II Communities and Communication in Herodian

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Vain Ambition, Futile Imitation: The Pattern of Failing 'Philosophers' in Herodian's Narrative

This contribution to the present volume has a twofold aim. First, it highlights a recurrent motif in Herodian's narrative: at various stages of the *History of the Empire after Marcus*, characters aspire to be perceived as philosophers, emulating and performing words and deeds that make them appear 'philosophical'. As our analysis will show, the result of these ambitions is highly ambiguous, which not only contributes to the characterization of the agents of Herodian's history but also has broader implications for the readers who are invited by the narrator to reflect on the ambivalences of the story he relates. Here the second aim of this article comes into play: we try to demonstrate that for a full appreciation of the ambiguous portrayal of 'philosophers' and the effect this depiction has on the audience, an intertextual analysis is required. Such an analysis shows how Herodian takes up various literary traditions and discourses to form his specific image of true or dubious philosophers and prompt his readers to compare his narrative to these pre- or intertexts. We will discuss these questions in two steps: in the first, shorter section of this article we will focus on an exemplary scene from Herodian's first book that quite literally sets the stage for the topic of philosophers in the *History of the Empire after Marcus.* In a second, more extensive section we will turn to the complex issue of parental and teaching figures in Herodian's narrative and compare two imperial pairs of father and son, Marcus Aurelius and Commodus, Severus and Caracalla; here the movement from a primarily intra-textual perspective to an inter-textual analysis is reflected by a division in two subsections (nos. 2 and 3 below).

1 "A Man Dressed Like a Philosopher" (Hdn. 1.9.3): Literary Stereotypes and Narrative Ambiguity in an Exemplary Scene

The first passage we would like to highlight is an episode in the long series of plots against Commodus that forms the greater part of the narrative Herodian devotes to Marcus Aurelius' son and successor. Perennis, the all too powerful praetorian prefect,

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plans a coup d'état (Hdn. 1.9.1: ἐπεβούλευε τῇ ἀρχῇ); his attempt, however, is thwarted by the unexpected intervention of a man who, in the narrator's words, "has the appearance of a philosopher" (Hdn. 1.9.2: φιλοσόφου φέρων σχῆμα). The story is told by the narrator in a characteristically dramatic fashion. First, the stage is set – we are in Rome at the theater, where a festival is taking place (Hdn. 1.9.2):[1]

> ἐγνώσθη δ' ἡ ἐπιβουλὴ παραδόξῳ τρόπῳ. ἱερὸν ἀγῶνα τελοῦσι Ῥωμαῖοι Διὶ Καπετωλίῳ, θεάματά τε ⟨μούσης⟩ καὶ ἰσχύος πάντα ἀθροίζεται ὡς ἐς βασιλίδα πόλιν πανηγυρίζουσαν. θεατὴς δὲ καὶ ἀθλοθέτης σὺν τοῖς λοιποῖς ἱερεῦσιν, οὓς ἐκ περιόδων χρόνου ἡ τάξις καλεῖ, ὁ βασιλεὺς γίγνεται.
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> But news of the plot leaked out in a remarkable way at the festival the Romans celebrate in honor of Capitoline Jupiter. On this occasion there are all kinds of artistic shows and athletic contests, to see which the people flock to the capital. The emperor attends the festival and acts as judge jointly with other members of the priestly colleges, who are designated each year in rotation.

Then the audience and the protagonists of the scene enter, first Commodus, afterwards the philosopher, and the drama unfolds (Hdn. 1.9.3–4):

> (3) κατελθόντος δὴ τοῦ Κομόδου ἐπὶ τὴν ἀκρόασιν τῶν ἐνδόξων ἀγωνιστῶν, καὶ αὐτοῦ μὲν προκαθίσαντος ἐν τῇ βασιλείῳ ἕδρᾳ, πληρωθέντος δὲ τοῦ θεάτρου μετὰ πάσης εὐκοσμίας, τῶν τε ἐν ἀξιώσεσιν ⟨ἐν⟩ ἐξαιρέτοις ἕδραις καὶ ὡς ἑκάστοις διετέτακτο ἱδρυμένων, πρίν τι λέγεσθαι ἢ πράττεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς σκηνῆς ἀνὴρ φιλοσόφου φέρων σχῆμα (βάκτρον γὰρ ἦν αὐτῷ μετὰ χεῖρας, ἡμιγύμνῳ τε αὐτῷ ἐκκρεμὴς πήρα) εἰσδραμὼν καὶ στὰς ἐν μέσῃ τῇ σκηνῇ τῷ τε τῆς χειρὸς νεύματι τὸν δῆμον κατασιγάσας (4) "οὐ πανηγυρίζειν σοι καιρός" ἔφη "Κόμοδε, νῦν, οὐδὲ θέαις καὶ ἑορταῖς σχολάζειν. ἐπίκειται γάρ σου τοῖς αὐχέσι τὸ τοῦ Περεννίου ξίφος, καὶ εἰ μὴ φυλάξῃ κίνδυνον οὐκ ἐπαιωρούμενον ἀλλ' ἤδη παρόντα, λήσεις ἀπολόμενος. αὐτός τε γὰρ ἐνταῦθα δύναμιν ἐπὶ σοὶ καὶ χρήματα ἀθροίζει, οἵ τε παῖδες αὐτῷ τὴν Ἰλλυρικὴν στρατιὰν ἀναπείθουσιν. εἰ δὲ μὴ φθάσεις, διαφθείρῃ."
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> (3) This time Commodus was attending the performance of celebrated actors, and took his place in the imperial seat. The theater filled with people, who went to their places in an orderly way, nobles to their special seats and each person to the place allocated for him. A man ran out on to the front of the stage, dressed like a philosopher (that is, he carried a staff in his hand and had a wallet hanging round his half-bared shoulders). Before anyone could say anything to stop him, he stood in the middle of the stage, silenced the people with a gesture of his arm and began to speak. (4) "Commodus," he said, "this is no time for you to be enjoying yourself by spending your time at theaters and festivals. The sword of Perennis hangs poised over your head. Unless you take precautions against this danger, which is not just threatening but already here, you will be destroyed before you realize it. Here in Rome he is collecting forces and money to use against you; in Illyria his sons are bribing the army to support him. If you do not act first against him, you will be finished."

1 The year is probably 184 CE, the *ludi Capitolini* were held on 15th October. See Whittaker (1969) 53 n. 3; Galimberti (2014) 102–103 for details. Translations in this chapter are taken from the respective Loeb editions, with occasional adaptations.

