

## IS THE PEN MIGHTIER THAN THE SWORD? THE FAILURE OF RHETORIC IN PLUTARCH'S *DEMOSTHENES*

The Greeks, as everyone knows, invented rhetoric—rhetoric as an art form, at least. But far from being slaves to their invention, Greek (and indeed Roman) writers seem to have had the same sort of attitude to rhetoric as some people have to the combustion engine: they're not happy unless they're taking it apart. Rhetoric in ancient texts is under constant scrutiny, subject to unremitting audit, and is frequently shown to fail.<sup>1</sup> Critics have pointed out the ambivalent qualities and doubtful success of rhetoric in tragedy, and the gulf between speech and reality in Thucydides;<sup>2</sup> recently Richard Tarrant has discussed the play made with the failure of rhetoric by Ovid.<sup>3</sup> Tragedy, of course, often demonstrates the failure of rhetoric.<sup>4</sup> Over and over again, texts of all kinds proudly display the best and most persuasive rhetoric and then ruthlessly undermine it, showing that what happens happens despite the rhetoric, or not because of the rhetoric but because of something else, or not in the way or with the result that was intended by the rhetorician; there is always a mismatch between the rhetoric and the reality. This mismatch is most neatly expressed by antitheses such as that between *lóγος* and *ἔργον* which, as *LSJ* point out,<sup>5</sup> is 'mostly [used] in a depreciatory sense', depreciatory of *lóγος*, that is. Inextricably involved with this is the tradition in classical texts of those who practise rhetoric superbly using rhetorical techniques

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. R. G. A. Buxton, *Persuasion in Greek Tragedy*, Cambridge 1982; Colin Macleod, *Collected Papers*, Oxford 1983, chs. 8–13; A. M. Parry, *Logos and Ergon in Thucydides*, Salem 1981. Just one subtle variation on an endlessly fertile theme in Thucydides is 4.84, involving Brasidas, the Akanthians, and their fruit trees: see S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides II*, Oxford 1996, 275–85.

<sup>3</sup> R. Tarrant, 'Ovid and the Failure of Rhetoric' in *Ethics and Rhetoric*, edd. D. Innes, H. Hine and C. Pelling, Oxford 1995, 63–74.

<sup>4</sup> See e.g. Buxton (n. 2), *passim*; this is one of the key affinities between tragedy and history explored by C. W. Macleod, *Collected Papers*, Oxford 1983, ch. 13, esp. 154–6; on his example from *Hecuba* see further J. M. Mossman, *Wild Justice: A Study of Euripides' Hecuba*, Oxford 1995 (repr. BCP 1999), 126–7, 133–4.

<sup>5</sup> *LSJ* s.v. *logos* VIc.

to attack rhetoric as false and misleading: so Hecuba attacks Polymestor's ability to put a rhetorical gloss on his wickedness at Eur. *Hec.* 1187, and Cleon at Thucydides 3. 37 rhetorically presents himself as a plain speaker who does not use rhetoric to oppose the reprieve of Mytilene. Orators' self-portrayal as non-orators, and therefore trustworthy, is very frequent.<sup>6</sup> The assumptions underlying these techniques reach the status of philosophical belief when Plato famously, and ruthlessly, uses rhetoric to attack rhetoric in the *Gorgias* and other dialogues.<sup>7</sup> Rhetoric is indispensable: it is part of the substance of these texts themselves, an integral part, too, of 'real life' outside the text; yet over and over again it is abused (in more than one sense of the word) by those who use it.

To Plutarch, a sensitive reader of classical texts, a good Platonist, and an inhabitant of Chaeronea, the temptation to see Demosthenes as a sort of living epitome of the tension between the power of rhetoric and its futility must have been overwhelming: καὶ τόδε καὶ φιλεῖ τοιοῦτους. Demosthenes, the greatest of the Greek orators in a great age of oratory, carries on a war of words against Philip, but flees him on the battlefield. Sure enough, in his *Life* of the orator, Plutarch is constantly playing with these ideas in a very elaborate way. Far from idealising the champion of Greek liberty, the *Life* scrutinises his oratory constantly, always measuring and calling attention to significant differences between Demosthenes' words and reality and mismatches between what he says and what he does, and it is so constructed as to keep the reader constantly wondering whether oratory is a worthwhile pursuit or not.<sup>8</sup> As Plutarch tells us at the beginning of the *Demosthenes*, this is

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<sup>6</sup> See Hornblower (n. 2) ad loc., and e.g. W. S. Barrett on *Hippolytus* 986-7, a good example of many relevant passages in tragedy; D. A. Russell, 'Ethos in Oratory and Rhetoric', in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, ed. Christopher Pelling, Oxford 1990, 197-212, and now Jon Hesk, 'The rhetoric of anti-rhetoric in Athenian oratory', in *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy*, edd. Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne, Cambridge 1999, 201-30.

<sup>7</sup> On the quarrel between rhetoric and philosophy through the ages see B. Vickers, *In Defence of Rhetoric*, Oxford 1988. The title of Vickers' book is significant. See also, on Plato, Christopher Janaway, *Images of Excellence: Plato's Critique of the Arts*, Oxford 1995, esp. 41-7, and, on Plato's linkage of rhetoric and tragedy, 49-51. Truth, fiction and Plato's myths are sensitively explored by P. Murray, 'What is a *Mythos* for Plato?', in *From Myth to Reason? Studies in the Development of Greek Thought*, ed. R. Buxton, Oxford 1999, 251-62.

<sup>8</sup> There are two recent editions of *Demosthenes and Cicero*, one ed. Annalaura Burlando, Garzanti 1995 and the Rizzoli edition (Milan 1995), where *Demosthenes* is edited by Chiara Pecorella Longo and *Cicero* is introduced by Joseph Geiger, translated by Beatrice Mugelli, with notes by Lucia Ghilli. Pecorella Longo's introduction has an exhaustive discussion of the probable sources of the *Life*, which is useful, but displays what seems to me to be undue scepticism about what sources Plutarch knew at first hand. There is an excellent edition of *Cicero* alone by John Moles (Warminster 1988).

his fifth pair of *Lives*, and thus relatively early in the sequence of composition, and it is also interesting to see Plutarch trying out techniques here which he will use on a larger scale in later *Lives*. This is so in particular of the use he makes of tragic and theatrical motifs. These are appropriate here because of the long-perceived link between acting and oratory (attacked side by side at *Gorgias* 502, and epitomised by the acting career of Aeschines as derided by the historical Demosthenes in *On the Crown*),<sup>9</sup> and that is indeed how they are introduced; but, as elsewhere in Plutarch, the theme becomes rather more complex at the end of the *Life* than it appears initially.<sup>10</sup>

*Demosthenes and Cicero* are a particularly well integrated pair, partly because there are so many similarities perceptible between these two characters, as Plutarch points out not only in the *synkrisis*, but also in chapter 3 of the *Demosthenes*.<sup>11</sup> Plutarch spends longer than is usual at the start of the first component *Life* justifying his choice and explaining his methods of proceeding. This programmatic section contains a series of apparently strange connections:

The author of the encomium upon Alcibiades for his victory in the chariot-race at Olympia, whether he was Euripides, as the prevailing report has it, or some other, says, Sosius, that the first requisite to a man's happiness is birth 'in a famous city'; but in my opinion, for a man who would enjoy true happiness, which depends for the most part on character and disposition, it is no disadvantage to belong to an obscure and mean city, any more than it is to be born of a mother who is of little stature and without beauty. (1. 1)

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<sup>9</sup> See n. 7 above. Other aspects of this link are now well explored by E. Hall, 'Law-court Dramas: the Power of Performance in Greek Forensic Oratory', *BICS* 40 (1995), 39-58, and by P. E. Easterling, 'Actors and voices: reading between the lines in Aeschines and Demosthenes', in *Performance Culture and Athenian Democracy*, edd. Simon Goldhill and Robin Osborne, Cambridge 1999, 154-66.

