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CRITICAL REVIEW

Angelo Casanova, *I miei scritti su Plutarco. Raccolti, riveduti e corretti con bibliografia unificata*. Firenze: Firenze University Press, 2025. Pp. 361. ISBN 979-12-215-0823-9 (Print); ISBN 979-12-215-0824-6 (PDF).

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Dedicated to his friend Professor Aurelio Pérez Jiménez and addressed to the international community of Plutarch scholars — specifically the International Plutarch Society and the European Plutarch Network — this volume brings together twenty-seven scientific contributions, collected, revised, and corrected by the author himself, accompanied by a unified bibliography. Beyond presenting Plutarchan studies previously published in other venues between 2003 and 2022 — here assembled for greater ease of reference and enhanced visibility (pp. 5-324) — the collection comprises a brief preface (pp. 3-4), a consolidated *Cited Bibliography* (pp. 325-344), an *Index locorum* (pp. 345-347), and an *Index of notable names* (pp. 349-351). Of these studies, which address textual and interpretative issues pertaining to the *Lives*, *Moralia*, quotations, and Plutarch's family, eighteen are written in Italian, five in English, three in Spanish, and one in French.

Professor Emeritus of Greek Language and Literature at the University of Florence and former director of the classical studies journal *Prometheus*, Angelo Casanova — who has also published extensively on Hesiod, Diogenes of Oenoanda, and Menander — is undoubtedly one of the most authoritative figures in Plutarchan scholarship of recent decades. This volume stands as a testament to a scholarly enterprise that over the years has probed the work of the Chaeronean with masterful results.

The first contribution, titled "Il *Grillo* di Plutarco e Omero" (pp. 5-19), retraces the relationship between the *Bruta animalia ratione uti* and Book 10 of the *Odyssey*, discerning in Plutarch a disciplined, rigorous engagement with the Homeric model. It explores the

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chronological placement of the dialogue through the textual exegesis of *Mor*. 986D and a re-examination of *Mor*. 988F concerning the relationship between Odysseus and Circe. Furthermore, the author suggests a moralizing interpretation of the Mendes goat at *Mor*. 989A — preluding a novel exegesis of the passage — and at *Mor*. 989E explains the association of Crete with Odysseus' lies, establishing a relationship between Plutarch's text and Homer's that is not merely mimetic, but virtually paraphrastic.

The second contribution, written in English and dedicated to P.A. Stadter, is titled "The Time Setting of the Dialogue *Bruta animalia ratione uti*" (pp. 21-30). It provides further observations on the same dialogue, focusing on its opening section and *Mor*. 986D. After surveying scholarly debates on the interpretation of the work's opening passage, Casanova traces it back to *Odyssey* 12.37-38, regarding those lines as the fulfillment of Circe's prophecies in *Odyssey* 10.504-540. Identifying a precise, direct correspondence between the two texts, he argues that Plutarch intended to bridge the temporal *vacuum* left open in Homer. Later in the paper, besides offering a new exegesis of *Mor*. 986D (corroborated by *Mor*. 988F), Casanova proposes the title "Last night on Aeaea" for the new anecdote inserted by Plutarch into the Circe saga within the Homeric narrative web, regarding it as the sole moment where Odysseus appears to fear the enchantress.

The third contribution, "Plutarco, *Quaest. Conv*. III, 659A: gli influssi della Luna", dedicated to Italo Gallo (pp. 31-38), discusses the problem raised by Euthydemus of Sunium concerning why meat spoils faster under moonlight than under sunlight — a query posed during a banquet featuring a massive wild boar. Recalling that the debate touches upon ancient food preservation and the properties of lunar heat and rays (a staple topic of agricultural lore and popular belief), Casanova comments on the passage to clarify its sense and interpretation. Regarding the woodcutters mentioned, he identifies them as builders and carpenters testing timber for construction. Supported by evidence from *De facie* 939F, Macrobius (*Sat*. 7.16.15-34, as signaled by Teodorsson), and Pliny (*H.N*. 18.308, 321), Casanova moves beyond the ill-fitting parallels drawn with Theophrastus (*H.P*. 5.1.3) and Athenaeus (276DE). He contextualizes the passage within an agricultural discourse attentive to the lunar calendar, identifying similar precepts in the works of Hesiod, Cato the Censor, Varro, Cicero, and Columella. The waning moon phase is linked to storing well-dried grain to ensure efficient milling, whereas damp grains crumble; lastly, the leavening of dough and fetal gestation are highlighted as processes suited to the moisture of lunar rays.

