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PLUTARCH'S ASSESSMENT OF LATIN AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSION*

It is well-known that at the beginning of the *Life of Demosthenes,* in one of the rare instances in which Plutarch speaks about himself, he tells the reader that only late in life did he begin to come into contact with texts written in Latin[1]. He adds that, by the time he was writing this, he had attained the capability of reading a Latin text treating matters he was somehow familiar with, so that the expertise he had acquired elsewhere made him able to understand the language, rather than the other way around – that is, using knowledge of the language as a means to gain the information he needed. We may believe him when he says this is true, in spite of its seeming strangeness[2]. Many of us may have experienced something similar at the beginning of our academic career, when we began reading books and papers in foreign languages we were not necessarily already familiar with, and soon attained the ability to find our way around texts treating subjects akin to those which we were studying ourselves.

This statement of Plutarch's would be sufficient, in and by itself, to make us realize that the Latin texts he is referring to are those that he needed for his writing activity – mainly, of course, in connection with the biographies of the prominent Romans he paired with equally prominent Greeks in his *Parallel Lives,* though Latin sources may have been handy also for lesser works concerned with Roman matters[3]. By and large, therefore, we may expect most of the Latin works he would be interested in to be histories, which he read in order to get information for his own biographical writing. This is punctually confirmed by an analysis of his quotations[4]. Most of the Latin

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[1] Plut. *Dem*. 2.2 ὀψέ ποτε καὶ πόρρω τῆς ἡλικίας ἠρξάμεθα Ῥωμαϊκοῖς συντάγμασιν ἐντυγχάνειν. Jones 1971, 81 n. 3, compares a similar expression, in which the age of around sixty years is mentioned: Plut. *Aem*. 10.2 ἡλικίας... ἤδη πρόσω καὶ περὶ ἑξήκοντα γεγονὼς ἔτη.

[2] Plut. *Dem*. 2.2 πρᾶγμα θαυμαστὸν μέν, ἀλλ᾽ ἀληθὲς ἐπάσχομεν.

[3] E.g. the *De fortuna Romanorum,* the *Quaestiones Romanae,* and the *Parallela Graeca et Romana;* but also several passages of the *Quaestiones convivales*.

[4] Plutarch quotes about 40 Latin writers in 130 different passages: cf. Strobach 1997, 41.

writers he mentions are indeed historians; in particular, no Latin poet is ever quoted, with the single exception of the *Epistles* of Horace, in the *Life of Lucullus*[5]. All scholars therefore agree on the fact that Plutarch did not read Latin literature for enjoyment, but merely for practical purposes. At all events, Plutarch himself explicitly goes on to say that he never acquired the capability to appreciate the fine points of style in Latin writings[6].

The question of Plutarch's knowledge of Latin has been discussed for well over a century, but nowadays most scholars agree that, in spite of some obvious errors found in his writings, he did possess a fair working knowledge of the language[7], which of course was far from perfect command[8]. An almost total ignorance of Latin on the part of Plutarch is hardly a tenable position; the same of course is true of the other extreme, which attributes to him a profound knowledge of Roman literature and considers his own state–ment about his inability to appreciate Latin style to be false modesty – though both positions are represented even in fairly recent scholarship[9].

Our main concern, however, is not to establish to what extent did Plutarch master Latin – we have already stated our opinion concerning this. What we propose to investigate is rather his attitude to and his assessment of

[5] Plut. *Lucull*. 39.5 ~ Hor. *epist*. 1.6.45-46.

[6] Plut. *Dem*. 2.4 κάλλους δὲ Ῥωμαϊκῆς ἀπαγγελίας καὶ τάχους αἰσθάνεσθαι καὶ μεταφορᾶς ὀνομάτων καὶ ἁρμονίας καὶ τῶν ἄλλων, οἷς ὁ λόγος ἀγάλλεται, χαρίεν μὲν ἡγούμεθα καὶ οὐκ ἀτερπές· ἡ δὲ πρὸς τοῦτο μελέτη καὶ ἄσκησις οὐκ εὐχερής, ἀλλ᾽ οἵστισι πλείων τε σχολὴ καὶ τὰ τῆς ὥρας ἔτι [πρὸς] τὰς τοιαύτας ἐπιχωρεῖ φιλοτιμίας.