<sup>10</sup> On Plutarch's use of tragedy in other *Lives*, see P. de Lacy, 'Biography and Tragedy in Plutarch', *AJP* 73 (1952), 159-71; J. M. Mossman, 'Tragedy and Epic in Plutarch's *Alexander*', *JHS* 108 (1988), 83-93, repr. B. Scardigli, ed., *Essays on Plutarch's Lives*, Oxford 1995, 209-28, 'Plutarch, Pyrrhus and Alexander', in P. Stadter (ed.), *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition*, London 1992, 90-108; D. Braund, 'Dionysiac Tragedy in Plutarch, *Crassus*, *CQ* 43, 1993, 468-74 and 'Plutarch's *Pyrrhus* and Euripides' *Phoenician Women*: Biography and Tragedy on Pleonectic Parenting', *Histos* 1 (1997) 113-27.

<sup>11</sup> See on *synkrisis* in general C. B. R. Pelling, '*Synkrisis* in Plutarch's *Lives*', in *Miscellanea Plutarchea*, *QGFF* 8 (1986), 83-96, and now Tim Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice*, Oxford 1999, 249-86. The classic treatment is H. Erbse, 'Die Bedeutung der *Synkrisis* in den Parallelbiographien Plutarchs', *Hermes* 84 (1956), 398-424, esp. 409-13 on *Dem.—Cic.* For this pair in detail see J. L. Moles, ed., *Plutarch: Cicero*, Warminster 1988, 19-26.

There is considerable irony in the words of the encomium when applied to Alcibiades, that unhappy lover of his city who helped to kill the thing he loved, so already the text offers one of those mismatches between rhetoric and reality which I mentioned before, and already Plutarch is rejecting the semblance of happiness as expressed in words for true happiness as realised in character. The contrast here is developed in the next section in a way which helps to confirm the already highly literary atmosphere of the *Life*.<sup>12</sup>

For it would be laughable to suppose that Iulis, which is a little part of the small island of Ceos, and Aegina, which a certain Athenian demanded should be removed as an eye-sore of the Piraeus, should breed good actors and poets, but should never be able to produce a man who is just, independent, wise, and magnanimous. Other skills, indeed, since their object is to bring business or fame, naturally pine away in obscure and mean cities; but virtue, like a strong and hardy plant, takes root in any place, if she finds there a good nature and a spirit that shuns no labour. Wherefore we, too, if we fail to live and think as we ought, will justly attribute this, not to the smallness of our native city, but to ourselves. (1. 2-4)

The contrast between virtue and arts such as poetry and, in particular, acting (the references are to Simonides and Polus the tragic actor—and perhaps to Aristophanes—respectively) could not be more marked, and is very Platonic in tone. So already a contrast between speciousness and truth has been set up, and expressed in terms of fictive literature as against innate character. This will be a very important touchstone for Demosthenes' actions as against his words later on—indeed, as Plutarch goes on to allude pointedly to Chaeronea in the next chapter, the contrast is already implicit here. Once again, this is all very Platonic: at *Gorgias* 459d-e rhetoric is attacked for making people seem good and wise when they are not.

Chapter 2 builds on aspects of chapter 1, but takes a different line:

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<sup>12</sup> This literary atmosphere—by which I mean the impression which Plutarch gives of the ubiquity and interrelation of all forms of literary endeavour, including his own production of the present text—continues throughout the *Demosthenes*, where it will be an important issue whether Demosthenes will remain just a literary figure or will be something more than that, but is much less a feature of the *Cicero*, where literature is much less prominent, since Cicero's status as a statesman is less questionable. As Erbse acutely remarks (n. 11 above, p. 410): 'Beide sind Redner. Aber Demosthenes setzt all ererbten und erworbenen geistigen Faehigkeiten in reine Rhetorik um'.

However, when one has undertaken to compose a history based upon readings which are not readily accessible or even found at home, but in foreign countries, for the most part, and scattered about among different owners, for him it is really necessary, first and above all things, that he should live in a city which is famous, friendly to the liberal arts, and populous, in order that he may have all sorts of books in plenty, and may by hearsay and enquiry come into possession of all those details which elude writers and are preserved with more fidelity in the memories of men. He will thus be prevented from publishing a work which is deficient in many, and even in essential, things. But as for me, I live in a small city, and I prefer to dwell there that it may not become smaller still; and during the time when I was in Rome and various parts of Italy I had no leisure to practise myself in the Roman language, owing to my public duties and the number of my pupils in philosophy. It was therefore late and when I was well on in years that I began to study Roman literature. (2. 1-2)

Plutarch, having denied the relevance of large cities to true happiness, intensifies the literary atmosphere by referring to his own modes of composition and the author's need for a great city full of books in order to produce other books which are not deficient; but he himself lives in a small city (Chaeronea). So what is going on? Is he changing his mind and agreeing with the encomium after all (and incidentally apologising for the deficiencies of the work to come)? Not really, despite his use here of the phrase from the encomium (τὴν πόλιν εὐδόκιμον). On the face of it, the contrast here is about the practical utility of large cities, which he has already admitted, not their role in human happiness. But even this point in favour of large cities is actually a false one as far as the author of this book is concerned: Plutarch might live in Chaeronea, but he had easy access to all the books of Athens, and all its oral tradition too.<sup>13</sup> It is noteworthy that written evidence is here portrayed as of less value than memory; this ties in with Plutarch's criticism of Demosthenes' oratory later on, and, more generally with Plutarch's preference for nature over artifice throughout the *Life*, which in turn can be traced back to the *Phaedrus* and Ammon's (and Socrates') criticism of the invention of writing at 274c-78e: cf. 228c. This section is in fact demonstrating the irrelevance of the size of one's city at all levels and is being used as a transition to Plutarch's reasons for not entering into a stylistic comparison between Demosthenes and Cicero. This omission is interesting, because in other *Lives* Plutarch regularly uses style as an indication of character (Antony's Asiatic

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<sup>13</sup> Plutarch pointedly refers to his use of oral tradition at the very end of the *Life*, 31.1 and 4.

style, in the *Antony*, and also *Fabius* 1. 7-8, *Cato* 7. 1-3).<sup>14</sup> The reason he gives for not doing so here—his weak Latin—may be the true one, but the way he expresses it is very striking in terms of the theme of this essay:

And here my experience was an astonishing one, but true. For it was not so much that by means of words I came to a complete understanding of things, as that from things I somehow had an experience which enabled me to follow the meaning of words. (2.3)

This then leads into his apology for not knowing enough Latin to make such a comparison and his explanation for sticking to the orators' political accomplishments; but here again it seems very probable that the apology is a false one, since both in his description of his own language acquisition and in his declared intention to examine the orators' characters and dispositions through their actions and their statesmanship he is giving preference to 'reality' over rhetoric and concentrating on the truth rather than the semblance, seeming to distance himself slightly from his subjects. Style may express character to some extent, but it will not do so as surely as deeds.

If this reading of the opening passages is plausible, Plutarch is also making extensive and elaborate use of the rhetorical technique of *praeteritio*. The series of subtle false apologies gently insists on the opposition between style and substance which dominates the *Life*, and Plutarch's own rhetorical performance here anticipates, but also undermines, those of Demosthenes to come.<sup>15</sup> Whether this programme is really carried out may be another matter, as we shall see; but it is true that throughout the *Life* rhetoric is constantly evaluated in relation to the reality of the situation as well as on its own terms.

After stressing the similarity of Demosthenes' and Cicero's careers, Plutarch then passes on to the background and childhood of Demosthenes; but this preamble is important, and is meant to be borne in mind throughout the *Life*—and, indeed, the pair.