Finally, the result of the philosopher's intervention is described (Hdn. 1.9.5–6):

> (5) ταῦτα εἰπόντος αὐτοῦ, εἴτε ὑπό τινος δαιμονίου τύχης ἐπειχθέντος, εἴτε καὶ τολμήσαντος ἵνα δόξαν ἄρηται πρότερον ἄγνωστος καὶ ἄσημος ὤν, εἴτε ἐλπίσαντος ἀμοιβῆς μεγαλοδώρου τεύξεσθαι παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως, ἀφασία τὸν Κόμοδον καταλαμβάνει. καὶ πάντες ὑπώπτευον μὲν τὰ λεχθέντα, πιστεύειν δὲ οὐ προσεποιοῦντο. κελεύει δὲ αὐτὸν συλληφθῆναι ὁ Περέννιος, οἷά τε μεμηνότα καὶ ψευδῆ λέγοντα πυρὶ παραδοθῆναι. ὃ μὲν δὴ ἀκαίρου παρρησίας τοιαύτην ὑπέσχε δίκην· (6) οἱ μέντοι περὶ τὸν Κόμοδον, ὅσοι τε εὐνοεῖν προσεποιοῦντο, καὶ πάλαι μὲν ἀπεχθῶς πρὸς τὸν Περέννιον διακείμενοι (βαρὺς γὰρ καὶ ἀφόρητος ἦν ὑπεροψίᾳ καὶ ὕβρει), τότε <δὲ> καιρὸν εὔκαιρον ἔχοντες, διαβάλλειν ἐπειρῶντο, ἐχρῆν τε ἄρα τὸν Κόμοδον τὴν ἐπιβουλὴν ἐκφυγεῖν καὶ τὸν Περέννιον σὺν τοῖς παισὶ διολέσθαι κακῶς.
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> (5) It may have been just an uncanny piece of luck which drove the man to utter these words, or it may have been that, as a completely unknown person before, he was trying to win himself a reputation, or hoping to get a rich reward from the emperor for his information. Commodus was dumbfounded; although everyone suspected that the words were true, they pretended not to believe them. Perennis gave orders for the man to be arrested and punished for his insane lies by being burned. Though the intruder paid his penalty for speaking so freely out of turn, (6) Commodus' companions and self-styled supporters, who had previously hated Perennis for his harshness and intolerably supercilious arrogance, judged this an opportune moment to try and bring a charge against him. As it turned out Commodus was destined to escape the plot, while Perennis and his sons met a sorry end.

The outcome of the whole scene is thus remarkably ambivalent: on the one hand, the unnamed philosopher pays with his life for what the narrator describes as a frankness that misses the right moment (Hdn. 1.9.6: ἀκαίρου παρρησίας). But then again, the unexpected speech provides the suitable moment (Hdn. 1.9.6: καιρὸν εὔκαιρον) for others to take action against Perennis, whose end is recounted in a quick-paced narration in the few paragraphs that follow the scene in the theater (Hdn. 1.9.7–10).

Beyond the important motif of the appropriate time (καιρός),[2] the story of the anonymous philosopher is characterized by an even more fundamental ambiguity: how are we to judge this man and his speech act? Is he a philosopher at all, or should the term in his case be put in quotation marks – in other words, could he be just a pseudo-philosopher, an impostor playing this role, as the very context of theater and festival might suggest anyway? Again, as for the outcome of the scene, no unequivocal answer can be given. The narrator immediately casts doubt on the 'philosopher's' motives: none of the possible reasons mentioned (luck/chance, search for fame, hope for a monetary reward, Hdn. 1.9.5) is a compliment to the man's character, and all these explanations create the image of a person who is neither in control of the situation nor of himself. If we follow the narrator's hints, the anonymous who enters the stage lacks a

2 On this motif and its role in Herodian's history, see Androulakis in this volume.

key quality that is expected from a true philosopher, namely ἐγκράτεια, self-control and, in particular, mastery over affects and desires.[3]

The description of the man's dress works in the same direction. According to the narrator, he has the σχῆμα, the appearance or habitus, of a philosopher (Hdn. 1.9.3), which inevitably raises the question of whether there is any substance to support or corroborate the outward impression. Moreover, the details given by the narrator all point towards well-known stereotypes brought up time and again in ancient discourses about philosophers (and pseudo-philosophers), especially of a Cynic (or would-be Cynic) kind: the philosopher's staff (βάκτρον) and wallet (πήρα) have by Herodian's day long become a cliché,[4] as has the half-naked (ἡμίγυμνος) body of the Cynic.[5] The impression that the narrator's depiction devalues the unnamed protagonist is reinforced by the fact that this costume of a philosopher frequently appears in polemical or invective texts. Lucian, for example, uses the staff several times as the main 'prop' of comical scenes which show 'philosophers' resorting to sheer violence: these self-declared wise men turn to beating up other people with their sticks.[6] Another case in point is Lucilius' scathing epigram *AP* 11.154:

> Πᾶς, ὃς ἂν ᾖ πτωχὸς καὶ ἀγράμματος, οὐκέτ' ἀλήθει
> ὡς τὸ πρὶν οὐδ' αἴρει φορτία μισθαρίου·
> ἀλλὰ τρέφει πώγωνα καὶ ἐκ τριόδου ξύλον ἄρας
> τῆς ἀρετῆς εἶναι φησὶν ὁ πρωτοκύων.
> Ἑρμοδότου τόδε δόγμα τὸ πάνσοφον· εἴ τις ἀχαλκεῖ,
> μηκέτι πεινάτω θεὶς τὸ χιτωνάριον.

3 Cf. the characteristic phrase used by Socrates in Plato's *Republic* for a definition of the virtue of σωφροσύνη ("moderation, temperance"): ἡδονῶν τινων καὶ ἐπιθυμιῶν ἐγκράτεια ("mastery over any pleasures and desires", 430e). See also *Smp.* 196c.

4 See e. g. the many epigrams on Diogenes of Sinope which mention staff and/or wallet alongside his cloak: *AP* 7.65.1–4 (Antipater of Sidon), 7.66.1–3 (Honestus), 7.67.5–8 (Leonidas of Tarentum), 7.68.5–8 (Archias). This 'image' was also used by (or for) other persons who emulated the Cynic lifestyle, as *AP* 7.413 (Antipater of Sidon on Hipparchia) demonstrates. Cf. also Diogenes Laertius on Diogenes (6.23: διὰ παντὸς ἐφόρει [sc. τὴν βακτερίαν], οὐ μὴν ἐν ἄστει, ἀλλὰ καθ' ὁδὸν αὐτῇ τε καὶ τῇ πήρᾳ, "He would carry it [sc. the stick] everywhere, not indeed in the city, but when walking along the road with it and with his wallet") and others (4.51–52: Bion, 6.13: Diodorus of Aspendus), and Epictetus on the basic objects of a Cynic's "wardrobe" (*Diss.* 3.22.10: 'τριβώνιον καὶ νῦν φορῶ[…] πηρίδιον προσλήψομαι καὶ ξύλον', "'I wear a rough cloak […] I shall take a wallet and a staff'").

5 To quote but two examples: Epictetus refers to the stereotypical habit of the Cynic to "show off his fine shoulder" (*Diss.* 3.22.50: καλὸν τὸν ὦμον δεικνύειν). In Lucian's *Vitarum Auctio*, when Hermes is trying to sell philosophical ideas and their owners, the Cynic is described as someone with "the wallet slung about him and a sleeveless shirt" (*Vit. Auct.* 7: οὗτος ὁ τὴν πήραν ἐξηρτημένος, ὁ ἐξωμίας).