The fourth essay, "Plutarco e Menandro" (pp. 39-50), examines the 'active' relationship between the two authors, observing how Plutarch harbored a deep ideological affinity and organic exegetical interest in the comic playwright. This is evinced across roughly fifty quotations — one in the *Life of Alexander* and the remainder across twenty-five treatises of the *Moralia*, notably with six citations in *De audiendis poetis* and five each in *De adulatore et amico* and *De tranquillitate animi*. After presenting a survey of Menandrean citations in the

Moralia — recognized as too diverse to allow a *reductio ad unum* — Casanova focuses on *Quaest. conv.* 654D and fr. 134 Sandbach. He demonstrates that Plutarch preferred Menander over Aristophanes not only as the bearer of a distinct philosophical and existential *sophia*, but as a timeless model of comedy capable of speaking to the non-Greek world, situated within a cultural horizon deeply shaped by the Platonic legacy and the principle that art must answer to a supreme pedagogical tribunal before itself.

The fifth contribution, "Il *Grillo* di Plutarco e la tradizione della figura di Ulisse" (pp. 51-60), divided into two sections and likewise devoted to the *Bruta animalia ratione uti*, investigates the debts of Plutarch's Odysseus to classical tragedy. He notes that Odysseus is depicted as an ambitious leader with Panhellenic pretensions rather than a comic or paradoxical figure. Casanova highlights how Plutarch's Odysseus is engaged in a role-play that opposes him to Circe and Gryllus, who level accusations against him drawing not only on Homer, but on the subsequent tradition — most notably fifth-century drama. Specifically, Casanova notes that the 'sordid' roles played by Odysseus in Attic tragedy — where he acts mostly as a despicable agent against the weak and defeated, becoming essentially 'odious' — belong to his function as a national, collective hero: a guardian and protector of the Greek people and their unity under any circumstance and at any cost.

The sixth essay, "Menandro maestro d'amore nell'opera di Plutarco" (pp. 61-70), opens with *Quaest. conv.* 3.6 (654D), which inquires into the most opportune time for making love. Plutarch first adduces the view of Epicurus, who in his *Symposium* discouraged lovemaking because of its dangers during digestion and at night; however, Menander is subsequently introduced as an ἐρωτικὸς ἀνήρ who viewed Aphrodite as queen of the night, as illustrated by a quotation of Thrasonides from the *Misoumenos*. For Plutarch, Menander is capable not only of grasping the mechanics of falling in love, but also of coupling them with a keen moral sensibility, even when treating courtesans. Casanova adds that, owing to an extraordinary familiarity with the female psyche, the playwright stands as a peerless master of love and good taste. Even when bringing dangerous or morally questionable characters to the stage, Menander tempers theatrical *mimesis* with a touch of *diegesis*, equipping the audience with tools to defend themselves with a smile.

"Traduzioni e riusi del *Grillo* di Plutarco nel Rinascimento fiorentino: Machiavelli e Gelli" (pp. 71-82) is the title of the seventh contribution, which addresses the reception of *Bruta animalia ratione uti* during the Florentine Renaissance. Having been translated into Latin at least three times during the fifteenth century, the dialogue influenced not only Florentine culture but Italian literature at large. Casanova focuses on Machiavelli's unfinished poem *L'Asino*, composed in Dantean *terza rima*, which sought playfully to blend Dante's *Commedia* with Apuleius' *Golden Ass*. In a semi-serious journey interrupted at Chapter 9, the poet is guided by a handmaiden of Circe through the abodes of men transformed into beasts, culminating in an encounter with a fat pig whom the poet attempts to persuade to become

human again. Casanova highlights how the structure and arguments of the poem lean heavily on Plutarch's dialogue — virtually flaunting its source — while incorporating additional motifs from Seneca and Pliny the Elder. Less space is devoted to Giovan Battista Gelli's *Circe*, which draws extensively on Plutarch (as confessed in the dedicatory epistle). Its ten dialogues feature Odysseus, Circe, and eleven animals who refuse to regain human form, illustrating how Gelli recovered and completed Plutarch's framework.

