OS FRAGMENTOS DE PLUTARCO

e a recepção da sua obra

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FROM MORALIZING BIOGRAPHY TO HISTORICAL NOVEL:
THE USE OF PLUTARCH'S *LIFE OF ALCIBIADES* IN STEVEN PRESSFIELD'S *TIDES OF WAR**

I. Introduction

Several of the protagonists of Plutarch's *Vitae Parallelae* continue to appeal to the imagination of modern people, including authors of historical fiction[1]. One of these figures is Alcibiades son of Cleinias. In 2000 Doubleday published a book entitled *Tides of War: A Novel of Alcibiades and the Peloponnesian War*[2]. In this bestseller written by Steven Pressfield an anonymous Athenian reports the tale that his grandfather Jason told him shortly before his death: when asked whether there was a person to whom his thoughts kept returning (p. 24), the old man related how a certain Polemides, who was in prison on a charge of the murder of Alcibiades, had told him the story of his life, which for a long time had been dominated by his alleged victim.

Tides of War is Pressfield's second novel situated in ancient Greece. When working on the first, *Gates of Fire: An Epic Novel of the Battle of Thermopylae* (Doubleday London, 1998), Pressfield found Plutarch's Spartan

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* I would like to thank Jeff Beneker for checking my English.

[1] See e.g. *Ancient Greece in Fiction* (http://www2.rhul.ac.uk/Classics/NJL/novels.html) and *Fictional Rome* (http://www.stockton.edu/~roman/fiction/).

[2] All our references to *Tides of War* are to the Bantam Books paperback edition published in 2001 (ISBN: 0-553-81332-3).

Lives "hugely helpful"[3]. In the acknowledgements at the end of *Tides of War* (p. 603), the Chaeronean is mentioned as well, after Thucydides, Plato, and Xenophon. It is the purpose of the present paper to examine how in writing this book Pressfield made use of the *Life of Alcibiades*. We will thereby distinguish between those parts of the *Life* in which Plutarch tries to provide us with a better insight into Alcibiades' character by describing his πράξεις and those in which he more emphatically focuses on his protagonist's ἦθος[4].

II. Tidings of War

Between his commission as general by the Athenian fleet at Samos in 411 and his return to Athens in 408 or 407[5], Alcibiades gained a series of important victories for Athens in the Hellespont and the Propontis. Several episodes in *Tides of War* can clearly be brought into connection with historical events from this period that are included in the *Life of Alcibiades*. In this first part of our paper we will examine to what extent some of the stories told by the narrators in the novel are based on the corresponding parts of Plutarch's biography.

1. The Siege of Chalcedon

Plutarch's version of Alcibiades' victory at Chalcedon differs from those of Xenophon and Diodorus. According to the Chaeronean (*Alc.* 30.1-2), the satrap Pharnabazus came to raise the siege while the troops of the Spartan harmost Hippocrates made a sortie; but drawing up his army so as to face both enemies at once, Alcibiades put the former to flight and slew the latter. Xenophon, on the other hand, relates that Pharnabazus came to the aid of the Chalcedonians but had to retire to Heracleion because a wall erected by the Athenians prevented him from

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[3] From his answer to Richard Lee's second question in the interview published in the spring of 2000 in *Solander: the Magazine of the Historical Novel Society*.

[4] It should be clear from our formulation that we find the distinction between "das Chronographische" and "das Eidologische" in Weizsäcker (1931) all too rigid; cf. e.g. Hamilton (1969), xl.

[5] On the various chronologies proposed for the years 411-406, see Krentz (1989), 11-14.

joining Hippocrates' forces (*HG* I 3.4-7)[6]. Diodorus does not mention the satrap at all (XIII 66.1-2). To put it briefly: only in the *Life of Alcibiades* does Alcibiades really defeat two enemies at once.

The brief story that Jason relates at the beginning of chapter thirty-one of *Tides of War* (p. 393) largely agrees with *Alc.* 30.1-2: the old man tells his grandson that Hippocrates and Pharnabazus attacked the Athenians "simultaneously"; thereupon "Alcibiades divided his forces and defeated them both". Since Xenophon and Diodorus are also named in the acknowledgements at the end of *Tides of War* (p. 603), it seems that Pressfield deliberately chose to use Plutarch's version of the battle at Chalcedon. In our opinion, the reason was that it adds most to Alcibiades' glory. We are confirmed in our view by the fact that Jason states that "Alcibiades *took* Chalcedon". At this point he not only contradicts Xenophon and Diodorus but Plutarch as well; all three ancient authors make it clear that Chalcedon did not fall on the day the Athenians defeated Hippocrates' troops (*HG* I 3.8-9; XIII 66.3; *Alc.* 31.1-2). Pressfield's aim, however, was the same again: to render Alcibiades' merit as great as possible.