[7] A comprehensive review of the ample bibliography may be found in Dubuisson 1979, 95-97; De Rosalia 1991; Strobach 1997, 32-39. Curiously enough, De Rosalia ignores Dubuisson, and Strobach ignores both Dubuisson and De Rosalia. De Rosalia defends Plutarch in relation with several alleged mistakes and misunderstandings.

[8] Strobach 1997, 34-35, is right when she considers that the *Platonicae quaestiones,* where Plutarch states that there are hardly any prepositions in Latin (10.3, 1010D), may have been written at an early stage, before Plutarch gained a better knowledge of the language. But his remark that the three perfects used by Caesar in a famous report (*veni vidi vici*) are effective because they all end with the same letter (Plut. *Caes*. 50.4) seems to prove Plutarch's ignorance of the fact that all Latin perfects end the same way. See below.

[9] Jones 1971, 81-87, holds that there was no need for Plutarch to learn Latin, since his Roman friends were bilingual. He would be helped by them or by other assistants, which would translate or make excerpts of the Latin sources for his benefit. Jones, of course, has a point about the cultured Romans' bilingualism. Plutarch's lectures on philosophy at Rome, which he mentions at *Dem*. 2.2, were no doubt held in Greek, as conceded also by Dubuisson 1979, 96, and Strobach 1997, 34. On the other hand Burlando 1994 thinks that Plutarch structured the introductory chapters of the *Lives of Demosthenes and Cicero* according to the guidelines laid down by Cicero in his rhetorical treatises. Therefore Plutarch's avowal as to his inability to appreciate Latin style would be nothing but false modesty.

the language of the Romans as a means of expression.

We may begin by remarking that at the very moment he avows his inability to appreciate Latin style he does, in fact, express such an appreciation, by saying that what he cannot perceive is not merely the beauty (κάλλος) of Latin, but also its conciseness and pregnant concentration, which he denotes by the term τάχος, "speed" or "brevity". The latter definitely appears to be no general remark, but rather a trait peculiar to the Latin language. We must remember this, because the same term and/or the same idea will return in all of Plutarch's pronouncements about the language of Rome.

In the introductory chapters of the *Lives of Demosthenes and Cicero* he goes on to say that due to his imperfect command of Latin he will avoid emitting a literary judgment as to the superiority of the former or the latter as an orator, and criticizes the presumption of Caecilius of Calacte, who had the nerve to write a *Comparison of Demosthenes and Cicero,* though his language was Greek. We may remind that another literary critic writing in Greek did not shrink from proposing such a comparison. I'm referring to Ps. Longinus, the author of *On the Sublime*[10], whose judgments on Demosthenes and Cicero are believed by many to be ultimately based on those of Caecilius[11], although he would hardly be touched by Plutarch's reproach, in as much as he is at pains to apologize for daring to utter an opinion about Cicero, though he is a Greek, and finally leaves the matter to his Roman addressee and his compatriots[12]. We should notice, however, that he attributes the very trait which for Plutarch is peculiar to Latin, the τάχος, to Demosthenes rather than to Cicero. On the other hand, his judgment on the two orators is in striking agreement with what we read in Quintilian about them,[13] and probably reflects a well established tradition.

[10] [Longin.] *de subl*. 12.4 οὐ κατ᾽ ἄλλα δέ τινα ἢ ταῦτα, ἐμοὶ δοκεῖ, φίλτατε Τερεντιανέ (λέγω δέ, ‹ εἰ › καὶ ἡμῖν ὡς Ἕλλησιν ἐφεῖται τι γινώσκειν), καὶ ὁ Κικέρων τοῦ Δημοσθένους ἐν τοῖς μεγέθεσι παραλλάττει. ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐν ὕψει τὸ πλέον ἀποτόμῳ, ὁ δὲ Κικέρων ἐν χύσει, καὶ ὁ μὲν ἡμέτερος διὰ τὸ μετὰ βίας ἕκαστα, ἔτι δὲ τάχου, ῥύμης, δεινότητος, οἷον καίειν τε ἅμα καὶ διαρπάζειν, σκηπτῷ τινι παρεικάζοιτ᾽ ἂν ἢ κεραυνῷ, ὁ δὲ Κικέρων ὡς ἀμφιλαφής τις ἐμπρησμός, οἶμαι, πάντη νέμεται καὶ ἀνειλεῖται, πολὺ ἔχων καὶ ἐπίμονον ἀεὶ τὸ καῖον καὶ διακληρονομούμενον ἄλλοτ᾽ ἀλλοίως ἐν αὐτῷ καὶ κατὰ διαδοχὰς ἀνατρεφόμενον.