The eighth essay, "Fortuna e carattere da Menandro a Plutarco (con una nota testuale su alcune citazioni di Menandro in Plutarco)" (pp. 83-94), examines Plutarch's intellectual stance toward *tyche*, which he deems unreliable yet capable of highlighting, by contrast, the virtues of the individual who overcomes or endures it, as shown in *De fortuna Romanorum* and *De Alexandri Magni fortuna aut virtute*. Reconnecting with Peripatetic doctrines, Plutarch returns to Theophrastus through a distinctly Menandrean theme: the impact of *tyche* upon *tropos* (the moral character of figures on stage). The essay closes with an analysis of two Menandrean quotations — in *De fortuna Romanorum* 318CD (with reference to *Life of Sulla* 34.3-4) and *Quaest. conv.* 3.6 (654D) — to illuminate Plutarch's appropriation of comic poetry for moralistic reflection on Fortune.

The ninth contribution, "Menander in Plutarch: A Conjecture for Eros (fr. 791 K.-A.)", written in English (pp. 95-100) and dedicated to Frederick E. Brenk, treats fr. 134 Sandbach (Stob. IV 20.34) from the lost treatise Περὶ ἔρωτος (absent from the *Lamprias Catalogue*). Menander is described as adept at understanding the physiology, pathology, and development of love. The passage contains eight lines of fr. 791 K.-A., the textual corruption of whose conclusion Casanova seeks to emend. Supporting the parallel with *Amatorius* 763B (previously elucidated by Becchi), Casanova offers a new translation opposing those of Ferrari and Sandbach, proposing the textual conjecture εἰς τὸ κῆρ to resolve the *lacuna*. This reading is palaeographically close to the transmitted εἴσω δή, metrically sound, and linguistically plausible, as demonstrated from Xenophon (*An.* 2.5.33).

"Plutarco y la helenización de la historia romana: la *Vida de Rómulo*" is the title of the tenth essay (pp. 101-113), written in Spanish. Casanova emphasizes that regarding Rome's origins, Plutarch maintained a middle stance: he acknowledged the ethnic and cultural independence of the Romans while recognizing an underlying cultural and spiritual unity with the Greeks from the outset. The *Life of Romulus* frames this unity as the multi-century maturation of a paradigmatic, ahistorical reality. Through a wealth of anecdotes, the author demonstrates how Plutarch employs Greek political and ethical models to construct the conceptual framework by which he evaluates Roman figures, both historical and mythical.

The eleventh essay, "Citations de Ménandre dans les ouvrages de Plutarque: texte et interprétation", written in French (pp. 115-130), underscores the profound intellectual and spiritual affinity between Plutarch and Menander. Examining lost fragments of the playwright, Casanova notes that the Chaeronean frequently cited from memory, without

guaranteeing strict verbatim accuracy. Through a philological analysis of twelve Menandrean quotations, Casanova cautions against emending Plutarch's text merely to conform it to Menandrean evidence transmitted through other channels, as Plutarch adapted or truncated texts to suit specific narrative, thematic, or moralizing needs.

The twelfth contribution, "La hora del amor (*Quaest. Conv.* 3.6): Plutarco y la tradición (literaria y filosófica)," written in Spanish (pp. 131-140), addresses the sixth question of the third book of *Quaestiones convivales* regarding the most opportune time for lovemaking. The Chaeronean draws upon a tradition of lost works — including those by Epicurus, Zeno the Stoic, and Clinia the Pythagorean — to address a problem previously debated by Homer, Xenophon, and Menander. The debate concludes with Soclarus (whose view is shared by Plutarch) endorsing post-banquet lovemaking if pursued in a sober state after a brief pause, while discouraging it in the morning or during work hours. In closing, Casanova playfully adopts Plutarch's advice by quoting a satirical refrain from the Spanish comedian Pedro Reyes: "en Sevilla y en Managua / capital de Nicaragua, / si la sangre no es agua / todo el día se hace el amor".

