. Oxford 2007: “*Meretrix regina*: Augustan Cleopatras,” pp. 195–243 and “Oriental Vamp: Cleopatra 1910s,” pp. 244–278.

<sup>46</sup> G.H. Macurdy: *Hellenistic Queens. A Study of Woman-Power in Macedonia, Seleucid, Syria, and Ptolemaic Egypt*. Baltimore 1932, p. 186.

<sup>47</sup> Certainly the event at Tarsus was one of the main incidents that contributed to the creating of the legend of Cleopatra: a deceptive, voluptuous woman; see additionally the graphic description of the stereotype of a Oriental woman as given by A. Blanshard: “Gender and Sexuality.” In: *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*. Ed. C.W. Kallendorf. Malden, MA–Oxford 2007, p. 332. The legend persisted intact through many centuries and the stereotype (for stereotypes – as usually – die hard) was repeated in the Middle Ages by Dante in his *La divina comedia*, where Cleopatra absolutely must have been found in the Hell (*Inferno*, canto V), and Boccaccio's *De claris mulieribus*; the last two references I owe to M. Suzuki's concise but well informative entry about the Egyptian queen's *Nachleben*: “Cleopatra.” In: *The Classical Tradition*. Eds. A. Grafton, G.W. Most, S. Settis. Cambridge, MA–London 2010, p. 206; see G. Hölbl: *A History of the Ptolemaic Empire*. London–New York 2001, p. 241; cf. generally G.W. Most: “Dante's Greeks.” *Arion* 2006, vol. 13, pp. 15f.



velops this theme in chapter XXVI, devoting much space to the description of how splendid was Cleopatra's (here stylized on Aphrodite: ὡς ἡ Ἀφροδίτη) memorable appearance in Tarsus before Antony (*Ant.* 26. 1–3), which Professor Robert Garland plausibly called “a brilliantly conceived ‘photo-op’ took.”<sup>48</sup> Plutarch ends the description of this show with the striking observation” (26. 4): “Few sights were so beautiful or so worthy to be seen as this” (τῶν ἐν ὀλίγοις ἄξιοθεάτων καὶ καλῶν ἐκείνην γενέσθαι τὴν ὄψιν). Generally, it was thus the pharaoh-queen's “splendour and elegance” (27. 1: τὴν λαμπρότητα καὶ τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν) that brought about that Antony “was left behind, and vanquished” (λειπόμενος καὶ κρατούμενος).

These two last terms are crucial as indicating that the author's attention is focused in fact not on her but on Antony; both adjectives perfectly describe his deplorable attitude: otherwise a brave soldier and the most influential statesman in the Roman Republic after Caesar's death, he is desperately helpless now – quite in the mode of the weeping Homeric hero in the beginnings of the Book V of the *Odyssey*. Plutarch leaves no doubts for such interpretation, choosing on this occasion a strong moral vocabulary: at *Ant.* 25. 1, he says of the destructive power of love which ruined this able and talented man: ἔρωις ἐπιγενόμενος καὶ πολλὰ τῶν ἔτι κρυπτομέ ν ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ ἀτρεμοῦντων παθῶν ἐγείρας καὶ ἀναβαλκεύσας, εἴ τι χρηστὸν ἢ σωτήριον ὅμως ἀντεῖχεν, ἠφάνισε καὶ προσδιέφθειρεν (cf. Seneca, *Epist. Mor. Luc.* 88. 25). A little further, in order to underscore his position, the biographer uses a “hunting” vocabulary adding that Antony “was taken captive” (ἀλίσκεται; in the same vein Cassius Dio, 50. 2–4). Certainly, in his characteristics of Antony Plutarch would agree with the words Propertius is using in one of his poems (3. 11. 1–2): *Quid mirare meam si versat femina vitam – et trahit addictum sub sua iura virum*. The result, small wonder, was lamentable: the proud triumvir became completely obedient to the queen (*Ant.* 26. 4: “obeyed and went”: ὑπήκουσε καὶ ἦλθεν), while she “despised and laughed the man”