[11] Cf. Ofenloch 1907, 137.

[12] [Longin.] *de subl*. 12.5 ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν ὑμεῖς ἂν ἄμεινον ἐπικρίνοιτε.

[13] Quint. 10.1.106 *densior ille (Demosthenes), hic (Cicero) copiosior, ille concludit adstrictius, hic latius, pugnat ille acumine semper, hic frequenter et pondere, illic nihil detrahi potest, hic nihil adici*. Cf. 10.1.76 *tanta vis in eo (Demosthene), tam densa omnia, ita quibusdam nervis intenta sunt, ut nec quod desit in eo nec quod redundet invenias*. Notice

Obviously, not all Greek critics had been so insensitive to Latin literature as Dionysius of Halicarnassos, who, though he knew Latin[14], never appears to have harbored any interest for Roman literature[15], and the comparative merits of Cicero and Demosthenes had been discussed in Greek[16]. Plutarch himself, in the σύγκρισις which closes the biographies of the two orators, comes very near to contravening his own introductory caution, in as much as he does somehow pass a judgment on their literary achievements. However, the detail we should stress the most, as it is pivotal in assessing Plutarch's ideas on our problem, is his remark about the two orators' work as a mirror of their respective character and nature[17].

This approach reflects an old idea, which had acquired paramount importance in Roman literary theory and criticism a few decades before Plutarch. It is perhaps best expressed by a Greek proverb reported by Seneca in Latin translation: *talis hominibus fuit oratio qualis vita*[18]: "people's expression reflects their life". There is no time now for a detailed investigation of this idea, which I have discussed at length in a paper first published in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* and later updated and collected in one of my books[19]. It is any way apparent that Plutarch had accepted this principle. To the passage from the σύγκρισις of Demosthenes and Cicero several others can be added – significantly all in reference to Roman authors.

Fabius Maximus' eloquence fitted his life and character, and it was as dense and concentrated as Thucydides'[20]. Cato the Younger's character showed through his orations[21], as did those of Tiberius and Caius Gracchus,

that Quintilian too, like Ps. Longinus, attributes the τάχος to Demosthenes (*adstrictius*). He also allots him the ὀξύτης (*acumine*), which in Plutarch, as we shall see, appears to be peculiar to Cato the Elder's Latin eloquence (as well as the τάχος).

[14] As he tells us himself: Dion. Hal. *ant. Rom.* 1.7.2 διάλεκτόν τε τὴν Ῥωμαϊκὴν ἐκμαθὼν καὶ γραμμάτων τῶν ἐπιχωρίων λαβὼν ἐπιστήμην.

[15] It must however be mentioned that he does recognize Rome's cutural role: Dion. Hal. *de vet. rhet.* 3, I, p. 5, 21 ff. U.-R.

[16] Though the pairing of the two orators probably originated with the Romans. Demosthenes and Cicero were the mainstays of rhetorical teaching at Rome. See e.g. Petr. *Sat.* 5, and cf. Setaioli 2002-2003.

[17] Plut. Cic. 50.4 (*σύγκρ.* 1.4) ἔστι δέ τις καὶ τοῦ ἤθους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἑκατέρου δίοψις.

[18] Sen. *ep.* 114.1.

[19] Setaioli 1985; cf. Setaioli 2000, 111-217; 397-408.