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<sup>14</sup> See Christopher Pelling (ed.), *Plutarch: Antony*, Cambridge 1988, p. 119-20 on *Ant.* 2.8 and Duff (n. 11), 13-51, esp. 15 n. 6. See also Christopher Pelling, 'Rhetoric, *Paideia* and Psychology in Plutarch's *Lives*', in *Rhetorical Theory and Praxis in Plutarch*, ed. L. van der Stockt, Leuven 2000, 331-9.

<sup>15</sup> A. Burlando, 'Breve nota a Plutarco, *Demostene* 1-2', in van der Stockt (n. 14), 61-8, suggests that Plutarch's unusual preface may be inspired by Cicero's *De oratore* and *Orator*: if so, as she points out (68), Plutarch's disclaimer that he is unable to criticise Latin style would be another rhetorical false apology, with an underlying message subverting the outward appearance in a way which would accord with his account of the way he acquired his Latin. At Chapel Hill, John Moles suggested that Plutarch's preface intertexts (also) with Herodotus *Praefatio* and 1.5.3-4.

The key-note of the section on Demosthenes' early life<sup>16</sup> (chs. 4-11) is in beautiful contrast to the parallel section in the *Cicero*: to Cicero everything, more or less, comes naturally (2.2); Demosthenes has to attain everything by hard work, and Plutarch dwells on his misfortunes and frustrations. The hard work theme crops up again and again: 5.3 *διεπόνει ταῖς μελεταῖς*, 6.1 *ἐγγυμνασάμενος ... ταῖς μελεταῖς οὐκ ἀκίνδυνος οὐδ' ἀργός*, and the whole of chapters 7 and 8 is devoted to it. Another point of interest in this early section is the account of Demosthenes' insulting nicknames. Cicero vows to make his peculiar name famous, but it is his name, not a nickname, and had been held by an ancestor of some note before him (1.3-5). Demosthenes is given two nicknames, both explainable as the names of poets of dubious reputation, both also relatable to Demosthenes' personal disadvantages, one relatable to his oratory and one obscene. Alternative explanations come thick and fast in this chapter,<sup>17</sup> and the resulting narrative texture characterizes Demosthenes very much as a victim, in stark contrast to the assertive and effortlessly superior Cicero. This contrast will later be reversed, but for most of their duration, one of the major differences between the two *Lives* is that Cicero is always perceived as having a choice between the philosophic life and the life of a statesman: whenever he is seriously contemplating giving up politics, his ambition drags him back (this point is well made by John Moles).<sup>18</sup> Demosthenes' choice is a more muted one—will he be just an artist, just an accomplished orator, just the semblance of a statesman, or will he be the real thing? Although Plutarch doesn't compare Demosthenes' style with Cicero's he does compare it with other Greek orators', and in ways which suggest that it is actually their characters and not only their modes of expression which are being compared:

And yet when he first addressed the people he was interrupted by their clamours and laughed at for his inexperience, since his discourse seemed to them confused by long periods and too harshly and immoderately tortured by formal arguments. He had also, as it would appear, a certain weakness of voice and indistinctness of speech and shortness of breath which disturbed the sense of what he said by disjoining his sentences.

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<sup>16</sup> On these invariably interesting and significant portions of the *Lives* see Christopher Pelling, 'Childhood and Personality in Biography', in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, ed. Christopher Pelling, Oxford 1990, 213-44.

<sup>17</sup> A full study of Plutarch's use of alternative stories and explanations has yet to be written. This is a very important technique for Plutarch often used delicately to suggest a theme without forcing the reader towards a particular interpretation. See for example Duff (n. 11) 230-40, esp. 239-40 on Plutarch's use of alternative versions to create a 'consistently inconsistent' character for Alcibiades.

<sup>18</sup> See Moles (n. 11), 9-12.

And finally, when he had forsaken the assembly and was wandering about dejectedly in the Piraeus, Eunomos the Thriasian, who was already a very old man, caught sight of him and upbraided him because, although he had a style of speaking which was most like that of Pericles, he was throwing himself away out of weakness and lack of courage, neither facing the multitude with boldness, nor preparing his body for these forensic contests, but suffering it to wither away in slothful neglect. (6.3-5)<sup>19</sup>

The touch of moroseness implied by this style is very much present in these chapters and elsewhere, particularly in the account of Demosthenes' exile, and also in the *synkrisis* (contrasted with Cicero's dangerous sense of humour), but above all the physical weakness and cowardice is Demosthenes' great fault, only overcome at the very end of the *Life*. Demosthenes learns to stand up to the people, though he will never be Pericles (is there a reference here to his own disclaimers in his speech *On the Crown*, 314-20?), but he never really learns to be brave until the very end of his life, as he will show at Chaeronea.

Chapter 7 represents a slight advance on the incident with Eunomos, in that this time his interlocutor helps him improve; but it is significant that it is a tragic actor, Satyrus, who teaches him to present his rhetoric. One way in which Plutarch tends to use metaphors from, and references to, tragedy, is to introduce dark colouring into his *Lives*; so to give prominence to Demosthenes taking lessons from an actor may suggest a disturbing falsity in his work, especially in the light of the contrast between actors and poets and virtuous men in chapter 1 and the connection made by Plato between tragedy and rhetoric.<sup>20</sup>

In the rest of 7 and chapter 8, the impression of moroseness and of obsessive diligence is continued: Demosthenes retires into his underground study for two or three months at a time; and obsessively reenacts his own speeches and those of others. So far Demosthenes has appeared a rather

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<sup>19</sup> On the use of extemporary speaking to characterise another Plutarchan subject see Pelling in van der Stockt (n. 14), esp. 335-7 on Alcibiades and Coriolanus, and on orators admired for their *τρόποι*, Pelling on *Antony* 80. 3. With Demosthenes' faltering early steps contrast *Cicero* 4. 4, where Cicero practises rhetoric in order to use it 'like a tool', for greater success in public life: his perception of the proper purpose of rhetoric is much clearer at this stage of his life than Demosthenes' is, and his attitude much more positive and purposeful. See Moles ad loc. for parallels for the expression.

<sup>20</sup> See nn. 7, 9 and 10 above. The connection between the two is of course not merely philosophical, but an extra-textual aspect of Greek (and Roman) culture. *Cicero* 5.4-6 also strikes a sour note, and emphasises the emotional damage acting can inflict on the actor, a very Platonic line: see n. 37 below.



unlikely hero; but at this point Plutarch begins to choose his anecdotes in such a way as to give the reader the impression that all that practice and hard work paid off to some extent. This is an interesting move to make, because one might have expected Plutarch to begin by stressing the positive qualities of Demosthenes and then allow the darker side to emerge and perhaps to dominate. Plutarch quite often does this in other fourth-century *Lives*: *Alexander*, though a complex case, can be seen as one where darker elements predominate towards the end; *Demetrius*' last chapters are almost wholly gloomy; and *Pyrrhus*, too, shows most of Pyrrhus' best characteristics distorted and elided by the end. But *Demosthenes* is not constructed to build up to Chaeronea, though it might have been an obvious climax for Plutarch, the native of that place, to use. Using the battle as the climax would have encouraged by its very nature a negative treatment of the orator who ran away, but instead Plutarch shapes the *Life* to lead up to the death scene, where he considers the orator to have atoned for many of his past faults. And instead of a linear movement from virtue to vice or *vice versa*, he constructs a series of false moral dawns, where Demosthenes often appears to be attaining greatness, but this impression is subsequently undercut by an anecdote with a sting in the tail or some overt authorial criticism, until very near the end of the *Life*.<sup>21</sup>

This first apparent change comes half way through chapter 8, where Demosthenes makes a very good response to Pytheas' jibe that his speeches smell of the lamp. More to the point, it is not just a smart piece of back chat:

To the rest, however, he made no denial at all, but confessed that his speeches were neither altogether unwritten, nor yet fully written out. Moreover, he used to declare that he who rehearsed his speeches was a true man of the people: for such preparation was a mark of deference to the people, whereas heedlessness of what the multitude will think of his speech marks a man of oligarchical spirit, and one who relies on force rather than persuasion. (8.5-6)

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<sup>21</sup> It may seem naive to take such an overtly moralistic line, but this is very much the way that this relatively early pair approaches its subjects, with the result that the *synkrisis* reflects more closely than usual the actuality of the *Life*, whereas in more morally complex *Lives* like the *Antony*, the complex picture of Antony given in the *Life* is then followed by something which seems distressingly simplistic in the *synkrisis*. Here that is much less true. On morality in the *Lives* see now Duff (n. 11 above). On the *synkriseis* see n. 11 above.