2. The Capture of Selymbria

Shortly after his victory at Chalcedon, Alcibiades captured Selymbria. The episode in *Tides of War* that is connected to this event (pp. 393-394) may be summarized as follows: as the traitors within the city were forced to give the agreed signal prematurely because one of them had suddenly backed out, Alcibiades went ahead with an advance party; when he was confronted by superior numbers, he had the trumpet sounded and ordered his adversaries to surrender and receive clemency; the Selymbrians concluded that the Athenians had already taken the city and accepted the offer; keeping his word, Alcibiades maltreated no one. In general, this story, told by Jason, agrees with *Alc.* 30.3-10, the only detailed account of the capture of Selymbria that is extant from

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[6] The wall "from sea to sea" is mentioned in all four of our texts but only in Xenophon is it of use to the Athenians during the actual battle.

antiquity[7]. There are, however, a few differences that are worth commenting upon.

For one thing, it seems that Pressfield is mistaken when he makes Jason declare that Alcibiades only required "that the city return to alliance with Athens and hold open the straits in her name" (p. 394). Selymbria – as the first of the two maps at the beginning of the book clearly shows – lay neither near the Hellespont nor at the entrance of the Bosporus but on the northern side of the Propontis, about sixty kilometres west of Byzantium. Presumably Pressfield went wrong because he associated the capture of Selymbria with Alcibiades' triumphs at Chalcedon and Byzantium (p. 393: "Alcibiades took Chalcedon Selymbria and Byzantium"; cf. *Alc.* 29.6-31.6).

Secondly, Jason reports that Alcibiades "had mounted the walls" (p. 393), whereas in Plutarch he enters through the city gate, which is opened from within (*Alc.* 30.6: ἀνοιχθείσης δὲ τῆς πύλης αὐτῷ). Pressfield may have been misled by Plutarch's statement that Alcibiades "ran to the walls" (*Alc.* 30.5: ἠπείγετο δρόμῳ πρὸς τὰ τείχη) but we consider it more likely that he deliberately made this change in order to add to his character's heroism. As we will argue below, such tendency manifests itself more clearly in other parts of *Tides of War*[8].

According to the *Life of Alcibiades*, Alcibiades was negotiating with the Selymbrians when the main bulk of his army reached the city (*Alc.* 30.9). The Athenian general sent away his Thracian soldiers because he had inferred (τεκμαιρόμενος) that the Selymbrians were in favour of peace and was afraid that the Thracians would sack the place (*Alc.* 30.9-10). The narrator explicitly affirms that Alcibiades' judgment about the Selymbrians' disposition was correct (*Alc.* 30.9: ὅπερ ἦν). It appears that the outcome of the confrontation ultimately depended on Alcibiades' ability to assess the situation rapidly. This is not the case in *Tides of War*.

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[7] Diodorus simply reports that Alcibiades took the city by betrayal, obtained a lot of money from it, and left a garrison (XIII 66.4: πρῶτον μὲν Σηλυβρίαν διὰ προδοσίας εἷλεν, ἐξ ἧς πολλὰ χρήματα πραξάμενος ἐν μὲν ταύτῃ φρουρὰν κατέλιπεν). Xenophon mentions the capture of Selymbria only in passing (*HG* I 3.10).

[8] See infra, pp. 249-250.

According to Jason, the Selymbrians consented to surrender on condition that Alcibiades would prevent his Thracian troops from plundering the city (p. 394: "if he would only call off his dogs"). In other words: when Alcibiades sent away his Thracians, he knew that the Selymbrians were ready to lay down arms. His own σύνεσις is less crucial than in the *Life of Alcibiades*. In fact, Jason remarks that *the Selymbrians* were close to the mark when they thought that the Athenians had already taken the city (p. 393: "which was nearly true").

Finally, our episode in *Tides of War* contains no counterpart to Plutarch's assertion that Alcibiades addressed the Selymbrians because "he was too fond of victory to take flight, undefeated as he was in all his campaigns down to that day" (*Alc.* 30.7: πρὸς δὲ τὸ φυγεῖν ἀήττητος ἄχρι τῆς ἡμέρας ἐκείνης ἐν ταῖς στρατηγίαις γεγονὼς φιλονικότερον εἶχε). This is due to the difference in purpose between the novel and the *Life*: as Pressfield is less of a moralist than Plutarch, he is less eager to set his readers thinking about the various effects a politician's ambition may produce[9].

3. The Battle of Cyzicus

Chapter twenty-nine of *Tides of War* offers a battle scene relating to the Athenian victory at Cyzicus in 410 (pp. 361-368). This time Polemides is our narrator. Throughout the battle he stayed close to Alcibiades because he had been ordered by Lysander to keep him alive as long as he was of use (pp. 342-343). Polemides' tale is more elaborate and less straightforward than the two episodes discussed above. If we abstract the narrated events from their disposition in the text and reconstruct them in their chronological order, the battle described by Polemides appears to have comprised four stages: first the Athenians lured out the Spartan fleet commanded by Mindarus; a naval battle ensued, followed by a fight on the beach; finally, the Lacedaemonians

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[9] On the ambiguous status of ambition in Plutarch, see esp. Frazier (1988); Duff (1999), 83-87; Wardman (1974), 115-124; Bucher-Isler (1972), 12-13 and 58-59. On the importance of the theme in the *Life of Alcibiades*, see Pelling (1996), xlvii and Gribble (1999), 272-274.

and their allies were routed on the plain of the Macestos.