[20] Plut. *Fab. Max.* 1.7-8 τὸν δὲ λόγον... εὖ μάλα τῷ βίῳ πρεπόντως κατακεκοσμημένον. οὐ γὰρ ἐπῆν ὡραϊσμὸς οὐδὲ κενὴ καὶ ἀγοραῖος χάρις, ἀλλὰ νοῦς ἴδιον καὶ περιττὸν ἐν γνωμολογίαις σχῆμα καὶ βάθος ἔχων, ἃς μάλιστα ταῖς Θουκυδίδου προσεοικέναι λέγουσι.

[21] Plut. *Cato min.* 5.3 καὶ γὰρ ὁ λόγος νεαρὸν μὲν οὐδὲν οὐδὲ κομψὸν εἶχεν, ἀλλ᾽ ἦν

whose natures were as different as their expression[22]. It hardly matters whether Plutarch is really acquainted with the speeches of these orators[23] – which some scholars, perhaps legitimately, call in doubt[24]. What is really important is that these passages prove that Plutarch accepted the idea that each author is endowed with a peculiar style, which reflects his personality.

As can be easily surmised, and as I have shown at length in one of my books[25], the idea of each writer's peculiarity of expression, as dictated by individual personality, is naturally matched by the conception of the special characteristics of a language corresponding to the national character of the people speaking it. Within the Greek language itself, as far as the Doric dialect spoken at Sparta is concerned, not merely does Plutarch accept the widespread idea of its "laconism": he adds that its conciseness is a fitting and effective means of expression[26]. Among the Romans, Seneca confirms that this dialect is a fit vehicle to give expression to sentiments of fortitude[27]. All the more justified is the effort to determine the peculiarities typical of each separate language. At Rome the different charateristics of Greek and Latin are often discussed in connection with a problem that hardly concerned the Greeks, namely translation or adaptation from the Greek into Latin. This is hardly surprising, in view of Rome's cultural dependence from Greece. The Romans' position, however, was also strongly influenced, sometimes, by moral prejudice. So, for example, the alleged levity of the Greeks, as the Romans saw them, was said to find its expressive counterpart in *volubilitas,* an uncontrolled rapidity heaping word upon word with no

ὄρθιος καὶ περιπαθὴς καὶ τραχύς. οὐ μὲν ἀλλὰ καὶ χάρις ἀγωγὸς ἀκοῆς ἐπέτρεχε τῇ τραχύτητι τῶν νοημάτων, καὶ τὸ ἦθος αὐτοῦ καταμειγνύμενον ἡδονήν τινα καὶ μειδίαμα τῷ σεμνῷ παρεῖχεν οὐκ ἀπάνθρωπον.

[22] Plut. *Gracchi* 2.3 ἔπειθ᾽ ὁ λόγος τοῦ μὲν Γαΐου φοβερὸς καὶ περιπαθὴς εἰς δείνωσιν, ἡδίων δ᾽ ὁ τοῦ Τιβερίου καὶ μᾶλλον ἐπαγωγὸς οἴκτου· τῇ δὲ λέξει καθαρὸς καὶ διαπεπονημένος ἀκριβῶς ἐκεῖνος, ὁ δέ Γαΐου πιθανὸς καὶ γεγανωμένος. See the whole context.

[23] To be sure, he summarizes a speech given by Tiberius Gracchus (*Gracchi* 15), in order – significantly – to give an idea of his power of persuasion (15.1 ὥσθ᾽ ὑπονοηθῆναι τὴν πιθανότητα καὶ πυκνότητα τοῦ ἀνδρός).

[24] E.g. Jones 1971, 85; Strobach 1997, 36.

[25] Setaioli 1988, 11 ff.

[26] Plut. *Lyc*. 19.5 ἐγὼ δὲ καὶ τὸν λόγον ὁρῶ τὸν Λακωνικὸν βραχὺν μὲν εἶναι δοκοῦντα, μάλιστα δὲ τῶν πραγμάτων ἐφικνούμενον καὶ τῆς διανοίας ἁπτόμενον τῶν ἀκροωμένων; cf. *de garrul*. 21, 513A. It must be added that these peculiarities of the Doric dialect are strongly reminiscent of those that Plutarch, as we shall see, attributes to Latin.