6 See Luc. *Symp.* 16 (the Cynic Alcidamas, after stripping himself naked, is about to hit someone with his staff but is distracted by food), *Pisc.* 1 (Socrates asks Diogenes and others to beat Parrhesiades ["Frankness"]: παῖε τοῖς ξύλοις τὸν ἁλιτήριον […]. σὺ δέ, ὦ Διόγενες […] χρῶ τῷ ξύλῳ) and 24 (Diogenes is ready to attack Frankness and prove that the philosophers "do not carry sticks in vain" [δείξω γὰρ αὐτῷ ὅτι μὴ μάτην ξυλοφοροῦμεν]).

> Everyone who is poor and illiterate does not grind corn as formerly or carry burdens for small pay, but grows a beard and, picking up a stick from the cross-roads, calls himself the chief dog of virtue. This is the sage pronouncement of Hermodotus, "If anyone is penniless, let him throw off his shirt and no longer starve".

Again, stick and nakedness are combined in the strong imagery of an illiterate impostor laying claim to the status of philosopher.[7]

There is, however, one aspect of the story around Herodian's philosopher-warner that does not fit into the neat cliché of a greedy charlatan yearning for 'philosophical' fame: what the anonymous man says is actually true – Perennis *is* plotting against Commodus, so it *is* about time for the emperor to act against the prefect. And in fact, as the narrator stresses, the audience in the theater realize that the warning is right and believe the words of the anonymous adviser; they only *pretend* otherwise (Hdn. 1.9.5: πιστεύειν δὲ οὐ προσεποιοῦντο). So rather than the philosopher, it is the others, the mass in the theater, who are dishonest and play a deceitful game. This is where the fundamental ambiguity of the whole scene lies: even if the unnamed man's motifs were questionable and his status as philosopher dubious, his advice is sound. What Herodian does here, it seems, is to take up a well-established critique of 'philosophers' and turn it upside down: while usually 'philosophers' are criticized for successfully adopting the outward appearance but failing to live up to that image in their actual words and deeds,[8] here the appearance casts doubt on the anonymous philosopher whereas, in fact, he shows philosophical substance in terms of true words and righteous advice.

In this way, Herodian tells a story that entertains his readers, who are invited to compare the scene to the literary stereotypes they are familiar with and appreciate their reversal. At the same time Herodian's narrative makes its readers think about deceptive appearances and the ambiguous character of the protagonists of history. If an apparently dubious philosopher like the one of Hdn. 1.9.1–6 is right, might then true or seemingly trustworthy philosophers be wrong? In what follows, we argue that in Herodian's account of Roman history this is indeed the case. We take another important aspect of philosophy in practice, teaching and learning, as a test case to demonstrate that ambiguities similar to those of 1.9.1–6 abound in Herodian's narrative and are particularly important for the narrator's portrayal – and the reader's appreciation – of the emperors.

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7 For a further mocking epigram about the Cynics and their appearance (including *baculum* and *pera*, staff and wallet), see Martial 4.53.

8 Again, the texts of Lucian are important here. See the last section of this article for a full discussion of the most relevant passages from the Lucianic oeuvre.

2 “This is my Son” (Hdn. 1.4.3): ‘Philosophers’/Fathers and the Upbringing of Prodigal Successors

In this section of the article, the pattern of ineducable students and unsuccessful teachers will be brought up, focusing on two of the most important parental and teaching figures in Herodian’s narrative. In particular, Marcus Aurelius’ futile attempts to educate Commodus and Commodus’ subsequent character will be juxtaposed with the equivalent case of Severus and Caracalla.

2.1 Marcus Aurelius and Commodus

In the first chapters of his own work, *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius refers to the values and virtues he acquired not only from his teachers (*Med.* 1.5–15)[9] but also from his family members (*Med.* 1.1–4,[10] 1.17.4). Judging by his writings, Antoninus Pius seems to have played the most crucial role in Marcus Aurelius’ upbringing. Two chapters (*Med.* 1.16, 6.30) are exclusively devoted to the character and moral excellence of his adoptive father from whom Marcus has apparently inherited numerous virtuous traits. Antoninus served as the exemplar for his son and later legendary emperor (*Med.* 6.30.2: Πάντα ὡς Ἀντωνίνου μαθητής: “Do all things as a disciple of Antoninus”),[11] while his behavior and principles (*Med.* 1.16, 1.17.3, 6.30) seem to encapsulate the sum of the teachings and virtues that his son’s tutors tried to enrich the boy with (*Med.* 1.5–15). As a result, M. Aurelius indeed became an erudite intellectual (Hdn. 1.2.3: ἀρετῇ δὲ

9 Marcus Aurelius’ personality and moral values reflected the wide spectrum of philosophical principles according to which he was nurtured. His teachers were mainly Stoic philosophers: Rusticus (*Med.* 1.7), Apollonius (*Med.* 1.8), Sextus of Chaeronea (*Med.* 1.9), Catulus (*Med.* 1.13), and Maximus Claudius (*Med.* 1.15). Alexander the Grammarian, Alexander the Platonist, and Fronto the orator were also Marcus’ educators and tutors (*Med.* 1.5, 1.10, 1.12, 1.11 respectively). Diognetus was the one who first introduced him to philosophy (*Med.* 1.6: τὸ οἰκειωθῆναι φιλοσοφίᾳ), while Severus seems to have played an equally important role in M. Aurelius’ later consistent appreciation of philosophical thinking (*Med.* 1.14: τὸ ὁμαλὲς καὶ ὁμότονον ἐν τῇ τιμῇ τῆς φιλοσοφίας); for Severus’ identity see Haines (1916) 409. Severus and Rusticus contributed specifically to his acquaintance with specific texts and philosophers as well (*Med.* 1.14 and 1.7 respectively).

10 E. g. *Med.* 1.1: Παρὰ τοῦ πάππου Οὐήρου, τὸ καλόηθες καὶ ἀόργητον: “From my Grandfather Verus [I had an example of] a kindly disposition and sweetness of temper”, 1.2: Παρὰ τῆς δόξης καὶ μνήμης τῆς περὶ τοῦ γεννήσαντος, τὸ αἰδῆμον καὶ ἀρρενικόν: “From what I heard of my [biological] Father and my memory of him, [I had an example of] modesty and manliness”, 1.3: Παρὰ τῆς μητρός, τὸ θεοσεβὲς καὶ μεταδοτικόν […] τὸ λιτὸν κατὰ τὴν δίαιταν καὶ πόρρω τῆς πλουσιακῆς διαγωγῆς: “From my Mother, (I had an example of) the fear of God, and generosity […] and simple life, far removed from the habits of the rich”.