"Plutarch as Apollo's priest at Delphi" is the title of the thirteenth study (pp. 141-148, in English). It treats passages from *An seni respublica gerenda sit* (792F) and *Quaestiones convivales* (700E) where Plutarch explicitly references his priesthood at Delphi, reading them alongside Delphic inscriptions that illuminate other passages in his corpus, notably *De E apud Delphos* 385A. To provide a detailed historical and philological analysis, Casanova adduces evidence regarding Plutarch's advanced age (when he was no longer able to perform sacrifices, processional marches, or choral dances), the precise number of priests of Pythian Apollo, the name of a fellow priest, an inscription on a statue erected in honor of Emperor Hadrian (Dittenberger, *Syll.*[3] 829A) by Plutarch as Amphictyonic delegate, and a statue erected by the Delphians and Chaeroneans honoring Plutarch himself by Amphictyonic decree.

The fourteenth contribution, "La giustizia nel *Grillo* e la conclusione del dialogo" (pp. 149-156), addresses the incomplete state of *Bruta animalia ratione uti* and the loss of its final section postulated by scholars. Casanova suggests that the dialogue may have been conceived precisely as it stands: with an abrupt, intentional conclusion designed to avoid driving a paradoxical exercise to absurdity. In his view, this work — infused with Cynic, Epicurean, and Stoic elements stemming from Plutarch's Platonic background — creates an unpretentious philosophical 'pastiche' that never truly features Odysseus' voice. Gryllus' extravagant opinions leave the reader to pursue the reflection toward a conclusion, emulating the oral pedagogical methods of the Academy while serving as a rhetorical provocation and Sophistic *jeu d'esprit* designed to stimulate reflection on animal virtue.

The fifteenth essay, "La *Vita di Teseo* e la tradizione letteraria" (pp. 157-166), highlights the learned nature of the *Life of Theseus*, which is rich in quotations serving

stylistic, ornamental, or historical-narrative purposes. Casanova shows how Plutarch scrutinizes source reliability through analytical rigor grounded in verisimilitude, favoring historical prose while approaching poetic texts with caution (invoking them impersonally or to present alternative versions). The mythical narrative draws heavily on tragedy — especially Euripides — alongside implicit references to Callimachus and Bacchylides.

The sixteenth essay, "Rilievi sulle citazioni di Euripide in Plutarco" (pp. 167-182, dedicated to Carles Miralles), underscores Plutarch's extensive knowledge of Euripides. Often quoting from memory — occasionally incurring minor oversights — Plutarch employs prose adaptations, veiled literary allusions, and subtle textual variations. Casanova notes that examining lost tragic fragments presents considerable difficulty, often due to corruptions in the manuscript tradition or, in one isolated case, a probable oversight attributable to the Chaeronean himself.

Chapter seventeen, "Are Women Colder or Hotter than Men? (*Quaest. Conv.* 3.4)", written in English (pp. 183-194), examines the title question, assessing the arguments presented by the interlocutors and offering interpretative insights grounded in existing scholarship. Beyond tracing several theories to Aristotelian doctrines and Parmenides, the author addresses two textual problems (at *Mor.* 651B and 651E), observing that the *Quaestiones convivales* have been transmitted with numerous *lacunae* and corrupt readings.

The eighteenth contribution, "*Quaestiones Convivales*: composizione e fonti, tradizione e riprese" (pp. 195-220) — by far the longest in the collection — investigates the literary and philosophical models of the symposiac genre. It explores the historical veracity of the recorded discussions and the influence exercised by the genres under review. Through careful textual analysis, Casanova investigates Plutarch's working method, hypothesizing a staggered composition over time for the various books comprising the work.

The nineteenth essay, "Il malinteso della nipote (Plut. *Cons. ux.* 608B)" (pp. 221-231), seeks to resolve the *vexata quaestio* regarding the identity of a presumed niece residing in Tanagra who informed Plutarch of his young daughter's death. Casanova places the composition of the *Consolatio ad uxorem* in Tanagra itself, proposing that the girl in question was actually the niece of the messenger sent to inform Plutarch; she became 'Plutarch's niece' through a centuries-old misunderstanding caused by textual corruption.