[27] Sen. *ep*. 77.14 *Lacon ille... captus clamabat 'non serviam' sua illa Dorica lingua, et verbis fidem imposuit*.

regard for the actual message to be conveyed[28]: the seeming equivalent, but the actual opposite of the τάχος that Plutarch attributed to the Romans. This attitude is probably mirrored also in the alleged impression which, according to Plutarch, Cato thought he made on the Athenians with a speech he held in their city, namely that the words of the Greeks came from the lips, those of the Romans from the heart[29]. Seneca, however, is more fair: he speaks of *Latinae linguae potentia aut Graecae gratia*[30], "the power of Latin, the charm of Greek", and finds their counterparts in *robur* and *subtilitas,* vigor and subtlety, the respective national peculiarities of the two peoples[31]. A generation later, Quintilian's verdict is hardly different[32]. As we shall see, Plutarch's judgment of Latin basically agrees with these ideas of the saner and less nationalistic Romans themselves. But are really Greek and Latin two distinct and separate languages?

Before we tackle the texts where Plutarch expresses his ideas on the peculiarities of Latin, we must briefly turn our attention to what linguistic theories, if any, provide the background for them.

Plutarch is fond of etymologies. In his writings he offers hundreds of etymologies of words belonging to Greek, Latin, and other languages[33]. The etymologies of Latin words (130 of them) are almost as numerous as those referring to Greek terms. In more than a quarter of the the total Plutarch has recourse to the Greek in order to present an etymological explanation of Latin words; not rarely he does the same with words from other languages, which the Greeks would traditionally consider 'barbaric'. This is extremely interesting, since Plutarch, though he never engages in discussions involving theories of language, clearly adopts the attitude and the methods which can be found in Plato's *Cratylos*[34]. He also appears to believe that, though things

[28] See Setaioli 1988, 14-15.

[29] Plut. *Cato mai*. 12.7 τὸ δ' ὅλον οἴεσθαι τὰ ῥήματα τοῖς μὲν Ἕλλησιν ἀπὸ χειλῶν, τοῖς δὲ Ῥωμαίοις ἀπὸ καρδίας φέρεσθαι.

[30] Sen. *Pol*. 2.6. Cf. Setaioli 1988, 14-15.

[31] Sen. *nat*. 2.50.1 *Graeca subtilitate;* 7.32.2 *Romani roboris*. Cf. Setaioli 1988, 12 n. 5; 13 n. 12; 15.

[32] E.g. Quint. 12.10.36 *non possumus esse tam graciles, simus fortiores: subtilitate vincimur, valeamus pondere*. See the whole context.

[33] Plutarch's etymologies are listed by Strobach 1988 in the *Anhang* (pp. 186-192: etymologies of Greek words; pp. 194-201: etymologies of Latin words; pp. 201-204: etymologies of words belonging to 'barbaric' languages – most of them Egyptian, found in the *De Iside et Osiride*). The etymologies of Greek words are treated at pp. 55-68; those of Latin words at pp. 87-115; those of words from 'barbaric' languages at pp. 115-141.

[34] Cf. Strobach 1988, 55; 123-124. See in particular Plut. *quaest. conv*. 9.14.7, 746B καὶ Πλάτων αὐτὸς ὥσπερ ἴχνεσι τοῖς ὀνόμασι τῶν θεῶν ἀνευρίσκειν οἴεται τὰς δυνάμεις· καὶ ἡμεῖς ὁμοίως μὲν τιθῶμεν ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ περὶ τὰ οὐράνια μίαν τῶν Μουσῶν, ἢ

received their names through human agency (θέσει), these perfectly reflected the intrinsic nature of the objects they denoted, when they were first introduced[35] – a position close to the Stoic theory of language[36]. In the *Cratylos,* however, Socrates repeatedly states that no etymology can be found for words coming from barbaric languages, even though they may have long been in use in Greek[37]. Plutarch has progressed well beyond the parochial attitude of the Greeks of the classical period, who had no qualms about universalizing their own language. In this he is the rightful heir of Hellenistic thinking, when the problem of the existence of languages different from their own was first tackled philosophically by the Greeks[38]. When Plutarch presents etymologies of Latin and 'barbaric' words, he extends the languages they belong to the recognition of a dignity equal to the Greek's, in as much as this supposes their being governed by rational rules, which permits to understand and reconstruct their inner structure.