The episode under discussion shows less affinity to the corresponding part of the *Life of Alcibiades* (*Alc.* 28.2-10) than those we studied before. Whatever phase of the battle we look at, many elements are clearly invented by Pressfield himself (e.g. the need for special rowing instructions to make the pretended flight of Alcibiades' squadron look real (p. 365); the manoeuvres of Antiope, Alcibiades' flagship, during the sea battle (p. 366); the oarsman Charcoal's instructions on how to prepare eels (pp. 361-362); Alcibiades' elimination of one Spartan on the beach with his shield, another with his axe (p. 363); the battle on the Macestos plain (pp. 366-367)). Moreover, the descriptions of the fighting at sea (p. 366) and on the water's edge (pp. 362-363; pp. 364-365) seem basically to go back to Diodorus' account of the battle of Cyzicus: only in the *Bibliotheca historica* do we read that Alcibiades sank some of Mindarus' ships and tried to drag off those on the beach (XIII 50.5: Ἀλκιβιάδης δὲ κατὰ σπουδὴν διώκων ἃς μὲν κατέδυεν, ἃς δὲ κατατιτρώσκων ὑποχειρίους ἐλάμβανε, τὰς δὲ πλείστας πρὸς αὐτῇ τῇ γῇ καθωρμισμένας καταλαβὼν ἐπέβαλλε σιδηρᾶς χεῖρας, καὶ ταύταις ἀποσπᾶν ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἐπειρᾶτο); Diodorus is also the only one who reports that Theramenes and Thrasybulus came to the aid of Alcibiades as he fought Mindarus on the shore (XIII 51.1-6)[10]. Nevertheless, there are at least two interesting points of contact between Polemides' story and Plutarch's *Life of Alcibiades*.

Xenophon and Diodorus differ widely on how the Athenians managed to surprise the Spartan fleet at Cyzicus. According to the former (*HG* I 1.16-17), Alcibiades set out in the pouring rain; when the sun suddenly broke through, it turned out that Mindarus' ships, which had been practising on the open sea, were already cut off from the harbour. Diodorus (XIII 50.1-4), on the other hand, relates that the Athenians divided their fleet into three squadrons; Alcibiades, sailing far ahead of

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[10] For a comparison of the entire accounts of the battle in Xenophon (*HG* I 1.11-23), Diodorus (XIII 49.2-51.8) and Plutarch (*Alc.* 28.2-10), see esp. Littman (1968) and Andrewes (1982), 19-23.

the others, drew the Spartans out to battle; by pretending to flee, he lured them away from the harbour; Theramenes and Thrasybulus blocked their retreat. Plutarch (*Alc.* 28.4-7) offers a combination of the two traditions: Alcibiades left Proconnesus in bad weather; when the sky cleared up and the Peloponnesian fleet came into sight, he ordered the others to stay behind because he feared that their number would make the enemy turn back immediately; he challenged the Spartans with only forty ships but soon the rest of the Athenian fleet entered the battle. In *Tides of War* too, mention is made of both a trap and a squall (p. 365). Yet this "brilliant scheme of bait-and-wheel" is said to have been conceived before the Athenians set sail (p. 375). It seems that Pressfield was inspired by Donald Kagan's reconstruction of the battle of Cyzicus rather than by *Alc.* 28.4-7. Kagan, who is listed in the acknowledgements of *Tides of War* (p. 603), believes that the Athenian ships that would cut Mindarus off from Cyzicus hid behind the promontory of Artaki and thinks that bad weather is needed to explain why they could do so without being spotted by Peloponnesian lookouts[11]. He argues, however, that both Thrasybulus and Theramenes concealed their vessels behind the promontory. In Polemides' story, on the other hand, only Thrasybulus' squadron emerges "from concealment behind the promontory" (p. 365); Theramenes' ships come "from the shoulder of the squall" (pp. 365-366), that is, from the same direction as Alcibiades, who had emerged "out of the squall line" before he lured the Spartans away from their harbour (p. 365). When Polemides later maintains that Alcibiades had insisted that an avenue of egress be left open to the Spartans, so that afterwards their spirit would be broken as they realized they had played the coward (p. 375)[12], it becomes clear that Pressfield deliberately adapted Kagan's version. We suspect that in

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[11] See Kagan (1987), 241 (with n. 108). Cf. Andrewes (1982), 20-21.

[12] Polemides' account of the first stage of the battle has already given us an instance of Alcibiades' flair for psychological warfare: the general ordered an end to the feigned flight of his squadron by means of the more demanding of two possible manoeuvres, "to unnerve the enemy, to let him know he had been suckered and must pay" (p. 365).

doing so he was inspired by Plutarch's statement that Alcibiades ordered the other Athenian generals to reduce speed and remain in the rear (*Alc.* 28.6: τοὺς μὲν στρατηγοὺς ἐκέλευσεν ἡσυχῆ πλεῖν ὑπολιπομένους).