11 See *Med.* 1.16.9 for a comparison of Antoninus Pius with Socrates by his son.

πάσης ἔμελεν αὐτῷ, λόγων τε ἀρχαιότητος ἦν ἐραστής[12]) and an emperor on the model of the Platonic philosopher-king[13] who constantly displayed philosophical principles in his behavior and judgment (Hdn. 1.2.4: μόνος τε βασιλέων φιλοσοφίαν οὐ λόγοις οὐδὲ δογμάτων γνώσεσι, σεμνῷ δ᾽ ἤθει καὶ σώφρονι βίῳ ἐπιστώσατο[14]), and in this way himself became a model for his subjects.[15]

Having set his heart on philosophy (*Med.* 1.17.8: ἐπεθύμησα φιλοσοφίας;[16] cf. 6.30.1) and with true appreciation of the benefits of education,[17] he made excellent pedagogical provision for his son,[18] aiming to provide a worthy heir. Marcus summoned distinguished scholars from all over the world to educate Commodus (Hdn. 1.2.2: ὅπως συνόντες ἀεὶ παιδεύοιεν αὐτῷ τὸν υἱόν), and – as he writes – was happy and proud of his ability to provide suitable tutors for his sons (*Med.* 1.17.7: τὸ ἐπιτηδείων τροφέων εἰς τὰ παιδία εὐπορῆσαι). Commodus was thus protected by paternal care (Hdn. 1.2.1: τὸν Κόμοδόν [...] ὁ πατὴρ μετὰ πάσης ἐπιμελείας ἀνεθρέψατο) and educational guidance, and, according to Herodian's text, he later refers to his father's numerous attempts to teach him and other young men about virtues (Hdn. 1.5.4: πατὴρ [...] πᾶσαν ἀρετὴν ἐπαίδευεν). Nevertheless, Marcus Aurelius did not succeed in sufficiently inspiring his own child: in the long tradition of sons who did not continue their fathers' rule effectively, Commodus holds a prominent place, since he grew up to become a negative counterpart of his respected father.[19]

In Herodian's narrative, M. Aurelius thinks before his death that it is now the right moment to bequeath his power (Hdn. 1.4.3: νῦν δὲ καιρὸς εὔκαιρος), but at the same

12 "He cultivated every kind of virtue, and loved ancient literature"; Hdn. 1.3.2: οἷα δὴ ἄνδρα πολυίστορα: "he was a well-read man".

13 A philosopher king is a king (an emperor in our case) who can practically be a philosopher, while at the same time applying the philosophical principles during his reign (Pl. *R.* mainly 471c–509c). According to Plato, only if philosophers become kings or if the recent kings are educated in philosophy there can be rest from troubles in the state and the human race (Pl. *R.* 473c–d).

14 "He was the only emperor who gave proof of his philosophy by his dignified, sober manner rather than by words and a knowledge of doctrine".

15 Hdn. 1.2.4: πολύ τε πλῆθος ἀνδρῶν σοφῶν ἤνεγκε τῶν ἐκείνου καιρῶν ἡ φορά· φιλεῖ γάρ πως ἀεὶ τὸ ὑπήκοον ζήλῳ τῆς τοῦ ἄρχοντος γνώμης βιοῦν: "The product of the age of Marcus was a large number of scholars since subjects always model their lives on the ideals of their ruler"; cf. Chrysanthou (2020) 629–630.

16 Throughout his *Meditations* he is constantly referring to philosophers (e.g. 2.10, 2.15, 4.46, 6.42, 6.47, 7.19, 7.44–46, 7.64, 8.3, 11.25, 11.34, 12.3) and his philosophical way of thinking (e.g. 2.17, 3.12, 3.16, 4.23, 4.30, 4.47, 5.9–10, 5.27, 6.2, 6.12, 8.5, 8.26, 9.3, 9.29, 9.41, 10.15, 11.7, 12.3, 12.23).

17 *Med.* 1.4: τὸ μὴ εἰς δημοσίας διατριβὰς φοιτῆσαι, καὶ τὸ ἀγαθοῖς διδασκάλοις κατ᾽ οἶκον χρήσασθαι, καὶ τὸ γνῶναι, ὅτι εἰς τὰ τοιαῦτα δεῖ ἐκτενῶς ἀναλίσκειν: "[from my grandfather's father I was in the way to learn] to dispense with attendance at public schools, and to enjoy good teachers at home, and to recognize that on such things money should be eagerly spent", 1.9.3: τὸ πολυμαθὲς: "[From Sextus I was in the way to learn] to possess great learning", 1.13: καὶ τὸ περὶ τῶν διδασκάλων ἐκθύμως εὔφημον: "[From Catulus I was in the way to learn] to speak with wholehearted goodwill of one's teachers"; cf. *Med.* 1.17.1.

18 For Commodus' education see Hekster (2002) 32–33; Galimberti (2014) 46–47.

19 For the idealized image of Marcus as a "figure of nostalgia" see Kemezis (2014) 46–47.

time, he is worried (Hdn. 1.4.1: κυμαίνουσαν οὖν ἔχων τοσαύταις φροντίσι τὴν ψυχήν)[20] about the way Commodus would behave and be received as an emperor due to his young age (Hdn. 1.3.5: οὐ μετρίως δ᾽ αὐτὸν ἐταράττον καὶ οἱ Γερμανοὶ γειτνιῶντες […] ὑπώπτευεν οὖν, μὴ τῆς ἡλικίας τοῦ μειρακίου καταφρονήσαντες ἐπιθῶνται αὐτῷ,[21] see also Hdn. 1.3.1–4, 1.4.3).[22] His last speech could be seen as a prolepsis about his son's problematic character, and the consequently unsuccessful forthcoming reign.[23] The emperor enumerates the vices in which Commodus actually indulged later on, such as vulnerability to physical pleasures, extravagant splendid life, urges, impulses, and appropriation of unchecked power (Hdn. 1.3.1). In addition, he recalls former young unsuccessful emperors and highlights their evil characteristics,[24] while also touching upon the matter of a successor's ability to shame the former ruler by his actions (Hdn. 1.3.2: τὴν ἐκείνου ἀρχὴν κατῄσχυναν). This is exactly what Commodus achieved, being a man who displayed all the above censurable characteristics. Despite the

20 "With a heavy heart because of these worries"; cf. Hdn. 1.3.1: φροντίσι τετρυχωμένον, 1.3.2: ἐτάραττε, 1.3.4: ἐλύπει, 1.3.5: ἐδεδίει […] ἐταράττον. Chrysanthou (2022a, 251–252; cf. *Med.* 11.3) states that Marcus Aurelius' anxiety "disturbs the impression of Stoic dignity that the scene would otherwise have". For his exemplary death see Chrysanthou (2022a) 251–256; Laporte/Hekster (2022) 88–89.