It should not escape our attention that not rarely Plutarch's etymologies of Latin words have recourse to the Greek. This may be due in part to a residual universalization of his own language by the Greek Plutarch. An even stronger reason, however, may be found in the widespread idea that Latin was itself derived from the Greek, which Plutarch in several passages seems to accept and endorse.

That Latin had developed from Greek – rather than both languages descending from a common Indo-European ancestry, as proved by modern comparative linguistics – was an idea which enjoyed wide currency among both Greeks and Romans[39] and at times went beyond the merely cultural sphere. The Macedonians, for example, tried to rally the Greeks on their side during the war against Rome by stressing the linguistical difference separating the Romans from the Greeks[40], whereas, by endorsing the idea that their language was derived from the Greek, the Romans could uphold their alleged right to interfere in the affairs of Greece.

Though Plutarch never explicitly tackles the problem of the relationship

Οὐρανία φαίνεται.

[35] Cf. Strobach 1988, 55.

[36] Cf. Setaioli 1988, 25-26.

[37] Plat. *Crat*. 409e; 416a; 421c; 425c. For the Stoics' similar position see Dahlmann 1964^2, 11.

[38] Cf. Setaioli 1988, 27 and n. 71, with the literature quoted and discussed.

[39] Detailed treatments of this topic are available in Gabba 1963 and Werner 1996.

[40] Cf. Liv. 31.29.15 *Aetolos, Acarnanas, Macedonas, eiusdem linguae homines, leves ad tempus ortae causae diiungunt coniunguntque; cum alienigenis, cum barbaris aeternum omnibus Graecis bellum est eritque; natura enim, quae perpetua est, non mutabilibus in diem causis hostes sunt*.

between the two languages, it is quite clear that he accepts the theory of Latin's derivation from the Greek. When he says that Latin has "dropped" most prepositions[41], he obviously supposes an earlier stage in which it possessed all the prepositions of Greek. This is punctually borne out by a number of passages which also suppose an early linguistical stage in which Latin had not yet fully detached itself from Greek[42]. Seen in this light, Plutarch's judgments concerning the peculiarities of Latin do not basically differ from those he passes, say, on the Doric dialect – whose "laconism", incidentally, closely resembles what he says about Latin's conciseness.

We have already seen that the conciseness (τάχος) of Latin was already emphasized in the *Life of Demosthenes,* where Plutarch purports not to be able to appreciate the stylistic aspect of Latin writings. Several other passages bear out this judgment. In the *Life of Cato the Younger* he remarks that Curio used one word which he is obliged to render with two Greek terms to do justice to its whole semantic range: ἡδίων... καὶ μᾶλλον ἥμερος, which, according to some, renders the Latin *mansuetior,* whereas I would rather propose *mitior,* which can mean both "sweeter" (ἡδίων) and "gentler" (μᾶλλον ἥμερος)[43].

In the *Life of Cato the Elder* Plutarch tells about a speech given by him at Athens, which, though according to some sources it was in Greek, he believes to have been held in Latin and then translated by an interpreter. Plutarch then reports what appears to be a comment by Cato on the impression he made on the Athenians, which might ultimately go back to the Censor himself. Once more, what is emphasized in this passage is the τάχος, the

[41] Plut.*Plat. quaest.* 10.3, 1010D προθέσεις τε γὰρ ἀφῄρηκε πλὴν ὀλίγων ἁπάσας. Cf. above, note 8.