According to Plutarch, Alcibiades' decision to launch the attack in the middle of a storm – note that Xenophon only speaks of heavy rainfall (*HG* I 1.16: ὕοντος πολλῷ)[13] – not only enabled him to take the Spartan fleet off its guard but also came as a surprise to his own troops (*Alc.* 28.4: οὐ γὰρ μόνον τοὺς πολεμίους ἔλαθεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἀπεγνωκότας ἤδη ἐμβῆναι κελεύσας ἀνήχθη). This statement brings two aspects of Alcibiades' character to the fore. First, it continues the idea, especially manifest in *Alc.* 1-16, that Alcibiades' behaviour was totally unpredictable and often ran counter to the expectations of friend and foe alike[14]. Secondly, we cannot but admire the general's determination and courage. In *Tides of War*, on the other hand, the weather at Cyzicus does not contribute to the characterization of Alcibiades. Polemides nowhere reports that the Athenian troops did not expect the order to embark. Moreover, we are told that it was Theramenes who proposed to use a sea trap to take the Spartans by surprise (p. 375). As for Alcibiades' courage, we are made aware of it before Polemides analeptically mentions the squall, through the description of the third phase of the battle (p. 363):

> (...) *The Athenians foundered, fighting uphill in the sand. Now the Spartans made their rush. The lines crashed along the length of the strand. I heard Macon at my shoulder screaming profanity. Where was Alcibiades?*
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> *He had burst through on his own. We could see him, churning upslope into the no-man's-land between the Spartan rush*

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[13] Cf. e.g. Andrewes (1982), 22; Bleckmann (1998), 57.

[14] On the prominence of this theme in *Alc.* 1-16, see Duff (1999), 230-235; Pelling (1996), xlii-xliv; see also Russell (1966). The section dealing with the campaign in the Hellespont and the Propontis shows Alcibiades time and again misleading his enemies (*Alc.* 27.4; 30.8; 31.3). In the battle of Abydus, his sudden appearance creates a false opinion in his compatriots' minds as well (*Alc.* 27.4: παρέσχε μὲν ἐναντίαν δόξαν ἀμφοτέροις ἐπιφανείς).

and their beached ships. (…) Alcibiades wore no helmet and bore only his shield and a marine axe. He reached the first ship and sank a grapnel. Two of the foe fought to rip it free; he stove in the first's skull with his shield, hamstrung the second with his axe. He hammered the iron into the timbers of the enemy prow. (…)

It is again difficult to prove that Pressfield wrote this part of his novel under the influence of the *Life of Alcibiades*, but the scene reminds us of Plutarch's statement that Alcibiades "broke through the line of the Peloponnesians with twenty of his best ships" (*Alc.* 28.8: ὁ δ᾽ ᾽Αλκιβιάδης εἴκοσι ταῖς ἀρίσταις διεκπλεύσας καὶ προσβαλὼν τῇ γῇ καὶ ἀποβάς, κτλ.)[15]. If Pressfield was inspired by Plutarch's account, he not only transferred Alcibiades' manoeuvre from the sea to the beach but also added to its boldness by making his character act completely on his own and without the proper armour. Whoever is familiar with Plutarch's works knows that the Chaeronean would have found it reprehensible for a commander to behave so recklessly, even if he wants "to model *arete*, excellence, before his men" (p. 364)[16]. On the other hand, it is clear that Pressfield did not want his readers to think that Alcibiades acted like a fool but rather tried to depict him as a great hero. A few

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[15] According to Xenophon, Alcibiades "sailed round" the Spartan ships: ᾽Αλκιβιάδης δὲ ταῖς εἴκοσι τῶν νεῶν περιπλεύσας ἀπέβη εἰς τὴν γῆν (*HG* I 1.18).

[16] See esp. *Pel.* 2.1-2.8, with the comments of Georgiadou (1997), 56-64 and Frazier (1996), 187-189; but note that Alcibiades' behaviour in *Tides of War* resembles that of Plutarch's Coriolanus while still a common soldier in the Roman army (see *Cor.* 8.3-6; 9.7-8). The Plutarch scholar reading *Tides of War* may later feel a smile coming across his lips when Jason, quoting from the younger Pericles' journals, relates that Alcibiades was nearly killed during an assault on Ephesus as he was fighting without a helmet and was struck on the shoulder by one of the bricks that the local women threw from the rooftops (p. 487); for in the formal comparison at the end of the *Lysander-Sulla*, Plutarch writes that "Lysander threw away his life ingloriously, like a common targeteer or skirmisher, and bore witness to the wisdom of the ancient Spartans in avoiding assaults on walled cities, where not only an ordinary man, but even a child or a woman may chance to smite and slay the mightiest warrior" (*Comp. Lys. et Sull.* 4.5, as translated in Perrin (1916)).

pages later we are told that Alcibiades had equally defied danger during the second stage of the battle: when the ram of the Athenian flagship became stuck in one of Mindarus' ships, the Spartan marines "let fly with everything they had"; all the Athenians "plunged for cover as the fusillade swept Antiope's deck"; Alcibiades, however, stood exposed "amid the storm of steel, scouring the sea for his rival in flight" (p. 366). There is no indication that we should consider Polemides an unreliable narrator when he claims that this incident shows that Alcibiades evinced a form of courage "which one glimpses in a lifetime as frequently as a griffin or a centaur" (p. 365). So if the section on Alcibiades' breakthrough on the beach is based on *Alc.* 28.8, Pressfield used material from Plutarch to portray his character as a great hero without adopting the value scheme of his source.