<sup>48</sup> R. Garland: *Celebrity in Antiquity. From Media Tarts to Tabloid Queens*. London 2006, p. 134. The title of Aphrodite, however, was an officially used by Ptolemaic queens, cf. W.A. Cheshire: “Aphrodite Cleopatra.” *Journal of American Research Center at Egypt* 2007, vol. 43, p. 157. Undoubtedly the passage bears some Homeric tones, here especially the famous and charming scene of Hera's dressing in order to seduce Zeus comes into mind: *Il.* 14.157–184 (cf. L. Llewellyn-Jones: *Aphrodite's Tortoise. The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece*. Swansea 2003, p. 288, who says of “The voyeuristic peep into the goddess' budoir”). The same is true with the verses in the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* where the goddess' preparation is described (5. 56–64; cf. 6. 6–14) and then the reader is informed about the reaction of Anchises (vv. 84–90). Both passages reveal something topical in later Greek literature: a potentially catastrophic danger women (beautiful evil) can bear on men. Also Hesiod in the *Theogony* openly confesses this old truth: the details of Pandora's dressing are thus followed by the narrator's famous litany that she (and women generally) is *kalon kakon* (v. 585), *dolon aipyn, amechanon anthropoisin* (“sheer guile, not to be withstood by men,” v. 589). See the notes by A. Faulkner: *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*. Oxford 2008, pp. 162f. On the culture of peping cf. a recent study by S. Goldhill: “What Is Ekphrasis for?” *Classical Philology* 2007, vol. 102, p. 3.

(26. 1: κατεφρόνησε καὶ κατεγέλασε τοῦ ἀνδρός).<sup>49</sup> His manly character inevitably has been totally weakened and it evaporated, in fact; additionally, on this occasion Antony was “melted and enervated” by queen’s friends (52. 6), which only worsened his status.<sup>50</sup> A further and particularly severe judgment by Plutarch is also found at 62. 1. Criticizing his hero’s decision to fight at sea, Plutarch explains it by the fact that Antony was just “lost”: he became – *horribile dictu* – just προσθήκη τῆς γυναικὸς (“appendage of the woman”). As a comment on this, Cassius Dio’s, 48. 24. 2, severe moral indictment would be also helpful here, for he pays in turn the attention to *honour*: κὰν τούτῳ τῆς Κλεοπάτρας ἐν Κιλικίᾳ οἱ ὀφθεισῆς ἐρασθεῖς οὐκέτ’ οὐδεμίαν τοῦ καλοῦ φροντίδα ἐποιήσατο, ἀλλὰ τῇ τε Αἰγυπτίᾳ ἐδούλευε καὶ τῷ ἐκείνης ἔρωτι ἐσχόλαζε. καὶ ἄλλα τε διὰ τοῦτο πολλὰ καὶ ἄτοπα ἔπραξε. This opinion agrees with the judgments by expressed by Flavius Josephus (*Ant. Jud.* 13. 1. 324) and Appian of Alexandria (*Bell. Civ.* 4. 38), as if Antony’s fatal reputation ideally proved an old rule known from the Virgilian phrase: *it fama* (*Aen.* 4. 173).

Yet, this being so, we must address the following question: How is the nature of these harsh, as they are, comments and sentiments by the prudent and lenient observer as Plutarch certainly was? The question most intriguing in the author’s line of argumentation may be formulated thus: As a man and statesman Antony really made major mistakes – here the Greek moralist has no doubts – and, all in all, he has paid the highest price for these faults.<sup>51</sup> All that remains true but by the same token a fundamental (viz. moral in its nature) problem seems to emerge from the writer’s analysis, as sketched above. We may formulate it in a following way: How could be love a bad thing, especially if in this case the love was so overwhelming, profound and sincere? Further explanation will be suggested in the following paragraphs, but for now it is enough to say that it is this question that lies at the roots of Plutarch’s issue with Antony and makes the biography still so vivid. To answer it, means probably to detect one of the messages hidden beneath the narrative surface of the *Antony*.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>49</sup> Let us observe that essentially Plutarch does not suggest that Egyptian did not love Antony. At 53. 5 the writer quotes the efforts made by Cleopatra’s flatterers who reviled the consul for being “a hard-hearted” toward the woman who loved him deeply and “was devoted to him and him alone”: it is clear that generally Plutarch is far from undermining the sincerity of Cleopatra’s assertion and rather calls the attention to the unfair ways by which the queen in love wants to overwhelm Antony and capture his affection.