[42] E.g. Plut. *Marc.* 8.7 κατὰ τὴν Ἑλληνίδα γλῶσσαν ἔτι πολλὴν τότε συμμεμιγμένην τῇ Λατίνων; *Num.* 7.10 τῶν Ἑλληνικῶν ὀνομάτων τότε μᾶλλον ἢ νῦν τοῖς Λατίνοις ἀνακεκραμένων; *Rom.* 15.4-5 (about the ritual cry at Roman weddings, *Talas(s)io,* probably related to the wedding deity *Talassius*) οἱ δὲ πλεῖστοι νομίζουσιν, ὧν καὶ Ἰόβας ἐστί, παράκλησιν εἶναι καὶ παρακέλευσιν εἰς φιλεργίαν καὶ ταλασίαν, οὕπω τότε τοῖς Ἑλληνικοῖς ὀνόμασι τῶν Ἰταλικῶν ἐπικεχυμένων. εἰ δὲ τοῦτο μὴ λέγεται κακῶς, ἀλλ᾽ ἐχρῶντο Ῥωμαῖοι τότε τῷ ὀνόματι τῆς ταλασίας καθάπερ ἡμεῖς, ἑτέραν ἄν τις αἰτίαν εἰκάσειε πιθανωτέραν. ἐπεὶ γὰρ οἱ Σαβῖνοι πρὸς τοὺς Ῥωμαίους πολεμήσαντες διηλλάγησαν, ἐγένοντο συνθῆκαι περὶ τῶν γυναικῶν, ὅπως μηδὲν ἄλλο ἔργον τοῖς ἀνδράσι ἢ τὰ περὶ ταλασίαν ὑπουργῶσι. Cf. *quaest. Rom.* 31, 271F. On the question see esp. Strobach 1997, 84-87.

[43] Plut. *Cato min.* 14.8 "εὖ λέγεις", εἶπεν ὁ Κουρίων, "ἡδίων γὰρ ἐπανήξεις ἐκεῖθεν καὶ μᾶλλον ἥμερος", οὕτω πως καὶ τῷ ῥήματι χρησάμενος. Gehman 1916-1916, 238, thinks the original word to have been *mansuetior*. The same suggestion is made by Perrin 1919, 267 n. 1. At *Coriol.* 1.6 Plutarch remarks that the Romans use only one word (*virtus*) to mean both ἀρετή and ἀνδρεία.

conciseness of Cato's Latin, which is reaffirmed, after a few words, by a hint at his brevity (βραχέως), and accompanied by ὀξύτης, "sharpness", or "pointedness", a quality which often goes together with τάχος[44]. It appears to be akin to *potentia,* the power which Seneca attributes to the Latin language. It is worth noting that Cato's conciseness is opposed to the verbosity of the Greek translation made by the interpreter: through Plutarch's report we can get a glimpse of an early stage of the persistent moralistic prejudice against the Greeks and their language, seen as a mirror of the alleged levity and lack of seriousness of that nation, which, as we saw, resulted in *volubilitas,* the expressive intemperance of a people whose urge to talk and talk, in the eyes of some Romans, was utterly beyond redemption[45].

However, when the moralistic disparagement of the Greeks is removed, the assessment of the peculiarities of Latin as an expressive tool attributed to Cato does not basically differ from what Plutarch himself has to say on the subject.

Exactly the same terms – τάχος and ὀξύτης – appear in another famous passage, in which Plutarch reports Caesar's celebrated announcement of his victory over Pharnaces: *veni vidi vici*. They are actually referred to Caesar's military campaign, of which his famous three-word report is the aptest representation; here too, however, literary brevity (βραχυλογία) is expressly mentioned[46]. The most striking detail is Plutarch's remark about the particular expressiveness of the three words in Latin, as compared to the Greek translation he offers his readers. One is rather amazed, however, when he sees the reason of this in the fact that all three have the same ending. This obviously proves that Plutarch's knowledge of Latin is anything but accomplished, as *all* Latin perfects end in *-i* in the first person. But another detail is perhaps even more conspicuous: Plutarch does not notice that the three Latin verbs all have two syllables, and, most of all, what for us is the most obvious element, namely the alliteration, appears to have escaped him totally.

In Greek literature alliteration in no way attained an importance comparable to the one it enjoys in Latin literature, not to mention those of the Ger-

[44] Even in the Greek Demosthenes: Quint. 10.1.106 (cf. above, note 13).