This politically correct reason for all that swotting is a good defence, suggesting substance beneath the rhetoric.<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, the form of anecdote<sup>23</sup> most often used in the ensuing part of the *Life* is itself in counterpoint to that employed in the *Cicero* to explain Cicero's downfall: joking and jesting, usually extempore, is what brings Cicero down, and his *bons mots* are listed for us at 24-27, but in *Demosthenes* we find far more comment on Demosthenes by others than witticisms by himself:<sup>24</sup> his words are described incessantly, both by Plutarch (9, but definitely in response to the criticisms of others) and in the words of others, but he rarely speaks directly, and when he does, he is talking about his own oratory, which gives a curious feeling of indirectness (8.3, 10. 2-3 and 11. 5-6), or, once, strangely, in verse (9.4).

Some of the anecdotes in this *opus musaicum* strike a distinctly sour note:

But although Demosthenes, as it would appear, did not regard the other characteristics of Pericles as suitable for himself, he admired and sought to imitate the formality of his speech and bearing (τὸ ... πλάσμα καὶ τὸν σχηματισμὸν αὐτοῦ), as well as his refusal to speak suddenly or on every subject that might present itself, as if his greatness was due to these things; but he by no means sought the reputation which is won in a sudden emergency, nor did he often of his own free will stake his influence upon chance. (9.2)

Demosthenes is still imitating the semblance, not the substance, of a great man.<sup>25</sup>

Chapter 10 compares Demosthenes with Demades and Phocion. Demades is here said to be the better orator of the two. But how much of a compliment is that? Demades' policies are utterly condemned by Plutarch at

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<sup>22</sup> Of course, it is also an extremely astute rhetorical and political ploy: see Christopher Pelling, *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian*, London 2000, 13-4, and Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology and the Power of the People*, Princeton 1989, 272-7.

<sup>23</sup> On Plutarch's use of anecdote see now P. A. Stadter's excellent article 'Anecdotes and the Thematic Structure of Plutarchean Biography', in J. A. Fernandez Delgado and F. Pordomingo Pardo (edd.), *Estudios sobre Plutarco: Aspectos Formales*, Madrid 1997, 291-303, and M. Beck, 'Anecdote and the Representation of Plutarch's Ethos', in van der Stockt (n. 14), 15-32.

<sup>24</sup> This perhaps resembles the use of Cicero's jokes in *Caesar* to characterise Caesar, as Christopher Pelling suggests to me. See Duff (n. 11), 231-2 on the form of anecdotes in *Alcibiades* mirroring the elusiveness of their subject.

<sup>25</sup> Πλάσμα retains a lurking connotation of fiction and falsity in many passages; its use as a rhetorical technical term, like the similar use of stage vocabulary (see next n.), epitomizes the ambivalence of rhetoric.

the end of the *Life*, and he and his son are both killed—deservedly in his case, since he has betrayed not only Demosthenes, but also Athens, in Plutarch’s view. The comparison with Phocion is also phrased in a way which suggests that being a great orator is not the most important goal in life, and which perhaps implies that Demosthenes’ efforts are being misplaced:

And the same philosopher (Theophrastus) tells us that Polyeuctus the Sphettian, one of the political leaders of that time in Athens, declared that Demosthenes was the greatest orator, but Phocion the most influential speaker, since he expressed most sense in fewest words. Indeed, we are told that even Demosthenes himself, whenever Phocion mounted the bema to reply to him, would say to his intimates: ‘Here comes the chopper of my speeches’. Now, it is not clear whether Demosthenes had this feeling towards Phocion because of his oratory, or because of his life and reputation, believing that a single word or nod from a man who is trusted has more power than very many long periods. (10.3-5)

Once again, rhetoric pales into insignificance beside the reality of a good man.

The section is closed and almost summarised by an account of his physical exercises (the famous pebbles story) and a very dense selection of one anecdote, some further opinions, and two pieces of repartee. The anecdote is particularly significant:

A story is told of a man coming to him and begging his services as advocate, and telling at great length how he had been assaulted and beaten by someone. ‘But certainly’, said Demosthenes, ‘you got none of the hurts which you describe’. Then the man raised his voice and shouted: ‘I, Demosthenes, no hurts?’ ‘Now indeed’, said Demosthenes, ‘I hear the voice of someone who is wronged and hurt’. So important in winning credence did he consider the tone and action (*τὴν ὑπόκρισιν*, picked up by *ὑποκρινόμενος* of Demosthenes in the next sentence) of the speaker. (11.2-3)

The vocabulary, as is regular, is common to the *βῆμα* and to the stage.<sup>26</sup> Demosthenes, though, has come full circle: the actor has become the director. But it’s still all about style, presentation, *πλάσμα*. Even within that false

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<sup>26</sup> See LSJ s.v. *ὑποκρίνομαι*, *ὑπόκρισις*. Demosthenes himself may be using *ὑποκρίνεται* with more force of histrionic exaggeration than it need normally have at *On the Crown* 15. Aristotle’s remarks at *Rhetoric* 1404a18 are puzzling in some respects, but show clearly a dichotomy between written speeches and orators *κατὰ τὴν ὑπόκρισιν*.

criterion, Plutarch quotes conflicting opinions about Demosthenes' real abilities. There is an elaborate series of *μὲν ... δέ* contrasts here, which emphasises the ambivalence of Demosthenes' rhetoric. On one level, Plutarch seems to imply that the really discerning, as opposed to the multitude, thought Demosthenes' manner (*πλάσμα*) was *ταπεινὸν ... καὶ ἀγεννὲς ... καὶ μαλακόν*, but perhaps when this criticism is attributed to Demetrius of Phaleron, the Macedonian quisling, it loses some of its force.<sup>27</sup> The next contrast is between other orators addressing the people and Demosthenes' speeches being read aloud, and the third between the harshness of the written speeches and the humour of his extempore responses, two of which are reported. The spontaneity or otherwise of Demosthenes' words has been central, and before his inability to speak off the cuff has always seemed a fault: but here the tenor of Aesion's opinion and of the repartee seems to be to correct that impression. Aesion seems to imply that written speeches can be more powerful than unwritten ones, and Demosthenes has the moral high ground as well as the rhetorical upper hand in the verbal exchanges at the end of the chapter. After drawing this section to a close in this elaborate manner, Plutarch then announces that he is getting down to the real point: Demosthenes' actions as a statesman.

In fact, however, this declaration begins to seem like yet another in the series of false leads we saw in the opening chapters of the *Life*: in contrast to the *Cicero*,<sup>28</sup> this section really remains an account of Demosthenes' speech acts, though many of these do have positive results. Plutarch is at particular pains, in the chapters which recount Demosthenes' career up to the battle of Chaeronea, to convey the power of oratory, especially in his account of how

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<sup>27</sup> The first and last adjectives are used elsewhere of style, but not *ἀγεννής* (according to LSJ). All three are also possible character descriptions of the kind likely to be used by a political opponent. Aeschines is described by Plutarch as *ἀγεννής καὶ μαλακός* for mistaking the nature of true grief at 22.2, the Athenians behave not *ταπεινῶς* or *ἀγεννῶς* at 21.2; *ταπεινά* is used to describe Demosthenes' demeanour after the success of Demades in placating Alexander in 24.1, he bears his exile *μαλακῶς* at 26. 4, and the soldiers wrongly accuse Demosthenes of being *μαλακόν* as he cheats them by swallowing poison at 29.4. See Duff (n. 11), 120 n. 67 for passages where the opinion of others seems reported in order to guide that of the reader.