21 "He also felt considerable anxiety about the Germans on the frontier […] he suspected (that they) would despise Commodus for his youth and attack him". In the very first paragraphs Herodian highlights in advance the contrast between an emperor of advanced age and a young inexperienced one (Hdn. 1.1.6: οἱ μὲν τὴν ἡλικίαν πρεσβύτεροι διὰ τὴν ἐμπειρίαν τῶν πραγμάτων ἐπιμελέστερον ἑαυτῶν τε καὶ τῶν ὑπηκόων ἦρξαν, οἱ δὲ κομιδῇ νέοι ῥᾳθυμότερον βιώσαντες: "The more mature emperors took greater care to control themselves and their subjects because of their political experience. The very young ones led rather less disciplined lives"; cf. 1.3.1: ῥᾷστα γὰρ αἱ τῶν νέων ψυχαὶ ἐς ἡδονὰς ἐξολισθαίνουσαι ἀπὸ τῶν παιδείας καλῶν μετοχετεύονται: "Young men's passions are easily diverted from learning moral values and slip into a life of pleasure"). Commodus' youth is frequently mentioned throughout the text (Hdn. 1.4.3: τῆς μειρακίων ἡλικίας, 1.6.1: νέου […] βασιλέως, 1.6.2: τῷ μειρακίῳ, 1.6.7: τὸ μειράκιον, 1.8.3: τὸν νεανίσκον; cf. 1.5.1, 1.6.4, 1.7.1–2, 1.8.1–2, 1.8.7, 2.10.3), and this topic turns out to be a pattern in the narrative regarding also (mainly) Geta and Caracalla (Hdn. 3.10.3–4, 3.11.1, 3.11.7, 3.12.10, 3.13.6, 3.15.3), Elagabalus (Hdn. 5.3.7, 5.3.9, 5.4.3, 5.7.1, 6.6.1), and Alexander (Hdn. 5.8.10, 6.1.5, 6.9.5). Moreover, Maesa and later Mamaea take over the power of the empire due to Elagabalus' and Alexander's young age (Hdn. 5.5.1, 6.1.1).

22 Hdn. 1.3.1: δεδιὼς μὴ νεότης ἀκμάζουσα καὶ ἐν ὀρφανίᾳ ἐξουσίαν αὐτοκράτορα καὶ ἀκώλυτον προσλαβοῦσα μαθημάτων μὲν καλῶν καὶ ἐπιτηδευμάτων ἀφηνιάσῃ, μέθαις δὲ καὶ κραιπάλαις ἐπιδῷ ἑαυτήν: "He was afraid that the young man would grow up in control of absolute, unchecked power without parental authority. As a result, he might refuse the discipline of his moral studies and habits and devote his time to drunken debauchery", 1.4.3: μή ποι φερόμενος ὑπ᾽ ἀτελοῦς τῆς τῶν δεόντων ἐμπειρίας ἐς φαῦλα ἐπιτηδεύματα προσαραχθῇ: "there is a danger that he will be carried away and dashed against the rocks of evil habits because he has an imperfect experience of what to do".

23 See Baumann (2025) 142–150. It is worth mentioning that in *Meditations*, Marcus writes down a phrase from Euripides' lost play *Antiope* (fr. 208), which would be proven right: "Though both my sons and me the gods have spurned, / for this too, there is a reason" (*Med.* 7.41, 11.6: Εἰ δ᾽ ἠμελήθην ἐκ θεῶν καὶ παῖδ᾽ ἐμώ, / ἔχει λόγον καὶ τοῦτο).

24 Domitian and Alexander's successors are mentioned for their cruelty (Hdn. 1.3.2, 1.3.4), Nero for ruthlessness but also for being an object of ridicule (Hdn. 1.3.4), and Dionysius, the Sicilian tyrant, for his luxurious life and lack of self-control (Hdn. 1.3.2).

emperor's foreshadowing of his son's inability to rise to the challenge of rulership and his apprehension for the future[25] (Hdn. 1.3.5: τοιαύτας δὴ τυραννίδος εἰκόνας ὑποτυπούμενος ἐδεδίει τε καὶ ἤλπιζεν ⟨εἰκότως⟩[26]), Commodus is designated as his successor and this decision seems to have been the greatest mistake of M. Aurelius.[27]

Roman citizens have high hopes for Commodus' reign, as they expect him to resemble his father (Hdn. 1.7.1: χρηστὰς εἶχεν ἐλπίδας νέου αὐτοκράτορος ἐπιδημίᾳ, πατρῴζειν τὸ μειράκιον ἡγούμενοι),[28] and to perpetuate his memory.[29] The young man, though, ends up being an unpopular and deeply despised emperor (Hdn. 1.14.7: οὐκέτι ὁ Ῥωμαίων δῆμος μετ᾽ εὐνοίας τὸν Κομοδον ἐπέβλεπεν[30]), who unifies the aforementioned vices of the well-known tyrants in his persona (Hdn. 1.3.2–5, 1.14–17).[31] Even though he arrogantly[32] considers citizens' support and acceptance as owed and takes them for granted (Hdn. 1.5.4: καὶ ῥᾷστα πάσης εὐνοίας μεθέξειν πρὸς ὑμῶν ἤλπικα, τῶν μὲν πρεσβυτέρων τροφεῖά μοι ταῦτα ὀφειλόντων;[33] cf. 1.5.3–6), the numerous plots against him (Hdn. 1.8–10, 1.12.3–13.6), and the celebrations that follow his death (Hdn. 2.2.3: πᾶς ὁ δῆμος ἐνθουσιῶντι ἐοικὼς ἐξεβακχεύετο: "people went practically mad with excitement"; see 2.2.3–4),[34] confirm his failure to win the people's favor.

First of all, Commodus increasingly withdraws from the political stage swayed by (physical) pleasures (Hdn. 1.13.7: δεδούλωντο δὲ πᾶσαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν […] ἐπάλληλοι καὶ ἀκόλαστοι σώματος ἡδοναί, 2.7.2: τῇ Κομόδου ἀσωτίᾳ καὶ ἀφειδέσι[35]), while fawners

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25 Marcus Aurelius' hopes lie in his advisers and relatives, to whom he entrusts the welfare and guidance of his son and essentially of the empire (Hdn. 1.4.3: ὁρᾶτε δή μοι τὸν νἱὸν […] δεόμενον ὥσπερ ἐν χειμῶνι καὶ ζάλῃ τῶν κυβερνησόντων: "Here is my son […] he stands in need of guides through the tempest and storm of life", 1.4.4: γένεσθε δὴ οὖν αὐτῷ ὑμεῖς ἀνθ᾽ ἑνὸς ἐμοῦ πατέρες πολλοί, περιέποντές τε καὶ τὰ ἄριστα συμβουλεύοντες: "You who are many must be fathers to him in place of me alone. Take care of him and give him sound advice"; cf. 1.3.1, 1.4.1–6). See Chrysanthou (2020) 643.

26 "With such examples of tyrants in mind, Marcus was properly apprehensive about the future."

27 Dio presents Marcus Aurelius as having been explicitly disappointed in Commodus (D.C. 72[71].36.4: πλεῖστον αὐτοῦ ὅσον διήμαρτε), while the author of the *Historia Augusta* writes: "he foresaw that after his death Commodus would turn out as he actually did, and expressed the wish that his son might die so that he not, as he himself said, become another Nero, Caligula, or Domitian" (*Marc.* 28.10); for Zimmermann's different viewpoint see (1999) 36–37, 150.