[45] Plut. *Cato mai*. 12.7 θαυμάσαι δέ φησι τοὺς Ἀθηναίους τὸ τάχος αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν ὀξύτητα τῆς φράσεως· ἃ γὰρ αὐτὸς ἐξέφερε βραχέως, τὸν ἑρμηνέα μακρῷ καὶ διὰ πολλῶν ἀπαγγέλλειν· τὸ δ' ὅλον οἴεσθαι τὰ ῥήματα τοῖς μὲν Ἕλλησιν ἀπὸ χειλῶν, τοῖς δὲ Ῥωμαίοις ἀπὸ καρδίας φέρεσθαι (= Cato, *fr. inc. libr*. 69, p. 91 Jordan). Cf. Kaimio 1979, 98-99.

[46] Plut. *Caes*. 50.3-4 καὶ τῆς μάχης ταύτης τὴν ὀξύτητα καὶ τὸ τάχος ἀπαγγέλλων εἰς Ῥώμην πρός τινα τῶν φίλων Μάτιον ἔγραψε τρεῖς λέξεις· ἦλθον, εἶδον, ἐνίκησα. Ῥωμαϊστὶ δ' αἱ λέξεις, εἰς ὅμοιον ἀπολήγουσαι σχῆμα ῥήματος, οὐκ ἀπίθανον τὴν βραχυλογίαν ἔχουσιν.

manic languages. With few exceptions – such as the couple λιμός τε καὶ λοιμός[47] –, it is also difficult to find alliteration in Greek everyday speech, as we do in Latin and the Romance languages on the one hand, or in the Germanic ones on the other[48]. In Latin we have, for example, *purus putus, faustus felix,* etc.[49]; in Italian "bello e buono", "sano e salvo", etc.[50]; in French "sain et sauf", "(promettre) monts et merveilles", etc.[51]; in German "Rast und Ruhe", "Schutz und Schirm", etc.[52]; in English "safe and sound", "then and there", "time and tide", "kith and kin", "part and parcel", "mice and men", "trick or treat", "spick and span", "wax and wane", "rough and rowdy", "head over heels", "through thick and thin", "from stem to stern", etc.

If Plutarch destroys Caesar's alliteration in his Greek translation, we witness the opposite in the Latin translation of a famous saying of Jesus' from the Greek of St. John. The famous words[53] ἐγώ εἰμι ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ἡ ἀλήθεια καὶ ἡ ζωή – "I am the way, the truth and the life", in the King James Version – become in Latin *ego sum via, et veritas, et vita*.

If Plutarch is one of the few Greeks capable to appreciate the qualities of Latin as a means of expression, it also remains very true that he is not capable to appreciate the fine points of Latin style, as he tells us himself and as his missing Caesar's alliteration confirms. This proves that, though Plutarch's working knowledge of the language can hardly be denied, his judgments on Latin are based on the general framework provided by contemporary culture which we have been trying to outline, rather than on opinions and convictions stemming from a personal, first-hand appreciation of language, texts, and authors.

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[47] E.g. Hes. *op*. 243; Herod. 7.171.2; more references in *LSJ* s.v. λοιμός.

[48] For an in-depth study of alliteration and other phonic structures see Traina 1999[2].

[49] Also *ferus et... ferreus* (Tib. 1.10.2); *maria montisque* (Sall. *Cat*. 23.3); *pax Palamedes* (Petr. 66.7); *factum, non fabula* (Petr. 76.4); *ab acia et acu* (Petr. 76.11, and cf. Otto, 1890, s.v. *acus* 2).

[50] Also "vivo e vegeto", "baracca e burattini", "mari e monti", "in fretta e furia", "ciò che pare e piace", "volere o volare", "l'onore e l'onere", "di riffa o di raffa"; "paga, Pantalone"; "basta, Bastiano", "spendere e spandere", "tagliare la testa al toro".

[51] Also "bel et bon", "rêve et réalité", "vice et vertu", "à tort et à travers", "bric-à-brac", "(ne remuer) ni pied ni patte".

[52] Also "Blut und Boden", "Tod und Teufel", "Feld und Frucht", "Haus und Hof", "Land und Leute", "Mann und Maus", "mit Kind und Kegel", "Zweck und Ziel".

[53] Ioh. 14.6.

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