<sup>28</sup> Cicero's prosecution of Verres (7) is interesting here: the chapter opens with Cicero reassessing his attitude to politics in general, which has been unrealistic, and his determination to progress more by hard work than by oratory on its own. After stressing his incorruptibility, Plutarch then declares that he won his case against Verres *οὐκ εἰπών, ἀλλ' ἐξ αὐτοῦ τρόπον τινα τοῦ μὴ εἰπεῖν*. He simply allowed the witnesses to speak for themselves. Action overrides rhetoric. The chapter closes, though with the witticisms Cicero made at Verres' expense, which anticipates his jokes later in the *Life*. But in general Cicero can be seen, on some occasions, at least, to achieve a balance between words and action which eludes Demosthenes: see especially 13.1 with Moles ad loc.

Demosthenes persuades the Thebans to change sides in chapter 18, and with it the more admirable traits of Demosthenes' character; but this is merely the flaunting of the glories of rhetoric before it is undermined by events, as it turns out. Oratory bestows his fame upon Demosthenes:

But when he had taken as a noble basis for his political activity the defence of the Greeks against Philip, and was contending worthily here, he quickly won a reputation and was lifted into a conspicuous place by the boldness of his speeches, so that he was admired in Greece, and treated with deference by the Great King; Philip, too, made more account of him than of any other popular leader in Athens, and it was admitted even by those who hated him that they had to contend with a man of mark. (12.3-4)

He is extolled in the next chapter, and significantly contrasted with Demades, for the consistency of his policies, and his oratory is described in high moral terms, though with an important qualification:

And Panaetius the philosopher says that most of his speeches also are written in the conviction that the good alone is to be chosen for its own sake ... for ... he does not try to lead his countrymen to do what is pleasantest or easiest or most profitable, but in many places thinks they ought to make their self-preservation secondary to what is honourable and fitting, so that, if the loftiness of his principles and the nobility of his speeches had been accompanied by such bravery as becomes a warrior and by incorruptibility in all his dealings, he would have been worthy to be numbered, not with such orators as Moerocles, Polyeuctus, Hypereides, and their contemporaries, but high up with Cimon, Thucydides, and Pericles. (13.5-6)

Here again there is a gulf between the rhetoric and the reality (and again Pericles epitomises the true statesman), but whereas before, in chapter 10, Plutarch was pointing to a contrast between Demosthenes' rhetoric and Phocion's honesty, here he is pointing to a mismatch between Demosthenes' rhetoric and his own character. As earlier still, in the rebuke of Eunomos, the Periclean potential of Demosthenes was being thrown away through cowardice, so here: now the rhetoric has attained truly Periclean proportions, but cowardice and venality are still inhibiting his greatness, and Plutarch stresses this in chapter 14. He is no longer afraid of the people, as Plutarch emphasises in the following chapters, and that is to his credit (and very

different from the Platonic view of the orator),<sup>29</sup> but he will still fail at the crucial moment, despite the deserved successes recounted in chapters 14-18.

That this section is written very much as a history of speeches delivered rather than of factual events, a matter of bitter regret for historians,<sup>30</sup> is nonetheless unsurprising when the *Life's* obsession with rhetoric and words in general is taken into account. When this is given due weight, it becomes less surprising that words in proposition and reaction to each other, and rumour and report and reputation and conjecture, dominate the account rather than deeds. Oratory is slippery in every way, including as a historical source (15. 3); powerful, yes, but frighteningly elusive.<sup>31</sup> In the central section, then, the reporting of speech acts may be seen as to some extent investing Demosthenes' political achievements with an insubstantiality in contrast to Cicero's, though it is subtly done, so that the laudatory conclusion to the section does not seem wholly inappropriate: and after all, Plutarch does not wish to deny the power of persuasion altogether, and the international nature of Demosthenes' policies make an approach which stresses his persuasive powers natural. But, perhaps because Demosthenes' speech acts are often more morally valid than his actions, this technique also later allows Plutarch to soften the effect of the genuine and disastrous failure of action on

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<sup>29</sup> In the *Theaetetus* (173ab) Plato gives a scathing character sketch of the orator, whom he contrasts with the philosopher:

Hence (from legal and political activity) he acquires a tense and bitter shrewdness; he knows how to flatter his master (the *demos*) and earn his good graces, but his mind is narrow and crooked. An apprenticeship in slavery has dwarfed and twisted his growth and robbed him of his free spirit, driving him into devious ways, threatening him with fears and dangers which the tenderness of youth could not face with truth and honesty; so, turning from the first to lies and the requital of wrong with wrong, warped and stunted, he passes from youth to manhood with no soundness in him and turns out, in the end, a man of formidable intellect—as he imagines. So much for the orator.

The picture is a suggestive one, and there are elements of it in Plutarch's portrait of Demosthenes (the moroseness, the single-mindedness), but they are confined to the earlier chapters and the account of his exile: elsewhere, Plutarch takes a less Platonist line and treats Demosthenes as a statesman, especially in his refusal to flatter the people, and in the end even as a hero.

<sup>30</sup> See Pecorella Longo, 123-9 and n. 34 below.

<sup>31</sup> Is it a coincidence that in 15.3, just before the passage where Plutarch suspends judgement as to whether *On the False Embassy* was ever delivered, he refers to a treatise by Demetrius of Magnesia *On Persons of the Same Name*? The same letters or word denoting two different things could be a source of unease, a symbol of the inadequacy of language to describe the world, in earlier literature: cf. Phaedra on the two kinds of *αἰδώς* at Eur. *Hipp.* 385-7, and Thuc. 3.86.4 with Hornblower ad loc. Thus even rather an obscure source on a trivial point might be seen to contribute to the impression of the instability of language given throughout the section, and, indeed, the *Life*.

Demosthenes' part at Chaeronea. The anecdote where the drunken Philip mocks Demosthenes' decree after the battle is a particularly good example of this (20.3). Philip manipulates and distorts the beginning of the decree, a speech act captured in stone (*Δημοσθένης Δημοσθένους Παιανιεύς τάδ' εἶπεν*), by scanning it and turning it into a jingling verse; but when sober he realises the power of the words he has mocked; this is then supported by the respect of the Persian king.<sup>32</sup> Ch. 21 puts a further twist on this: Demosthenes pronounces the oration over those who died at Chaeronea by the will of the Athenian people, and, it seems, his advice matters more to them than his desertion. His opponents are *ρήτορες*; he is the people's *σύμβουλος*. That he will not put his name to other decrees until after Philip's death is put down not to cowardice (and how easy it would have been to do so!), but to avoidance of ill-luck: he was *ἐξοιωνιζόμενος τὸν ἴδιον δαίμονα καὶ τὴν τύχην*.

Other devices, too, are used in the account of Chaeronea to present Demosthenes not as a villain, but as a victim of his own eloquence along with everyone else who fought. Plutarch begins chapter 19 with a suggestion that the gods were conspiring to end Greek liberty, and backs this up with a discussion of the ancient prophecies concerning the battle; he then gives us what amounts to an indirect version of Demosthenes' pre-battle speech:

but as for Demosthenes, he is said to have had complete confidence in the Greek forces, and to have been lifted into a state of glowing excitement by the strength and ardour of so many men eager to engage the enemy, so that he would not suffer his countrymen to give heed to oracles or listen to prophecies; he even suspected the Pythia of being in sympathy with Philip, reminding the Thebans of Epaminondas and the Athenians of Pericles, and declaring that those great leaders regarded things of this kind as pretexts for cowardice, and therefore followed the dictates of reason. (20.1)

There may be overtones of *Iliad* 12.230-50 here (Hector's response to Poulydamas).<sup>33</sup> Plutarch having declared himself a proud inhabitant of the small city of Chaeronea, and having reminded us of his provenance in ch. 19, it would follow very naturally if he were presenting the battle in an epic light here; the Homeric passage is also tragic in its sense of impending doom, and in Hector's refusal to recognise his fate and his reliance on feeble human strength and reason. Demosthenes' attitude in the face of the portents of ch.