<sup>50</sup> Pelling: *Life of Antony*..., p. 245 quotes on this occasion the criticism of such “friends” Plutarch expresses in the diatribe *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend*, 61a–b; see E. Goltz Huzar: *Mark Antony. A Biography*. London–New York 1978, p. 247.

<sup>51</sup> See R. Hägg: *The Art of Biography in Antiquity*. Cambridge 2012, p. 275; also T. Whitmarsh: *Ancient Greek Literature*. Cambridge–Malden, MA 2004, p. 197; cf. generally G. Camassa: “La biografia.” In: *Lo spazio letterario della Grecia antica*. I. 3. Dir. G. Cambiano, L. Canfora, D. Lanza. Roma 1995, pp. 303f.

<sup>52</sup> This question remains in itself worth further investigating, especially in the case of Plutarch.

It should be emphasized that entirely when the naval clash at Actium still was continuing, the ships of Cleopatra unexpectedly withdrew from their tactical position. In this way the escape has begun. At this moment something astonishing happened to Cleopatra's lover; he decided to cease from his tactical position too. An example of cowardice? A sense of real state? Certainly both. But let us see how does Plutarch comment on this step (*Ant.* 66. 7–8): ἐνθα δὴ φανερόν αὐτὸν Ἀντώνιος ἐποίησεν οὐτ' ἄρχοντος οὐτ' ἀνδρὸς οὐθ' ὅλως ἰδίῳις λογισμοῖς διοικούμενον, ἀλλ' – ὅπερ **τις παίζων εἶπε τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ ἐρώντος ἐν ἀλλοτρίῳ σώματι ζῆν** – ἐλκόμενος ὑπὸ τῆς γυναικὸς ὥσπερ συμπεφυκῶς καὶ συμμεταφερόμενος (“Here, indeed, Antony made it clear to all the world that he was swayed by the sentiments neither of a commander nor of a brave man, nor even by his own, but, as **someone pleasantly said that the soul of the lover dwells in another's body**, he was dragged along by the woman as if he had become incorporate with her and must go where she did”; emphasis mine – B.B.).

In the two main commentaries to the text of the *Life of Antony*<sup>53</sup> the importance of this passage is not especially stressed out or discussed. This is understandable, since the first tendency which immediately appears on reading it is to take it as the evidence for Plutarch's ironical interpretation of Antony's overwhelming passion. This is also strongly suggested by the use of the present participle παίζων. But in fact, I believe, the passage is purportedly ambiguous and rather the contrary is true: the comparison must have impressed Plutarch enormously both as a man and thinker as it presented to him a great value and attraction – it will be even no exaggeration to concede that he apparently was fascinated by its ostensible “message.” Indeed, one might even agree today that it makes a considerable impression on a reader, given of course that we do not adopt an ironic stance but look at it with the young Werther's sensibility at least, not necessarily with his contemplating sorrows. Anyhow, elsewhere still was Plutarch under the allure of the comparison and thought it worth quoting twice: first, in the biography of the Roman hero – Cato the Elder (to whom the saying was ascribed: *Cat.* 9. 8: Τοῦ δ' ἐρώντος ἔλεγε τὴν ψυχὴν ἐν ἀλλοτρίῳ σώματι ζῆν). Above all, secondly, in the famous and suggestive *Dialogue on Love* (Ἐρωτικός, *Amatorius*, 16 = *Mor.* 759c: ὁ μὲν γὰρ Ῥωμαῖος Κάτων ἔλεγε τὴν ψυχὴν τοῦ ἐρώντος ἐνδιατᾶσθαι τῇ τοῦ ἐρωμένου).

The observations on the nature of true and false love made in the *Amatorius* are by no means remarks isolated;<sup>54</sup> they constitute, in fact, a part of a broader context and should be read with other works of Plutarch concerning this everlasting topic. Today, every student of this author perfectly knows that the character of women and the nature of love as such were a significant subject-matter of the Chaeronean essayist's writings; he just revealed peculiar interest in the nature of

<sup>53</sup> R. Scuderi: *Commento...*, p. 107; Ch. Pelling: *Life of Antony...*, p. 285.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. generally P. Walcot: “Romantic Love and True Love: Greek Attitudes to Marriage.” *Ancient Society* 1987, vol. 18, pp. 5–33.