28 Hdn. 1.7.1–6; cf. Caligula's ascension to the throne (Suet. *Cal.* 13; D.C. 59.6.1).

29 "The attendees are urged to look after Commodus in order to be able to keep Marcus' memory alive forever" (Chrysanthou [2022a] 254; cf. Hdn. 1.4.6: ἀίδιον μνήμην).

30 "The people of Rome no longer viewed Commodus in such a favourable light".

31 See also Zimmermann (1999) 138.

32 Marcus Aurelius credited his lack of conceit to paternal guidance (*Med.* 1.17.3), whereas Commodus' boastful confidence can be traced already in this first speech as an emperor (Hdn. 1.5.3–8).

33 "I shall win your complete loyalty without difficulty. The older ones among you owe me this service as your protégé".

34 Cf. the citizens' reaction to Marcus Aurelius' death: Hdn. 1.4.8: οὐδέ τις ἦν ἀνθρώπων τῶν ὑπὸ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν ὃς ἀδακρυτὶ τοιαύτην ἀγγελίαν ἐδέχετο ("There was not a single subject throughout the Roman empire that did not grieve at the news").

35 Hdn. 1.13.7: "he continually gave his whole mind to the slavish pursuit of unrestrained physical pleasure", 2.7.2: "his wasteful and indiscriminate expenditure", 1.12.6: ἡδοναῖς σχολάζοντος ἀγνοοῦντός τε τὰ

soon enough gain control over him (Hdn. 1.8.1: ἔπεισεν αὐτὸν τρυφαῖς σχολάζειν καὶ κραιπάλαις τῆς τε φροντίδος καὶ τῶν βασιλείων καμάτων ἀπῆγεν αὐτόν,[36] 1.9.1: ποιησάμενός τε αὐτὸν ἐπ ἐξουσίας, 1.13.8: εἶχον αὐτὸν ὑποχείριον).[37] His cruel and bloodthirsty character becomes obvious as well, mainly in the final stages of his government through merciless killings (Hdn. 1.13.7: ἀφειδῶς τε φονεύων, 1.14.7: ἀκρίτους φόνους) and numerous executions of anyone who could possibly improve his character (Hdn. 1.13.8).[38] Most importantly, Commodus' mental state is presented as having been disturbed (Hdn. 1.14.8: ἐς τοσοῦτόν τε μανίας καὶ παρανοίας προὐχώρησεν: "such was his mental derangement", 1.15.8: ἐς τοσοῦτον δὲ προεχώρησε μανίας: "his madness reached such a state"). He decides to adopt Heracles' persona and attire (Hdn. 1.14.8: ἀποδυσάμενός τε τὸ Ῥωμαίων καὶ βασίλειον σχῆμα λεοντῆν ἐπεστρώννυτο καὶ ῥόπαλον μετὰ χεῖρας ἔφερεν[39]) and gives orders that he should be called "Heracles, son of Zeus, instead of Commodus, son of Marcus" (Hdn. 1.14.8: ἀντὶ δὲ Κομόδου καὶ Μάρκου υἱοῦ Ἡρακλέα τε καὶ Διὸς υἱὸν).[40] This could be interpreted as an invocation of lineage, since Commodus discards his family name,[41] offering a striking contrast with the initial emphasis on his birthright to the throne (Hdn. 1.5.5–6).[42]

θρυλούμενα: "Commodus was spending his time enjoying himself […] without any idea of the commotion going on"; see also 1.6.1–3, 1.8.1, 1.17.2, 2.1.3, 2.2.6.

36 Hdn. 1.8.1: "[Perennis] began to relieve him of the responsibilities and cares of his office by persuading him to spend his time in a life of pleasure and drunkenness".

37 For instance, influenced by these parasites (Hdn. 1.6.8: ἐγκειμένων δὲ τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν θεραπόντων; cf. 1.6.1–3) and unable to restrain his impulses (Hdn. 1.6.2: ἤγειρον αὐτοῦ τὰς ὀρέξεις ἐς τὴν ἡδονῶν ἐπιθυμίαν: "they whetted his appetite for a taste of these pleasures"), Commodus abandons the war against the Germans only to return to Rome's extravagant everyday life (Hdn. 1.6.1, 1.8.1–9.10, 1.12.3–13.3, 1.13.8, 2.10.3). His young age eases the way for these devious men to accomplish their goals (Hdn. 1.6.1: διαφθείρειν ἐπειρῶντο νέου ἤθος βασιλέως: "they tried to corrupt the character of the young emperor", 1.6.2: τοιαῦτα δή τινα τῷ μειρακίῳ ὑποτυπούμενοι: "by putting such ideas into the young man's head", 1.8.1: τῇ τοῦ μειρακίου ἀποχρώμενος ἡλικίᾳ: "Perennis took advantage of the emperor's tender age", 1.8.2: ἐς ὑποψίαν ἄγων τὸ μειράκιον ἐφόβει: "he sowed suspicion in the young emperor's mind"); cf. Hdn. 1.3.2 (ὑπὸ τῆς ἄγαν ἀκρασίας καινὰς ἡδονάς) for the tyrant Dionysius' luxurious and intemperate life.

38 The equivalent cruelty of Domitian and Alexander's successors is mentioned in Hdn. 1.3.4: ἐσχάτης ὠμότητος and 1.3.2: ὕβρεις τε καὶ βίαι retrospectively; for similarities in Commodus' and Domitian's deaths see Zimmermann (1999) 139–142; Chrysanthou (2020) 626–627. For Nero's matricide (Hdn. 1.3.4) and Commodus' possible patricide see below.

39 "He took off the dress of a Roman emperor, put on a lion skin and carried a club in his hand". Cf. Hdn. 1.3.3, where Antigonus is criticized for modeling himself completely after Dionysus (Διόνυσον πάντα μιμούμενος).

40 For Commodus as Hercules see Zimmermann (1999) 128–136, 143–144; Hekster (2002) 11–13, 99–111, 117–129, 135–136, 146–148, 152–155, 178–188; Hekster (2005a) 208–214; Galimberti (2014) 148–150; Chrysanthou (2022a) 226–227 with n. 134–135; for Domitian as Hercules see Hekster (2005a) 205–207, cf. Chrysanthou (2022a) 226–227 with n. 135; for Nero in the role of *Hercules Insanus* see Hekster (2002) 156; OKell (2005) 185–204; Chrysanthou (2022a) 226 with n. 135.