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<sup>32</sup> Burlando notes that Plutarch might have followed an alternative tradition which made Philip behave with continence after Chaeronea (Burlando [n. 8 above], pp. 191-2 n. 147). That would have changed the reader's view of Demosthenes substantially.

<sup>33</sup> I owe this suggestion to Christopher Pelling.

19 may also recall passages such as Sophocles, *OT* 707-25 and 848-78 (Jocasta reassuring Oedipus) or *Antigone* 1033-47 (Creon accusing Teiresias of venality).

The content of the speech reprises Plutarch's earlier comparisons between Demosthenes and Pericles, especially his hypothetical remarks in 13 (see above). But Demosthenes is incapable of scaling those heights:

Up to this point, then, he was a brave man; but in the battle he displayed no conduct that was honourable or consonant with his words, but forsook his post, cast away his arms, and ran away most disgracefully, nor was he ashamed to belie the inscription on his shield, as Pytheas said, on which was written in letters of gold "With good fortune". (20.2)

Demosthenes fails his words, spoken and written. The pen is not mightier than the sword. But although Plutarch has made the obvious and inevitable contrast between Demosthenes' rhetoric and his lack of physical courage, the aftermath of the battle revives his moral standing somewhat, as we have seen.

Another way in which Plutarch softens Demosthenes' failure is to collapse the time-span between Chaeronea and the death of Philip (in reality two years, in Plutarch one clause).<sup>34</sup> Demosthenes may have run away, but he still has his triumph over his old enemy, and does not have to wait long for it. Plutarch marks his approval of Demosthenes' conduct in celebrating Philip's demise despite the recent death of his daughter by another series of subtle contrasts. He is contrasted first with Aeschines for his brave demeanour after his daughter's death,<sup>35</sup> then with the Athenians for their hypocrisy in honouring Philip when alive but rejoicing at his death, and finally with 'actors who play kings and tyrants', who have no choice but to laugh or cry as the text dictates. This last is a complex contrast: the actors are puppets of the play and must willy-nilly respond to circumstances in a conventionally appropriate way, but to an extreme, and therefore undignified, degree; they are playing tyrants, who are unlike democratic politicians in caring more for their own affairs than for the public good; and they are acting, and so whatever they do is artificial, in contrast to Demosthenes' genuine joy on behalf of Athens. The comparison as a whole suggests that Demosthenes is being contrasted again with Aeschines, whose career as an actor attracted

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<sup>34</sup> There is no point in complaining, as Pecorella Longo does, of a lack of historical sensibility here (147-8): Plutarch is not trying to be a reliable historical source, but to shape his text in a certain way.

<sup>35</sup> And compare, too, Cicero's refusal to be consoled at *Cicero* 41.8.



Demosthenes' abuse in the speech *On the Crown*,<sup>36</sup> and who is said both at 22.2 and at the end of the chapter to be wrong about the proper way to bear grief: the wording of the last sentence (ἐπικλῶντα πολλοὺς καὶ ἀποθηλύνοντα τὸν Αἰσχίνην τῷ λόγῳ τούτῳ πρὸς οἶκτον) may suggest the effect of a tragic actor upon an audience.<sup>37</sup> If this is so, then this anticipates the technique of attaching tragic imagery to Demosthenes' opponents found at the end of the *Life*. In any case, Demosthenes ends this section in rather better moral odour than one might have expected.

But in 25 and 26 his moral stature is badly compromised by his accepting bribes from Harpalus. Demosthenes literally loses his voice for money.<sup>38</sup> As a result he is fined and imprisoned, but it is once again his own cowardice which imposes the worst punishment—exile—upon him. He runs away again, this time from prison. And his conduct in exile is not admirable. Like Cicero (and Odysseus) he looks towards his native land with tears in his eyes; but unlike Cicero, who speaks some brave words and claims, at least, to be consoled by philosophy and to have used oratory merely as a tool for political ends,<sup>39</sup> Demosthenes' utterances become 'ungenerous and not consonant with his efforts in the *politeia*' (26.5):

Moreover, when young men came to visit and converse with him, he would try to deter them from public life, saying that if two roads had been presented to him in the beginning, one leading to the bema and the assembly, and the other straight to destruction, and if he could have known beforehand the evils attendant on a public career, namely, fears, hatreds, calumnies and contentions, he would have taken that road which led directly to death (26.7).

There is here certainly something of a recrudescence of the morose Demosthenes created by the anecdotes related in the first section of the *Life*. But like many of the anecdotes in this work, it is not quite as straightforward as it appears. The anecdote is somewhat reminiscent of the story told in

<sup>36</sup> For more detail on this see Easterling, n. 9 above.

<sup>37</sup> Not only, perhaps, in terms of Aristotelian pity and fear, but also in terms of the Platonic horror of the feminization of the actor (*Rep.* 395d5-e3, with Janaway [n. 7 above], 97-102) and the corruption of the audience by pity (*Rep.* 606a3-b8, with Janaway [n. 7 above], 149-52). For interesting modern use of the concept of feminization in tragedy, see F. I. Zeitlin, 'Playing the Other: Theater, Theatricality and the Feminine in Greek Drama', in *Nothing to Do with Dionysos? Athenian Drama in its Social Context*, edd. J. J. Winkler and F. I. Zeitlin, Princeton 1990, 130-67.

<sup>38</sup> This is in contrast to *Cicero* 35.5 where Cicero falters in fear during his speech for Milo.

<sup>39</sup> See *Cicero* 32.5-7 and Moles ad loc.

Xenophon's *Memorabilia* by Socrates, and attributed to Prodicus, of Heracles choosing virtue rather than vice, the oldest version of which occurs in Hesiod.<sup>40</sup> But here everything is rather off-key (though very self-consciously drawing on the literary tradition, in keeping with the literary atmosphere I mentioned earlier). In Hesiod, and in most, though not absolutely all later versions, the road to virtue is hard to begin with and then gets better; the road to vice seems easy at first but leads to destruction. As Gera says (243): 'If the tale of a choice put to young Heracles (or his counterparts) is to be morally instructive and interesting, it must comprise a genuine choice and involve a real dilemma of some kind. And the way to create such a quandary is to present a pair of two genuine alternatives, where the bad or misguided option is at least superficially compelling, while the good alternative is less obviously attractive.'

But which alternative here is which? Is politics vice and death virtue? That might seem *prima facie* more likely, given Demosthenes' recent disgrace, but politics for Demosthenes has never been easy. Unlike the effortlessly superior Cicero, he has been portrayed as having to work relentlessly for his status as orator and much has been made in this regard of his diligence and lack of ability to extemporise; politics therefore ought to be being represented as the harder but more virtuous alternative; the road to death, by contrast, is specifically described as being short and Demosthenes seems here with bitter experience to be describing it as the pleasanter alternative, which normally equates to the less virtuous. Whether or not the political life is a good life to lead is very much at issue throughout this pair: Cicero is torn between politics and philosophy, and succumbs to the fatal lure of politics;<sup>41</sup> in the first *Life* exactly how far Demosthenes is a statesman and how far he is just an orator is constantly at issue. So it is perhaps surprising here to find politics suggested as a difficult but virtuous path from which Demosthenes in his misery now recoils—even though that reading is what not only the two roads motif, but also the introduction to the anecdote, would suggest.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.22, Plato, *Rep.* 620c. For an excellent analysis of a variety of versions of the Xenophon story see D. Levine Gera, 'Lucian's Choice: *Somnium* 6-16', in *Ethics and Rhetoric*, edd. D. Innes, H. Hine and C. Pelling, Oxford 1995, 237-50. She also draws attention to Hesiod, *Works and Days* 287-92. For a suggestive examination of Heracles and Socrates, see N. Loraux, 'Socrates, Plato, Herakles: A Heroic Paradigm of the Philosopher' in *The Experiences of Teiresias: the Feminine and the Greek Man*, tr. P. Wissing, Princeton 1995, 167-77. She also has interesting remarks about the philosophic Odysseus.