love or friendship, these powerful drives that deteremine, shape, change or often destroy human lives.<sup>55</sup> Besides his Ἑρωτικός,<sup>56</sup> Plutarch devoted to these problems such treatises as *Laceanarum apophthegmata* (*Mor.* 240c–242d), *Bravery of Women* (*Mor.* 242e–263c), or *Love Stories* (Ἑρωτικά διηγήσεις, *Amatoriae narrationes* = *Mor.* 771e–775e). To this same category belongs also his captivating diatribe *Advice to Bride and Groom* (Γαμικά παραγγέλματα, *Coniugalia praecepta* = *Mor.* 138a–146a).<sup>57</sup> From this short catalogue of the works concerning love it is, then, obvious that Plutarch had also a great understanding for humans (men and women alike) falling into this affection. Accordingly, in the dialogue *Amatorius* (constituting – alongside the *Coniugalia praecepta* – a kind of the Plutarchan theory of love) the author observes (750d) that there is in men and women a natural drive toward a mutual pleasure (ἐνεστι τῇ φύσει τὸ δεῖσθαι τῆς ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων ἡδονῆς γυναικας καὶ ἀνδρας). Of course, the writer was deeply convicted (in this respect the ancient Christians certainly would agree) that pleasure alone is not yet in itself a mark of true love (ταῖς δὲ πρὸς γυναικας ἐπιθυμίαις ταύταις, ἂν ἄριστα πέσωσιν, ἡδονὴν περίεστι καρποῦσθαι καὶ ἀπόλαυσιν ὥρας καὶ σώματος.... τέλος γὰρ ἐπιθυμίας ἡδονὴ καὶ ἀπόλαυσις: 750d–e; also cf. 767c: ἐπιθυμία τὸν Ἑρωτα ταὐτὸ ποιῶν ἀκαταστάτῳ καὶ πρὸς τὸ ἀκόλαστον ἐκφερούση τὴν ψυχὴν). By this last term the biographer understands something more important, namely, a feeling that can lead to *philia* and *arête* (εἰς ἀρετὴν διὰ φιλίας τελευτᾷ). In consequence Eros, the argument runs, if an affection is true and sincere, must be accompanied by friendship and virtue (φιλίαν καὶ ἀρετὴν: 750e), that is – only then moral goodness appear.<sup>58</sup> If not, otherwise one may only speak of something a γυναικομανία (mere, lustful obsession with women) and uncontrolled, untamed desire (τὸ πάθος<sup>59</sup>) that have

<sup>55</sup> On this cf. P.A. Stadter: “Philosophos kai Philandros: Plutarch’s Views of Women in the *Moralia* and *Lives*.” In: *Plutarch’s Advice to the Bride and Groom and A Consolation to His Wife* (English Translations, Commentary, Interpretive Essays, and Bibliography). Ed. S.B. Pomeroy. Oxford 1999, pp. 175f.; cf. also F. Le Corsu: *Plutarque et les femmes*. Paris 1981, pp. 270f.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. S. Goldhill: *Focault’s Virginity*. Cambridge 1995, pp. 144f.; see P. Walcot: “Plutarch and Sex.” *Greece & Rome*, 1998, vol. 45, p. 185.

<sup>57</sup> See E. Fantham, H.P. Foley, N.B. Kampen, S.B. Pomeroy, H.A. Shapiro: *Women in the Classical World. Image and Text*. New York–Oxford 1994, p. 367. On the treatise see V. Wohl: “Scenes from a Marriage: Love and Logos in Plutarch’s *Coniugalia Praecepta*.” *Helios* 1997, vol. 24, pp. 170–192.

<sup>58</sup> It is interesting to remind that in this respect Plutarch was not far from the Stoic ethics, although on many other occasions he criticized the adherents of the *Stoa Poecile* very vigorously; cf. D. Babut: *Plutarque et le stoïcisme*. Paris 1969, p. 110. “Friendship” and “love” was an important point in the Stoic ethics, cf. Diogenes Laertius, 7. 130, quoting Chrysippus’ treatise *On Love* (= J. von Arnim: *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*. III. Stuttgartiae 1964, nos. 716, 718); also: F. Frazier: “Eros et Philia dans la pensée et la littérature grecques. Quelques pistes, d’Homère à Plutarque.” *Vita Latina*, 2007, vol. 177, p. 42.