41 Zimmermann (1999) 136; Laporte/Hekster (2022) 95; Chrysanthou (2022a) 226–227.

42 Hdn. 1.5.5: ὁμοῦ δέ με εἶδεν ἥλιος ἄνθρωπον καὶ βασιλέα: "On that day I was born man and emperor"; on this topic see Chrysanthou (2022a) 226–228. New names are also provided for the months after

A similar attitude is observed later on when he starts participating in gladiatorial combat (Hdn. 1.13.8, 1.15.1–9)[43] and inscribes his name in the base of the Colossus as "Victor of a Thousand Gladiators" without using the title Germanicus (Hdn. 1.15.9: ἀντὶδὲ ΓερμανικοῦὈμονομάχους χιλίους νικήσαντος').[44] Commodus thus reverses his status of visibility during the games: instead of being the spectator (Hdn. 1.9.2: θεατής)[45] from the amphitheatrical seats, he himself becomes the spectacle in the arena (Hdn. 1.15.1: συνέθεον […] θεασόμενοι,[46] 1.15.7: εἶδεν ὁ δῆμος θέαμα, 1.16.3: ὀφθῆναι τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις). At the same time, Romans are gathering to see Marcus' son, who was willingly stripped of his imperial insignia (cf. Hdn. 1.7.1–6) and adopted the clothes (Hdn. 1.16.3) and the quality of a gladiator.[47] Even though they are indeed entertained, the citizens gradually become ashamed to watch their ruler, a descendant of an exalted father and triumphant forebears, disgracing his office with a thoroughly degrading exhibition (Hdn. 1.15.7: Ῥωμαίων βασιλέα μετὰ τοσαῦτα τρόπαια πατρός τε καὶ προγόνων […] καθυβρίζοντα δὲ τὸ ἀξίωμα αἰσχίστῳ καὶ μεμιασμένῳ σχήματι).[48] In the end, Commodus becomes a laughing stock (Hdn. 1.14.8: καταγέλαστον αὐτὸν), just like Nero

Commodus' titles, which were supposed to refer to the brave Heracles (Hdn. 1.14.9). Chrysanthou ([2022a] 228) highlights Domitian's and Nero's renaming of October and April as Domitianus (D.C. 67.4.3–4) and Neroneus (Suet. *Nero.* 55) retrospectively.

43 Commodus participated in the arena as a gladiator (*munera*; Hdn. 1.15.1, 1.15.7–9, 1.16.3–5), a fighter against wild beasts (*venationes*; Hdn. 1.13.8, 1.15.1–7, 1.17.8), and was at least trained to become a charioteer (Hdn. 1.13.8); cf. Futrell (1997) 24–38, 44–51, 205–213; Hekster (2002) 137–145.

44 Toward the end of his gladiatorial 'career', he disclaims the assumed Heracles' identity and arrogates the name of a dead gladiator (Hdn. 1.15.8: ἑαυτὸν δὲ οὐκέτι Ἡρακλέα […] καλεῖσθαι προσέταξε).

45 Cf. Tac. *Ag*. 45.2: *praecipua sub Domitiano miseriarum pars erat videre et aspici* ("Under Domitian it was no small part of our sufferings that we saw him and were seen by him"). On the importance of imperial visibility see Hekster (2005b) 162–177.

46 "People flocked (to Rome) […] to be spectators". On Commodus as gladiator and participant in games see Zimmermann (1999) 128–136; Hekster (2002) 128–129, 137–138, 146–162; Kemezis (2014) 250; Chrysanthou (2022a) 228–230. The exact gradual transition from a spectator to a participant in shows can be found in the reign of Caligula, who also competed as a gladiator and a charioteer (D.C. 59.5.5: ἅρματά τε γὰρ ἤλασε καὶ ἐμονομάχησεν), while at first had been just "one man in the crowd" (D.C. 59.5.4: τὰ μὲν πρῶτα θεατὴς […] τις ἐκ τοῦ ὁμίλου ὤν; cf. Hekster (2002) 148–150, 157–158). Nero similarly displayed himself publicly as – mainly – an actor, a singer, and a charioteer (D.C. 62[61].20; 62[62].24; 62[62].29; 62[63].8–11, 14, 17.5–18, 21; 63[63].22–23; 63[63].26; 63[63].28.4–5; Suet. *Nero* 20–25, 40.1–3, 41, 44, 53; Tac. *Ann*. 14.14, 14.20–21, 15.33, 16.4; cf. Hekster [2005b] 173–174).

47 According to Futrell ([1997] 245 with n. 179), "gladiators typically came from the ranks of the marginalized in Roman society […] For a free man to voluntarily enter the arena, it meant an automatic loss of social and civic status". Cf. Hekster (2002) 148; for gladiators as the most despised men see Chrysanthou (2022a) 229 with n. 149.

48 Cf. Hdn. 1.13.8: τοῦ δὲ ἀπρεπέστερον μετιόντος ἢ βασιλεῖ σώφρον ἥρμοζε: "was less than proper for an emperor of modesty", 1.6.4: ἐδεῖτο μήτε τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν καθυβρίσαι: "begging him not to bring disgrace to the Roman empire", 1.16.5: πείθειν ἐπειρῶντο μηδὲν ἀνάξιον τῆς βασιλείας ποιεῖν: "trying to dissuade him from any action unworthy of an emperor"; see also. D.C. 62[63].9.1 (for Nero): "Yet how could one endure even to hear about, let alone behold, a Roman […] an emperor, an Augustus, named on the program among the contestants" (καίτοι πῶς ἄν τις καὶ ἀκοῦσαι, μὴ ὅτι ἰδεῖν, ὑπομείνειεν ἄνδρα Ῥωμαῖον […] αὐτοκράτορα Αὔγουστον ἔς τε τὸ λεύκωμα ἐν τοῖς ἀγωνισταῖς ἐγγραφόμενον).

(Hdn. 1.3.4: καταγέλαστον θέαμα; cf. D.C. 62[63].9.1, 11.1), confirming his father's doubts and worries.[49] Simultaneously, he is incorporated into the general pattern of ridiculed ineducable students, a topic we will turn to shortly.

Due to these facts, Zimmermann ([1999] 129, 136) describes Commodus' catastrophic reign as "a negative climax: from βασιλεύς (king) to Hercules and then to gladiator", as a transition from an imperial 'referee' of the state and of festivals or agons to a fighter and an entertainer. In Marcus Aurelius' inner monologue (Hdn. 1.3.1–4.1) and first speech (Hdn. 1.4.2–6), we get the chance to see an ideal Commodus through the eyes of his father, who envisions his son's reign as ἀρίστη (Hdn. 1.4.6).[50] However, according to our sources, an empire ruled with dignity up to the reign of Marcus degenerated into a reign of slavery and suppression[51] (Hdn. 2.10.3: ἐς Κόμμοδον δὲ μεταπεσοῦσα; cf. D.C. 72[71].36.4: κατιωμένην τῶν τε πραγμάτων [...] καταπεσούσης τῆς ἱστορίας).[52] Despite his famous ancestors (Hdn. 1.7.4, 1.17.12), his education (Hdn. 1.2.1–2), his noble birth, and the initial support of the citizens (Hdn. 1.7, 1.13.7), Commodus fails as an emperor and debases these 'gifts' by corrupt living (Hdn. 1.17.12: εἰ μὴ τὴν τούτων εὐμορίαν αἰσχροῖς ἐπιτηδεύμασι κατῄσχυνεν).[53]

2.2 Severus and Caracalla

Caracalla's behavior during his reign creates a further profound opportunity to draw attention to the failure of paternal pedagogic strategies. A first parallel with the aforementioned father-son couple can be detected in Septimius Severus' self-adoption as Marcus' son,[54] a narrative constructed to promote his new dynasty and connect the

49 See Zimmermann (1999) 139; Chrysanthou (2022a) 228.

50 Chrysanthou (2022a) 31–33, 36 with n. 29, 251; cf. Zimmermann (1999) 31.

51 Hdn. 1.16.1: τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν τυραννουμένην, 2.2.4: τὸν τύραννον, 2.1.3: ἀπὸ τῆς πικρᾶς καὶ ἀκολάστου τυραννίδος πάντες ἀναπνεύσειαν: "a respite from the bitter violence of tyranny" (see also 1.14.9–15.1, 2.2.4, 2.4.2); cf. Hdn. 1.4.5. Commodus suffered *damnatio memoriae* (Varner [2004] 136–146; Galimberti [2014] 57, 61; for Nero's and Domitian's *damnatio memoriae* see Varner [2004] 46–85, 111–135). His memory though was soon rehabilitated by Julianus (Hdn. 2.6.10) and Severus who also brought about Commodus' deification. (For bibliographical references see below.)