The twentieth essay, "La vela di Teseo e la tintura di Simonide" (pp. 233-244, dedicated to Aurelio Pérez Jiménez), addresses *Life of Theseus* 17 regarding the purple, oak-derived color of the sail to be hoisted upon returning from Crete in the event of victory. Casanova demonstrates that Plutarch aimed to underscore the early Athenians' lack of nautical experience, particularly through their reliance on a terrestrial dye. The essay supplies details on the origin and use of this dye drawn from ancient sources and modern scientific knowledge.

The twenty-first article, "Reminiscenze di poeti arcaici nella *Vita di Teseo*" (pp. 245-258), notes that Plutarch dismissed extravagant or implausible variants from archaic poetry, reducing quotations from choral lyricists to a minimum. His critical acumen is visible in his handling of the *Theseid*, the pseudo-Hesiodic work, and controversial passages in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, whereas the *Epic Cycle* is deliberately ignored and the hexameters of Hereas of Megara receive only a brief polemical mention.

"Timoxena's messenger's journey (Plut. *Cons. ux.* 608B)" is the title of the twenty-second chapter (pp. 259-266). Here Casanova re-examines the compositional setting of the *Consolatio ad uxorem*, Plutarch's journey to Tanagra, Timoxena's attempt to reach her husband, and the dispatch of the messenger sent to break the news of their daughter's death.

The twenty-third chapter, "Nipoti, generi e cognati di Plutarco" (pp. 267-280, dedicated to Maria Cannatà Fera), draws on the *Quaestiones convivales* to discuss Plutarch's kinship with Craton, Firmus, and Patroclea. Casanova identifies them as Plutarch's brothers-in-law (brothers of Timoxena), correcting mistranslations of kinship terms found in earlier editions.

The same topic is addressed in the subsequent Spanish-language essay, "Yernos y cuñados de Plutarco" (pp. 281-290). Reaffirming that Plutarch did not have three married daughters, Casanova approaches the question from a slightly different angle, concluding once again that the three figures were brothers-in-law rather than sons-in-law.

The following paper, "I figli di Plutarco" (pp. 291-301), turns to Plutarch's offspring, establishing the birth order of Autobulus, Chaeron, Plutarch Jr., and Soclarus. Casanova notes that Plutarch named his sons first after his father, then after the eponymous hero of Chaeronea, then after himself, and finally after a dear friend and frequent companion, Soclarus of Tithorea (later archon and *epimeletes* at Delphi).

The penultimate essay, "La storia di Empona e la datazione dell'*Erotikos* plutarcheo" (pp. 303-312, dedicated to Augusto Guida), treats key issues in the *Amatorius*. Recognizing it as a work of extraordinary beauty, brilliance, and formal harmony — as well as the vehicle for innovative thought despite textual *lacunae* — Casanova praises its complex architecture. He dismisses as untenable (and perhaps provocative) the hypothesis that the transmitted text represents a compilation of Plutarchan notes assembled posthumously by his son.

The final essay, "Timossena, la moglie di Plutarco" (pp. 313-324), re-examines the biographical details concerning Plutarch's wife, Timoxena, preserved in the *Consolatio ad uxorem* and other works. Casanova offers insights into her family background, clarifying aspects of her marriage to Plutarch and its associated challenges. He advances the hypothesis that Timoxena was older than her husband and deeply devoted to him, fostering a happy, exemplary marital union.

The main thematic axes of this volume — revolving around the *Bruta animalia ratione uti*, the *Quaestiones convivales*, the *Life of Theseus*, Plutarch's family, and his engagement

with Menander and Euripides — bear witness to a major scholarly achievement. The work is distinguished throughout by exegetical finesse, conjectural acumen, and an unwavering commitment to refining our understanding of the Chaeronean's oeuvre.

Within the broader landscape of international scholarship, which has significantly reshaped textual and literary approaches to the *Moralia* while re-evaluating key dimensions of Plutarch's thought, Angelo Casanova's collection stands out as a volume of paramount importance that merits careful reading by all scholars of Plutarch.