<sup>59</sup> Let us add that this word itself is ambiguous, meaning an uncontrolled emotion, often ending in a suffering, cf. R. Beekes: *Etymological Dictionary of Greek II*. Leiden 2010, p. 1124.

nothing to do with a true affection (ἔρως: 769b).<sup>60</sup> Such definition appears also in the Γαμικά παραγγέλματα, chapter XXXIV (= *Mor.* 142f), to quote a telling passage: σχεδὸν οὖν καὶ γάμος ὁ μὲν τῶν ἐρώντων ἡνωμένος καὶ συμφυῆς ἐστίν, ὁ δὲ τῶν διὰ προίκας ἢ τέκνα γαμούντων ἐκ συναπτομένων, ὁ δὲ τῶν συγκαθευδόντων ἐκ διεστῶτων, οὓς συνοικεῖν ἂν τις ἀλλήλοις οὐ συμβιοῦν νομίσειε.<sup>61</sup>

Now, having reminded these fundamental remarks, we may return to the Antony-*vita*, where the essential question that arises, may be formulated in the following way: Should the Roman consul's unusual affection be regarded as the case of such true feeling, something more than temporary sensual fascination?<sup>62</sup> Undoubtedly, the answer must be yes, for in the biographer's conviction it was – if discussed on a general level – an example of something more than a γυναικομανία. That is, naturally, first and foremost, it was γυναικομανία: Plutarch devotes many pages to prove the results of Antony's "fatal attraction." But on the other hand, remarkably, he also does not deny that – although politically disastrous – there was something sincere and deep in his love passion as well as a lot of honesty in his fondness toward the attractive queen. This was certainly visible at the end of Antony's life. So, it remains therefore to state, Antony's passion fits *also* Plutarch's definition of true affection and this is a lesser paradox than it might seem.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Cf. D. Konstan: *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks. Studies in Aristotle and Classical Literature*. Toronto–Buffalo–London 2006, pp. 8f; cf. Ch. Gill: *Greek Thought* [Greece & Rome New Surveys in Classics 25]. Oxford 1995, pp. 30–33.

<sup>61</sup> See L. Goessler: "Advice to the Bride and Groom: Plutarch Gives a Detailed Account of His Views on Marriage." In: *Plutarch's Advice to the Bride and Groom...*, pp. 97f.

<sup>62</sup> One might argue that there is some danger in taking Plutarch's interpretation of Antony's profound obsession with Cleopatra at its face value as a hard historical fact, and explain all his later decisions by a "fatal" and "tragic" obsession or feeling. Rather, it is claimed, here a famous letter Octavian sent to Antony should be recalled. The letter is quoted by Suetonius in his *Divus Augustus*, 69. What is striking here is a highly derogative, if not brutal and vulgar (so rightly Schiff: *Kleopatra...*, pp. 227–228), tone Antony adopts when speaking to Octavian about his intimate relationship with the *regina* who at that time was not yet his *uxor* (the letter is dated on the year 33 BC, nine years after Antony's first meeting with Cleopatra). This would be an evidence that in the first phase of their intimate affair there was no so purely "romantic" feeling, at least on the part of Antony; cf. here E. Shuckburgh: *C. Suetonii Tranquillii Divus Augustus*. Chicago 1896, p. 132, and J.M. Carter: *Suetonius, Divus Augustus*. Bristol 1982, p. 191. Yet, given this restriction, one should not blame Plutarch for an erroneous interpreting of the nature of the relationship between the queen and the triumphvir. Above all, Plutarch rightly recognized that Antony's feeling toward this enchanting woman changed and increased as the time went and went. Perhaps such change began take the place after Antony's retreat from Armenia and dismissing Octavia. The nature of the affection became deeper and more intensive.

<sup>63</sup> By the way of comparison, the discussion about friendship (to some extent overlapping with the notion of feeling or affection) Aristotle has given in the Book VIII (1155a and following) of the *Nicomachean Ethics* may be here instructive. The philosopher states that a true, ideal friendship can only exist between honest men (1157a) which was a claim repeated later by Cicero in his beautiful *Laelius sive de amicitia*. By the same token, however, the Stagirite admitted that there are various degrees of friendship. One of them is friendship for pleasure; it is less perfect than others



In order to strengthen this way of argumentation, let us indicate the last, telling example.