III. Still the Same Character?

Besides descriptions of Alcibiades' famous deeds, the *Life of Alcibiades* contains several passages in which Plutarch discusses his protagonist's ἦθος, relates anecdotes to illustrate some of his characteristics, or both. In what follows we shall study the way this kind of material is exploited in *Tides of War*.

1. Alcibiades as a Boy

In the second chapter of his *Life of Alcibiades*, Plutarch recounts three stories of Alcibiades' childhood to illustrate that his strongest passions were his love of victory (or possibly strife[17]) and his love of being first (*Alc.* 2.1: φύσει δὲ πολλῶν ὄντων καὶ μεγάλων παθῶν ἐν αὐτῷ τὸ φιλόνικον ἰσχυρότατον ἦν καὶ τὸ φιλόπρωτον, ὡς δῆλόν ἐστι τοῖς παιδικοῖς ἀπομνημονεύμασιν). The second of these anecdotes (*Alc.* 2.3-4), which occurs in no other ancient author, may be summarized as follows: Alcibiades was playing knucklebones in a narrow street with some other children; when a loaded wagon threatened to run over his throw, Alcibiades ordered the driver to stop; as the man did not listen, the

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[17] On the problematic relation between the words "φιλονικία" and "φιλονεικία", see Duff (1999), 83.

other children scattered out of the way but Alcibiades stretched himself out on the ground in front of the wagon; the driver reined in his team in terror and the bystanders ran up to help Alcibiades.

This anecdote obviously underlies the analeptic story told by Polemides towards the end of chapter twenty-four of *Tides of War* (p. 313). The differences, however, are numerous: in *Tides of War*, the boys play "bowl hockey" instead of knucklebones; the driver no longer is "a boorish fellow" (*Alc.* 2.4: δι' ἀγροικίαν) who deliberately ignores a request to stop; the happy outcome now depends on a last-minute tackle by Polemides; etcetera. Yet the most significant divergence lies in the fact that the boy who is nearly run over is not Alcibiades but Polemides' brother Lion. This change is symptomatic of the way Alcibiades' childhood and youth are treated in *Tides of War*: apart from a few glimpses (e.g. p. 39: "his guardian, Pericles"; p. 48: "At Athens his fields of enterprise had been limited by youth to sport and seduction"), we get no information on the life Alcibiades led before he first went on campaign (pp. 39ff; p. 364). Although Pressfield could have taken much of interesting material from the *Life of Alcibiades* (*Alc.* 2-7.3) or other ancient texts (e.g. Pl., *Symp.* 217a-219e) and was free to use his own imagination, he did not try to show – like he himself does for Lion in the passage just cited and Plutarch does for Alcibiades (*Alc.* 2) and the protagonists of several other *Lives* (e.g. *Them.* 2.1-4; *Alex.* 4.8; *Sull.* 2.3-5) – that certain aspects of Alcibiades' character were already manifest while he was still a boy, let alone that he followed the tendency of many modern biographers and novelists to explain their subject's personality in terms of the influences he or she received early in life[18]. Pressfield wrote an action-packed novel, not a *Bildungsroman*.

2. Alcibiades as a Speaker

In the *Life of Alcibiades*, Plutarch twice discusses Alcibiades' abilities as a speaker[19]. In the first chapter of the *Life*, we learn that Alcibiades

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[18] On the way Plutarch discusses the childhood of his subjects and the differences between his approach and that of modern biographers, see esp. Pelling (1990) [= (2002), 301-338] and (1988), 257-263 [= (2002), 283-288].

[19] On Alcibiades' rhetoric in the *Life of Alcibiades*, see also Pelling (2000), 336-337 [=

had a speech defect (*Alc.* 1.6-8): verses from Aristophanes (*Vesp.* 44-46) and Archippus (frag. 48 *PCG*) are quoted to prove that he pronounced the letter rho like lambda[20]. In Plutarch's view, however, this very defect made Alcibiades' talk charming and therefore persuasive (*Alc.* 1.6: τῇ δὲ φωνῇ καὶ τὴν τραυλότητα συμπρέψαι λέγουσι καὶ τῷ λάλῳ πιθανότητα παρασχεῖν χάριν ἐπιτρέχουσαν).

In *Alc.* 10, Plutarch asserts that Alcibiades counted above all else on the charm of his discourse to gain influence over the people (*Alc.* 10.3: ἀπ' οὐδενὸς ἠξίου μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς τοῦ λόγου χάριτος ἰσχύειν ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς). The Chaeronean then argues that the comic poets and Demosthenes confirm that Cleinias' son was indeed a powerful speaker (*Alc.* 10.4). Immediately afterwards, however, he reports that Theophrastus maintained that Alcibiades of all men was the most capable of understanding what needed to be said but often paused in the middle of a speech, trying to find the proper words (*ibid.*). In *De profectibus in virtute* (80D) and *Praecepta gerendae rei publicae* (804A), Plutarch simply accepts the second part of Theophrastus' testimony as being true; in both passages, Alcibiades serves as an example of a man who pays excessive attention to style. In the *Life of Alcibiades*, on the other hand, it is not beyond doubt that Theophrastus is right (*Alc.* 10.4: εἰ δὲ Θεοφράστῳ πιστεύομεν); by contrasting the Peripatetic's opinion to that of the comic poets and Demosthenes, Plutarch reinforces the impression – ineluctable throughout *Alc.* 1-16 – that Alcibiades was a very difficult man to judge[21].