<sup>41</sup> See Moles on 32.5-7, 40.2, and 41.8.

<sup>42</sup> The trials and tribulations of the political life listed perhaps should remind us of the *Theaetetus* passage partially quoted in n. 29 above, which mentions both ἀγῶνες and φόβοι as deforming forces which twist the orator.

Other writings of Plutarch might help us gauge the tone of this better. Demosthenes' audience of young men is perhaps significant. We have been told about various people encouraging the young Demosthenes in the early part of the *Life*, but he himself is here these young men. In an interesting passage from the *An Seni* (795b-c), Plutarch argues that one of the highest duties of an older man in politics is the training of young men:

in kindly spirit to suggest and inculcate in private to those who have natural ability for public affairs advantageous words and policies, urging them on towards that which is noble ... then, if the young man fails in any way, not letting him be discouraged, but setting him on his feet and encouraging him ... (one of the ensuing examples is indeed Demosthenes being encouraged as a young man himself).

In Plutarch's own advice to a young man about to enter politics, it becomes very clear that he does think the right kind of politics a worthwhile pursuit:

many who have become engaged in public affairs by chance and have had enough of them are no longer able to retire from them without difficulty ... These men cast the greatest discredit upon public life by regretting their course and being unhappy when, after hoping for glory, they have fallen into disgrace or, after expecting to be feared by others on account of their power, they are drawn into affairs which involve dangers and popular disorders. (*Praecepta* 798 d-e)

So reading the *Life* in the light of these works, where Plutarch is projecting a wise and kindly *persona* and presenting politics (of the right kind) as an important and honourable calling, might suggest that Demosthenes would have been wrong to die straightaway rather than face up to a political task of importance. This, it seems, is the utterance of a disappointed and depressed man.

On one level, that is that. And yet the wording of the anecdote as a 'two roads' story renders it pivotal and serves at least to raise the possibility that death may be better than the political life, and this too is surely important in the light of Demosthenes' suicide. The anecdote, importantly, is proleptic: its slightly closural tone is an illusion: it actually looks forward as well as back and requires the reader to anticipate the heroic, redeeming, suicide which follows only two chapters later. The *Life* is full of false dawns and turning points; all along one is encouraged to think by the inclusion of positive anecdotes or opinions about Demosthenes that he really is graduating from being just an orator to being a statesman, only to find that Plutarch is undercutting him or adding an ironic layer immediately afterwards. But this

story, with its image of a crossroads, actually does turn out to be a real change.

The final section certainly rather carefully carries out the rehabilitation of Demosthenes' character. Demosthenes speaks on behalf of Athens in Arcadia and has the following exchange with Pytheas:

Pytheas, we are told, said that just as we think that a house into which asses' milk is brought must certainly have some evil in it, so also a city must of necessity be diseased into which an Athenian embassy comes; whereupon Demosthenes turned the illustration against him by saying that asses' milk was given to restore health, and the Athenians came to bring salvation to the sick. (27.5)

There is a possibility that this is engaging with Plato's famous criticism in the *Gorgias*, that rhetoric, unlike philosophy, which is to the soul what healing is to the body, is instead the counterpart of the false art of cookery and is infected with *κολακεία*, flattery. (*Gorgias* 464b-465e). If we are meant to think of that passage here, then Demosthenes' retort is a particularly telling one, and one which is permitting a particularly favourable view of rhetoric and persuasion as a whole. Flattery is certainly far from being a characteristic of Demosthenes' words in general (see e.g. 14), and he is not trying to flatter anyone here. And for once words actually seem to accomplish something, since Demosthenes is brought back from exile. In the account of his homecoming he specifically contrasts himself with Alcibiades, which looks back to the beginning of the *Life*, and the point of the comparison is significant: he has, he says, persuaded, not forced, his fellow-citizens to accept him.

The triumph is short-lived, however, at least in one sense, as the Greeks are crushed in battle at Crannon (the sword prevailing once again) and Demosthenes' death follows immediately in Plutarch's account.

The narrative of the death-scene deserves to be examined in detail. Demosthenes has taken shelter in the temple of Poseidon at Calauria. He has been condemned to death on a motion of Demades and is hunted down by the unpleasant Archias. At this point Plutarch reintroduces the tragic colouring which pervades the end of the *Life*, surrounding the personality and actions, not so much of Demosthenes, as of Archias. Archias, we are told, had been a tragic actor before he took to exile-hunting, the teacher of Polus of Aegina, who was referred to at the start of the *Life*. But there is also some question of Archias' having been a rhetorician too—again the association of acting and rhetoric. Archias has already caught Hypereides and his companions and handed them over to Antipater to be put to death, and Plu-

tarch records that Hypereides had his tongue cut out.<sup>43</sup> Archias disingenuously reassures Demosthenes that he will not suffer at Antipater's hands, but Demosthenes has been forewarned by a dream and so does not believe him:

He dreamed that he was acting in a tragedy and competing with Archias for the prize, and that although he acquitted himself well and won the favour of the audience, his lack of props (*παρασκευή*) and costumes cost him the victory. (29.2)

What are we to make of this typically complex Plutarchean dream?<sup>44</sup> As with a number of other dreams in Plutarch, it combines a prophetic quality which might suggest external, divine involvement, with an appropriateness of subject which might suggest an internal, psychological contribution.<sup>45</sup> Its metaphor seems prompted by Archias' associations, and superficially it foretells Archias' success and Demosthenes' own downfall. But the audience's sympathy mitigating his failure on the practical level of props and costumes (part of a play's production provided by someone other than the actor) seems to look back over his career, not forward to his death: he has for a long time had a good relationship with the audience, the people, but on a concrete level he has never succeeded (Chaeronea, Crannon). And he has always to some extent been acting a part.<sup>46</sup> In the rest of the scene he declines to pretend any more: he hears Archias out in stony silence and answer him in a way which makes it quite clear that he knows this is pretence: 'You never convinced me by your acting, nor will you now with your messages'. And, again, when Archias threatens him, he refers once more to the stage: 'a moment ago you were acting a part.' At that, on the pretext of writing to his family, he takes out a scroll and a pen, which he bites as if in thought, and it is this which poisons him. His last words also play on Archias' tragic past: play Creon, he says, and cast me out unburied; and then he staggers out to die outside and not pollute the temple. So his final words make the dream come true in one sense—he does act in a tragedy with Archias, but refute it in another: his props do not let him down, and Archias can hardly be said to

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<sup>43</sup> This detail perhaps looks forward to the mutilation of Cicero right at the end of the pair: *Cicero* 48.4–49.2.

<sup>44</sup> On dreams in Plutarch and in ancient historiography see Christopher Pelling, 'Modern fantasy and ancient dreams', in *Writing and Fantasy*, edd. C. Sullivan and B. White, London 1999, 15–31, with further bibliography.

<sup>45</sup> See Pelling (n. 44 above), 15–17, and especially S. R. F. Price, 'The future of dreams: from Freud to Artemidorus', in D. M. Halperin, J. J. Winkler and F. I. Zeitlin, (edd.), *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, Princeton 1990, 365–88, esp. 371–2.

<sup>46</sup> On *ὑποκρινόμενος* and its cognates applied to drama and oratory see n. 26 above.

win. The tragic atmosphere is used rather subtly to convey Demosthenes' growth into wisdom: he is in control of the performance, more director than actor, and at the end, though his words still cloak his actions, now his actions are worthier than his words. So there is still a mismatch between rhetoric and reality, but now Demosthenes need not be ashamed of it: he is not just an orator after all.