A clear and somewhat surprising clue of Plutarch's lack of decision of whether to issue or not a severe moral condemnation of Antony's behaviour is given in the chapter XXXI, describing a famous political meeting at Brundisium in 40 BC. Here Plutarch develops the theme of the fine political perspectives that have opened before Antony thanks to his marriage to the generous sister of Octavian, a woman of highest respect. On this occasion, one reads of Octavia's female virtues (among many, beauty, dignity, reason excel: 31. 4 – *kallos, semnotes, nous*). Yet, as it usually happens in human life, matters are not so simple, as earlier on the reader is informed that on these honest qualities of Octavia a shadow is cast: this dark shadow provide Antony's intimate relations with the Egyptian "tabloid queen" (again, R. Garland's excellent phrase, see fn. 48). In effect, this relationship with Cleopatra is understood by Plutarch as a battle, or, rather a metaphorical war – a private fighting of Antony with his own demons, his feeling, "with his love" (*pros ton erota tes Aigyptias machomenos*),<sup>64</sup> that is – in the Boetian sage's interpretation – with hero's own indulgences. Although Antony conceded that the queen was not his wife at that time, nevertheless he could not resist his deepest feelings. Ultimately, as everyone interested in the story knows, the Roman consul has lost this decisive battle and, in a distant consequence of his failed resistance, the next generation of the Greek inhabitants of the Roman *oecumene* will receive the doubtful the opportunity to live under alleged blessings of the *Pax Augusta*.<sup>65</sup>

Fortunately, however, one may today concede that it was a great merit of Plutarch's enormous sensitivity and a lot of empathy he possessed that he was able to give us (as did William Shakespeare over four or Georg Friedrich Haendel three hundreds years ago<sup>66</sup>) an unique, exceptional opportunity to look into

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but it often happens; the second is the friendship for utility; utility is a feature of old men; pleasure – of the young people. Does this partition fit Plutarch's philosophy of love or Antony's infatuation in particular? I believe this was the biographer's dilemma: Antony was a scoundrel, arrogant and hybrid aristocrat who usually treated men (and women) in an instrumental way. However, there is a sufficient basis for claiming that in Plutarch eyes his feeling toward the queen gradually changed its character. From Plutarch's perspective – it was a change for better, although it meant a total downfall of the man.

<sup>64</sup> A recurrent motif in Roman love poetry of the Roman bards, e.g., Ovid or Propertius: cf. G. Luck: "Love Elegy." In: *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature II. Latin Literature*. Eds. E.J. Kenney, W.V. Clausen. Cambridge 1982, pp. 405f.

<sup>65</sup> On the conception of the Roman *oikoumene* as all-embracing, social and political reality that was the background against which the Greek intellectuals wrote and in which lived during the Principate, see my paper: "The *Romanitas* of Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations*." *Studia Elbląskie* 2012, vol. 13, pp. 93–96, 98–99; cf. P. Fiebigier Bang: "Imperial Ecumene and Polyethnicity." In: *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Studies*. Eds. A. Barchiesi, W. Scheidel. Oxford 2010, pp. 678f.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Rudolf Hirzel's classic treatment: *Plutarch*. Leipzig 1912, pp. 140f. . Regarding Haendel's *Giulio Cesare in Egitto* (HWV 117), see Danielle de Niese's 2005 performance. Such sympathy

the Roman “alpha-male’s” purely human drama.<sup>67</sup> It was a drama of the man who was not sufficiently clever and strong or assertive enough (indeed, Plutarch characterizes him as a weak, naive and uncomplicated nature, more familiar with mentality of a rank-and-file soldier, rather than a cunning and shrewd politician) and whose bad luck resulted from a simple fact that he – proverbially and consequently – at the risk of facing a catastrophe, followed the voice of his heart. Against all odds.

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for Cleopatra is not to be suspected in modern screen adaptations of her fate, to recall the famous, 1964 movie by Joseph L. Mankiewicz.

<sup>67</sup> The term by Gordon Braden: “Plutarch, Shakespeare, and the Alpha Males.” In: *Shakespeare and the Classics*. Eds. Ch. Martindale, A.B. Taylor. Cambridge 2004, pp. 200f.