In *Tides of War*, too, Alcibiades is said to have lisped and to have had the habit of pausing when he did not immediately find the right words; these two peculiarities are brought up together when Polemides tells

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(2002), 343-344].

[20] The technical term for this speech defect is "lambdacism" or "lallation". However, in many English translations of Aristophanes' *Vespae* and Plutarch's *Life of Alcibiades* "τραυλίζειν" and "τραυλότης" are rendered as "to lisp" and "lisp".

[21] Cf. Duff (1999), 233. Note that the authority of both Demosthenes and Theophrastus is underlined (*Alc.* 10.4: τῶν ῥητόρων ὁ δυνατώτατος; *ibid.*: ἀνδρὶ φιληκόῳ καὶ ἱστορικῷ παρ' ὁντινοῦν τῶν φιλοσόφων).

Jason how his family reacted to Alcibiades' appeal to support an expedition against Sicily (p. 185). If we are right to assume that this passage goes back to *Alc.* 1.6-8 and 10.3-4, Pressfield, on the one hand, omits all learned elements, i.e. not only the reference to Theophrastus, which had to be omitted for obvious reasons of chronology, but also the comic verses quoted in the first chapter of the *Life of Alcibiades*[22]. On the other hand, he works out the idea that the imperfection of Alcibiades' speech contributed to its charm. Polemides *explains* why Alcibiades' lisp worked in his favour: "It was a flaw; it made him human. It took the curse off his otherwise godlike self-presentation". Moreover, he attributes an equally positive effect to Alcibiades' hesitations: "There was to this an attractive lack of artifice, an ingenuousness and authenticity. It was winning". Here Pressfield clearly gives his source material a twist, although the reader of the *Life of Alcibiades* may arrive at a position similar to that of Polemides if he notices the efficiency of Alcibiades' rhetoric (e.g. *Alc.* 2.5-7; 17.1-4; 33.2-3) but still gives credit to Theophrastus' testimony[23].

Alcibiades' hesitations are mentioned a second time in chapter forty-six of *Tides of War* (p. 524). Jason relates how he watched Polemides write his valediction: as he saw the mercenary pause from time to time to seek a word, he was struck "by the recollection of Alcibiades, possessed of the identical trait, so charming when he spoke, of drawing up until the proper phrase presented itself". We find this passage interesting for two reasons. First, Jason appears to agree with Polemides that Alcibiades' stumbling style made his speeches attractive ("so charming"). Secondly, Jason's comparison makes us wonder whether Alcibiades was just as prudent in his choice of words when he was writing as when he was speaking. Nowhere in *Tides of War* do we get an answer to this question.

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[22] It seems that the Archippus quote in *Alc.* 1.8 (κλασαυχενεύεταί τε καὶ τραυλίζεται) underlies Polemides' statement that Alcibiades tilted his head to one side when he paused to find the right words.

[23] See e.g. Pelling (2000), 336-337 [= (2002), 343]: "That (= Theophrastus' testimony) scarcely sounds like the model orator; and yet we are left with no doubt of his (= Alcibiades') rhetorical impact on the Athenian *demos*, … These are people who get on. They naturally find his stumbling style an engaging idiosyncrasy, not an irritating tic".

Instead, Polemides asserts that Alcibiades was "an abominable speller" (p. 370). Even though this spelling problem is explicitly brought into connection with Alcibiades' speech defect (*ibid.*: "His bane was inversion of letters; his secretaries teased that he even wrote with a lisp"), it seems that Pressfield did not invent it to provide him with another charming flaw but rather needed a way to give his narrator access to the general's thoughts on politics and generalship (*ibid.*: "Thus many half-composed missives found their way to trash and from there to my chest"; see e.g. pp. 370-371[24]; pp. 374-381). In other words: this "fiction-by-analogy" was prompted by the narrative structure of the novel.

3. Alcibiades as a Private Person at Sparta

In chapter thirteen of the *Life of Alcibiades*, Plutarch first relates how Alcibiades, having fled to Sparta after his condemnation in the Mysteries affair, became a well-respected man with regard to public affairs by proposing various measures that would seriously hurt Athens (*Alc.* 23.1-2). Next we are told that he was no less admired for his private conduct because he adopted a truly Spartan lifestyle (*Alc.* 23.3). Plutarch then enlarges upon his protagonist's adaptability: comparing him to a chameleon, he explains that Alcibiades was able to imitate the habits of any of his hosts without undergoing a real change in his character (*Alc.* 23.4-5). According to *Alc.* 23.6-9, such was the case in Sparta too: on the outside Alcibiades looked like a born Spartan but on the inside he had remained the same, as his seduction of Timaea, the wife of King Agis, made clear.