This splendidly dramatic scene has something in common with Cleopatra's death in its narrative technique, in that in both cases the reader, like the intra-textual observers, does not know what will happen next, but is alerted more quickly than they by a shift in focalisation.<sup>47</sup> He has shaken off his physical cowardice—wrongly imputed to him by the soldiers with Archias after he has already cheated them by taking the poison—and ends his life on a note of piety.<sup>48</sup>

As he often does, Plutarch then compares different versions of his story, rejecting them in favour of his own. It is important that none of them is discreditable, in contrast to the alternative explanations of his nickname at the start of the *Life*; indeed, the only one Plutarch gives much consideration to implies divine intervention in Demosthenes' favour:

But the divergent stories of all the others who have written about the matter, and they are very many, need not be recounted; except that Demochares the relative of Demosthenes says that in his opinion it was not due to poison, but to the honour and kindly favour shown him by the gods, that he was rescued from the cruelty of the Macedonians by a speedy and painless death. (30.4)<sup>49</sup>

The chapter ends with a description of the honours paid to Demosthenes after his death, and in particular the inscription on his statue:

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<sup>47</sup> Here 29. 4; there, more elaborately, *Antony* 85.4-5 (Cleopatra, after a splendid meal, sends a sealed tablet to Caesar and retires behind closed doors with two of her women; Caesar realises too late what has happened when he reads the tablet).

<sup>48</sup> It is far from surprising that an author of this period should produce a favourable portrait of Demosthenes: see e.g. J. Bompaigne, 'L'apothéose de Demosthène, de sa mort jusqu'à l'époque de la II<sup>e</sup> Sophistique', *BAGB* 1984, 14-26, and B. Baldwin, 'The Authorship and Purpose of Lucian's *Demosthenis Encomium*', *Antichthon* 3 (1969), 54-62, and *Studies in Lucian*, Toronto 1973, 69. The complexity of Plutarch's portrayal is what is striking.

<sup>49</sup> If this passage is seen as specifically mirroring chapter 19, the last passage where divine intervention was posited, it may constitute further exculpation for Demosthenes' behaviour at Chaeronea: his failure was the work of the gods, and they are therefore suitably tender of him at his death. The use of the different but positive alternative versions here may also be contrasted with those at the end of *Alcibiades*, which as Duff has shown (239-40) stress Alcibiades' indefinable quality. See also n. 17 above.

If you had had strength (ῥώμη) equal to your intelligence (γνώμη), Demosthenes, the Macedonian Ares would never have ruled over the Greeks. (30.5)

One may feel that this is all too true, and that the fact that he did not is a serious character flaw, but the general effect of the inscription is positive rather than negative, especially in the light of his brave end.<sup>50</sup>

Demosthenes, then, has been rehabilitated on the count of courage; in the last chapter Plutarch uses an odd little anecdote to soften his other serious flaw: his venality. The story dates from Plutarch's own day: a soldier hides some gold in the interlaced fingers of Demosthenes' statue; when he returns, a long while later, it is still there, and people joke in epigrams about the incorruptibility of Demosthenes. Of course this has nothing directly to do with the living man Demosthenes, but told on the foot of the setting up of the honorific statue and its inscription it has the effect of a posthumous vindication.

The *Life* closes with the fate of Demades. It is not uncommon for Plutarch to recount the fate of opponents of his heroes at the end of his *Lives* (e.g. *Crassus*, and this also happens at the end of the *Cicero*).<sup>51</sup> He is, appropriately, murdered by the Macedonians, whom he has flattered so outrageously (Plato again?), along with his son, and Plutarch remarks: 'He was now learning amid the greatest misfortunes that traitors sell themselves first, a truth of which Demosthenes had often assured him, but which he would not believe'. So Demosthenes has the last word.

So the death-scene, and the whole of the end of the *Life*, recapitulates some of the themes of the first section in a very striking way, and this ring-composition is used to suggest that Demosthenes has grown as a person. The crossroads story, where the form of the anecdote matches and underlines its pivotal content rather than subverting it, as was the case in the preamble, begins this constructive recapitulation. The end is still dominated by the literary atmosphere which was commented on earlier: the tragic atmosphere, now lending dark colour to Demosthenes' enemies rather than himself, is one factor in that, but there is also the astounding appropriateness of Demosthenes dying while pretending to write, and even the epigrams made

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<sup>50</sup> As well as the jingling ῥώμη ... γνώμη, there may also be a pun on ῥώμη and σθένος. This would be typical of the *Life's* obsession with words and wordplay: see also note 31 above.

<sup>51</sup> See Christopher Pelling, 'Is Death the End? Closure in Plutarch's *Lives*', in D. H. Roberts, F. M. Dunn, and D. Fowler (edd.), *Classical Closure: Reading the End in Greek and Latin Literature*, Princeton 1997, 228-50, and Duff 137 n. 25.

about the soldier's gold, both integral factors, as we have seen, in Demosthenes' rehabilitation. Plutarch's final comment stressing that he has used both written and unwritten sources also reprises that first section and represents an affirmation that this is a true account, not a deficient one: no false apologies here, and an almost lapidary simplicity replacing the convolutions of the opening. In terms of Plutarch's biographical technique, he has moved from using a patchwork of anecdotes and opinions of Demosthenes and comments on his speeches and utterances to a 'big-narrative' approach with Demosthenes at its centre as a real moral agent rather than a figure characterized piecemeal, which also seems to reflect Demosthenes' growth in stature.<sup>52</sup>

It is worth noting that the end of the *Cicero* complements this final scene in interesting ways, as perhaps we might have expected given the way the preamble of the *Demosthenes* was clearly meant to overarch the two *Lives*. Although in the *synkrisis* Plutarch describes Cicero's death as being simply pathetic and not glorious in any way, this is the main point in which the *synkrisis* seems to be less subtle than the narratives of the *Lives*. In the *Cicero*, too, an expansive narrative replaces a multitude of smaller anecdotes, but to different effect. Broadly speaking, Demosthenes moves from being one who acts only through others to one who takes responsibility for his own death, but Cicero moves from an almost frenetic hyperactivity to a dignified acceptance of death. Cicero's final retreat is to the kind of country villa where he had previously carried on the philosophic life, and his submission to those sent to kill him—he stretches his neck out from his litter to the sword, shows suitably philosophic calm. He, like Demosthenes, is betrayed, and by a youth called Philologus whom he had educated in the liberal arts (perhaps a hint at the spuriousness of the wrong kind of literary endeavour which would look back to the early chapters of the *Demosthenes*); this youth, like Demades, is said in the final chapter to have paid a dreadful penalty later, and Antony also pays for his crimes against him, first by the repulsion with which the Romans greet the display of Cicero's head and hands—the hands which wrote the *Philippics*, states Plutarch, underlining the similarities between his subjects, and then by the fact that it is in the consulship of Cicero's son that Antony is finally defeated. Like Demosthenes, Cicero also receives posthumous vindication, which in both cases prevents us from thinking that either life has been lived in vain, however inexorable the tide of history against which these men struggled. Demosthenes' rebuke to Demades holds a closural position in the first life, and in the second, Augustus, taking a book of Cicero's from his frightened nephew, reads it for a long time, and then

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<sup>52</sup> On 'big scenes' in Plutarch see F. Frazier, 'Contribution à l'étude de la composition des "Vies" de Plutarque: l'élaboration des grandes scènes', *ANRW* II.33.6, 4487-4535.



returns it, saying, ‘A learned man, my child, a learned man and a lover of his country’.

So in both *Lives* the pen finally is mightier than the sword, even though it may not appear so all the time; but only when the pen is worthily employed, and the benchmark of that is not stylistic, but moral. Rhetoric—mere rhetoric—fails, but virtue triumphs.

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