Several elements of *Alc.* 23.3-9 have found their way into *Tides of War*. In chapter nineteen of the novel, Polemides tells Jason how he was informed of Alcibiades' defection to the Lacedaemonians by the master of a Tyrrhenian coaster (pp. 227-229). Like Plutarch, the seaman contrasts the exile's behaviour in Sparta to his conduct in Athens. Some of the activities he mentions are just well-known customs or national clichés

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[24] How did Polemides came into possession of some of the letters Thrasybulus wrote to Theramenes (pp. 371-372)? Evidently, Alcibiades' spelling problem cannot account for that.

(e.g. "He takes his meals in the common mess"; "Of speech he is as parsimonious as if words were gold and he a miser") but others are obviously inspired by *Alc.* 23.3 (p. 227: "this same perfumed coxcomb" ~ εἴ ποτε … προσέβλεψε μυρεψόν; p. 228: "curls cascading to his shoulders in the Lacedaemonian style" ~ ἐν χρῷ κουριῶντα[25]; "bathes in the frigid Eurotas" ~ ψυχρολουτοῦντα; "he dines on black broth" ~ ζωμῷ μέλανι χρώμενον). Two elements appear to have been taken from elsewhere in the *Life of Alcibiades*: the statement that in Athens Alcibiades "swathed himself in purple and trailed his robe astern in the dust" (p. 227) seems to go back to *Alc.* 16.1 (θηλύτητας ἐσθήτων ἁλουργῶν ἑλκομένων δι' ἀγορᾶς), while the description of his physical exercises at Sparta (p. 228) may have its origin in the more general discussion that follows upon *Alc.* 23.3 (*Alc.* 23.5: ἐν Σπάρτῃ γυμναστικός)[26].

In *Tides of War*, too, Alcibiades' way of living is said to have made him popular among the Lacedaemonians (p. 228):

> *In short the man has become more spartan than the Spartans, and they idolize him for it. Boys trail him about, Peers compete to call him comrade, and women … well, the laws of Lycurgus promote polyandry, as you know, so that even men's wives may dote openly upon this paragon of whom all declare,*
>> *…here is not a second Achilles,*
>> *but the man, the very man himself.*

The last two lines are a slight adaptation of "οὐ παῖς Ἀχιλλέως, ἀλλ' ἐκεῖνος αὐτὸς εἶ" (*TGF* adespota F 363), a verse that is only attested in *Alc.* 23.6 and the fifth chapter of *De adulatore et amico* (51C), where no direct reference is made to Alcibiades. In the former passage, the fragment is followed by another citation (Eur., *Or.* 129: ἔστιν ἡ πάλαι γυνή).

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[25] On this phrase, see Paradiso (1996).

[26] Cornelius Nepos (*Alc.* 11.3) and Athenaeus (XII 534b) maintain that Alcibiades applied himself to physical training *in Thebes*, a city not mentioned in *Alc.* 23.5.

Plutarch uses the two verses to express the idea – supported by the story about the seduction of Timaea – that Alcibiades changed his outward behaviour at Sparta without losing his old licentious tendencies[27]. Such a message is absent from chapter nineteen of *Tides of War*. The line from Euripides' *Orestes* does not occur in Pressfield's novel, and the scandal involving Timaea is brought up much later (pp. 332-333; p. 347). Only in the latter passage, which undoubtedly goes back to *Alc.* 23.7[28], Alcibiades' seduction of Timaea is presented as a new manifestation of an old character trait ("Why did this inspirit us at home? Because it held out hope that Alcibiades could not keep from his old tricks and would fall inevitably by his own hand")[29]. However, we do not contend that Pressfield's adaptation of the first verse cited in *Alc.* 23.6 has no other function than to embellish the narrative or to demonstrate the author's erudition. Alcibiades is associated with Achilles in three later passages of *Tides of War* (pp. 230-232: Polemides relates that Lion was compiling a chronicle of the Peloponnesian War and regarded Alcibiades as a "modern Achilles"; pp. 388-392: we are told how Alcibiades, visiting the tomb of Achilles, dreamt aloud of allying with the Spartans and fighting the Persians like the great heroes of the past fought the Trojans;

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[27] See Duff (1999), 236-237.

[28] It is worth quoting the two passages in full:

The lone report which stirred promise involved Alcibiades as well. This was the gossip that he had seduced and impregnated the lady Timaea, wife of the Spartan king, Agis. Nor did this gentlewoman, reports testified, exert care to conceal the affair. While in public she called the babe in her womb Leotychidas, in private she named him Alcibiades.	Τιμαίαν γὰρ τὴν Ἄγιδος γυναῖκα τοῦ βασιλέως στρατευομένου καὶ ἀποδημοῦντος οὕτω διέφθειρεν, ὥστε καὶ κύειν ἐξ Ἀλκιβιάδου καὶ μὴ ἀρνεῖσθαι, καὶ τεκούσης παιδίον ἄρρεν ἔξω μὲν Λεωτυχίδην καλεῖσθαι, τὸ δ' ἐντὸς αὐτοῦ ψιθυριζόμενον ὄνομα πρὸς τὰς φίλας καὶ τὰς ὀπαδοὺς ὑπὸ τῆς μητρὸς Ἀλκιβιάδην εἶναι· τοσοῦτος ἔρως κατεῖχε τὴν ἄνθρωπον.
She was out of her head in love with the man.	

Cf. also *Ages.* 3.2 and *De tranq. an.* 467F.

[29] The Tyrrhenian's description of Alcibiades' popularity among the Spartans prepares us for Jason's story about Timaea in that it does not come as a total surprise that Agis' wife was not very secretive about the identity of the father of her child when one has read before that even the married women of Sparta doted openly upon Alcibiades.

pp. 551-552: Alcibiades is said to have become mad and to have claimed that he "had soared to Phthia on wings of quicksilver, conferring there with Nestor and Achilles"). The quote on p. 228 neatly introduces this interesting theme.

The final element of *Alc.* 23.3-9 that has a counterpart in *Tides of War* is the chameleon comparison (*Alc.* 23.4-5). One finds it in chapter twenty-five of the novel. There Polemides relates how Alcibiades urged the Spartans to embrace money, to build a strong navy and to ally themselves with the Persians (pp. 325-328). The narrator then reports the reaction of Callicratidas, citing among others the following phrases (p. 329):

> *"What will have become of us, brothers, when we, emulating this programme of infamy, mount victorious to the Athenian Acropolis? What kind of men will we have become, who place ourselves in league with tyrants to enslave free men? Our guest here has taught himself to dress like us, train like us, speak like us. But the chameleon, they say, may turn every color but white." (...) "What is this new nation into which you wish to turn us, Alcibiades? I will name it in a single word: Athens!"*

"Our guest here has taught himself to dress like us, train like us, speak like us": this sounds like the perfect summary of the Tyrrhenian's report on Alcibiades' integration in Sparta and the corresponding passages of the *Life of Alcibiades*. The chameleon comparison, in other words, has become part of a totally fictitious debate but still relates to its original context. There is, however, an important divergence as to the point that the users of the comparison want to make. In *Tides of War*, Callicratidas claims that Alcibiades, like a chameleon, is unable to "turn white", that is, to stop thinking of politics like an Athenian. According to *Alc.* 23.5, on the other hand, Alcibiades' adaptability surpassed that of the chameleon because he was able to imitate any characteristic he wanted ('Ἀλκιβιάδῃ δὲ διὰ χρηστῶν ἰόντι καὶ πονηρῶν ὁμοίως οὐδὲν ἦν ἀμίμητον οὐδ' ἀνεπιτήδευτον). Interestingly, Callicratidas' position

corresponds to the one Plutarch holds in the ninth chapter of *De adulatore et amico*, where he states that the flatterer is like a chameleon in that he is "utterly incapable of making himself like to another in any quality that is really worth while" (53D: ὁ κόλαξ ἐν τοῖς ἀξίοις σπουδῆς ὅμοιον ἑαυτὸν ἐξαδυνατῶν παρέχειν κτλ.)[30]. Did Pressfield know this passage or did he at his own discretion exploit the idea – mentioned in *Alc.* 23.5 – that a chameleon cannot assume the colour white? Only the author himself can answer this question[31].

In conclusion we may state that Pressfield, when writing *Tides of War*, recycled several elements of *Alc.* 23.3-9 but gave up their strong interconnection. His picture of Alcibiades as a private person at Sparta is not fundamentally different from Plutarch's but does not give rise to a more general discussion of the man's adaptability.

IV. Conclusions

The *Life of Alcibiades* was an important source for *Tides of War*. Pressfield made use of some of Plutarch's accounts of Alcibiades' πράξεις as well as of passages in which the biographer more emphatically focuses on his protagonist's ἦθος. In both cases, Pressfield sometimes followed his source very closely (e.g. the capture of Selymbria; the Timaea affair) but at other times used the material he found in Plutarch more freely (e.g. Alcibiades' breakthrough at Cyzicus; the childhood story).

It is rarely difficult to explain the divergences between a passage in *Tides of War* and its counterpart in the *Life of Alcibiades*. Two of the basic choices that Pressfield made for his novel were of particular importance. First, the author of *Tides of War* apparently wanted his readers to agree with Jason that Alcibiades was the boldest man of his age (p. 24). To that purpose, he adapted Plutarch's battle descriptions in various degrees (the assault of

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[30] The translation is taken from Babbit (1927).

[31] As far as we know, none of the modern works Pressfield mentions in the acknowledgements of *Tides of War* (p. 603) contains a reference to the chameleon comparison in *De ad. et am.* 53D. Nor do our English translations of the *Life of Alcibiades*, i.e. Dryden & Clough (1932); Perrin (1916); Scott-Kilvert (1960); Waterfield (1998).

Selymbria; the breakthrough at Cyzicus). Secondly, Pressfield paid less attention than Plutarch to the characterization of Alcibiades. That is not to say that the narrative does not elucidate the general's ἦθος at all; we are, for example, told about the idiosyncrasies of Alcibiades' speech and do learn the rationales that lie behind his actions at Cyzicus. Rather, a comparison of *Tides of War* and the *Life of Alcibiades* reveals to how great an extent Plutarch's biography is designed to bring the protagonist's ἦθος to the fore. Thus reading a contemporary historical novel may sharpen our consciousness of the individuality of Plutarch's *Lives*[32].

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[32] Just like a close reading of Plutarch may be illuminating for the peculiarities of his sources; see esp. de Romilly (1988), 22-23.

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