52 "Commodus war in jeder Hinsicht das Gegenteil seines Vaters" (Hohl [1954] 12; cf. Kemezis [2014] 45).

53 Marcus Aurelius' accountability for Commodus' character will be pursued once Severus' and Caracalla's cases have been examined.

54 "The best-known Roman example of openly invented genealogical claims" (Hekster [2015] 205); for Severus' self-adoption and the consequent propaganda see Rubin (1980); Galimberti (2014) 44; Kemezis (2014) 16, 57–74, 253; Hekster (2015) 144–148, 205–221. Severus became *Marci filius* of his own accord, and consequently established Commodus' deification since Commodus was his new brother (D.C. 76[75].7.4: τοῦ τε Μάρκου υἱὸν καὶ τοῦ Κομμόδου ἀδελφὸν ἑαυτὸν ἔλεγε) and "a still-valuable strand of Antonine propaganda" (Kemezis [2014] 65; cf. Hdn. 2.10.3); for Severus as *Divi Commodi Frater* and Commodus' deification see *HA Sev*. 11.3–5, 12.8; *HA Comm.* 17.11: *inter deos rettulit*: "he raised this man to the rank of the gods"; Zimmermann (1999) 17, 146–150; Hekster (2002) 186–195; Varner (2004) 147–148; Galimberti (2014) 44; Hekster (2015) 144, 146, 208, 210, 216–217, 222; Chrysanthou

power he had not inherited but merely acquired with worthy predecessors. By affiliating his own house with the dynasty of the Antonines, he could establish his and his sons' right to the throne.[55] Furthermore, according to Herodian, Severus looked up to Marcus Aurelius' rule (Hdn. 2.10.2–3) and promised to provide a period of similar prosperity for his subjects by taking Aurelius' way of ruling as a model for his actions (Hdn. 2.14.3: καὶ πάντα πράξειν ἐς ζῆλον τῆς Μάρκου ἀρχῆς). His political aspiration is promoted by – allegedly – predictive oracles or signs (e.g. Severus' dream of undertaking Pertinax's power in Hdn. 2.9.3–7[56]), and by references to his good fortune[57] and divine favor, which seemingly indicate that his seizing of power is the work of providence (Hdn. 2.9.7: θείᾳ προνοίᾳ ἐπὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν [αὐτὸν] καλεῖσθαι). Divine intervention had been said to play an important role in Marcus Aurelius' reign from an early stage[58] and Severus aimed to convince the Roman citizens that he could and would be equally victorious and successful.[59] Indeed, he displayed some of Marcus Aurelius' virtues: he is depicted as an efficient, vigorous, brave administrator, not negligent of his responsibilities or afraid of undertaking any hardship or pain (Hdn. 2.9.2: γενναῖος ἅμα καὶ θυμοειδὴς […] πόνοις τε ἀντέχων, 2.10.8: οὔτε ἐμοῦ ῥᾳθυμίαν ἢ ἀδρανίαν καταγνώσονται, 3.6.10: προθυμίας καὶ ἀνδρείας, 3.8.8: καρτερίᾳ ψυχῆς καὶ ἀνεξικακίᾳ πόνων).[60] What they have in common though, is their failure as educators of their sons.

(2022a) 202. For the representation of Julia Domna as heir to Faustina and Crispina in relation to Severus' attempts to boost his invented ancestral lineage see Hekster (2015) 143–153, 159, 210.

55 Particularly, by naming Caracalla "Antoninus" (Hdn. 3.10.5: Ἀντωνῖνον ὠνόμασε) he "stressed the dynastic continuity and made clear who was from now on the intended heir" (Hekster [2015] 210; see also Rubin [1980] 73).

56 Potter (2008) 220–221.

57 In Herodian's text, Severus is presented as having been favored and "accompanied by fortune throughout his career" (Chrysanthou [2022b] 211–212; cf. Rubin [1980] 47 with n. 36; Potter [2008] 220–222). See e.g. the spontaneous victory over the Parthians τύχῃ μᾶλλον ἢ γνώμῃ (Hdn. 3.9.12: "more by good luck than good judgment") when the ships unintentionally drifted and grounded in the Parthian banks (Hdn. 3.9.8: ἡ συναιρομένη τότε τοῖς ἐκείνου πράγμασι τύχη; cf. 3.9.7–12, 2.14.1). "Stressing his own luckiness evidently served his purposes" (Kemezis [2014] 60).

58 E.g. 'weather miracles' (mainly water elements suddenly appearing) were experienced by both emperors. This pattern emerges in Severus' battle against Niger (Hdn. 3.3.1–8), when the enemies are defeated due to a sudden rain interpreted as προνοίᾳ θείᾳ (Hdn. 3.3.8: divine providence; D.C. 75[74].7.7: παρὰ τοῦ θείου βοηθουμένοις: "aided by god"; Rubin [1980] 66–74, 83–84, 117–120, 205–206; Kovács [2009] 146–147; for further similar incidents concerning Severus' army see D.C. 75[75].1.3; for Herodian's and Dio's spatial disagreements see Rubin [1980] 66–74), while Marcus Aurelius subdues the Quadi similarly due to a providential rain which saves the Roman army (D.C. 72[71].8.2: τὸ θεῖον ἐξέσωσε, see 72[71].8–10; cf. Tert. *Apol.* 5.25, *Ad Scap.* 4; Eus. *Hist. Eccles.* 5.5.1–7; Orac. Sib. 12.195–200; Claud. *VI. Cons. Hon.* 347–348; *HA Marc.* 24.4; Rubin [1980] 67–74; Potter [2008] 222; Kovács [2009]; Kemezis [2014] 60–61, with n. 96).

59 Rubin (1980) 74; Potter (2008) 220.

60 For Severus' bravery and endurance see Hdn. 2.10.6, 2.11.1–2, 2.14.1–3, 3.7.7–8, 3.8.8, 3.14.2–3, 3.4.1–4. He is specifically described as undisturbed by adverse weather conditions (Hdn. 3.6.10: κρύους καὶ θάλπους ὁμοίως καταφρονῶν: "without regard for cold or heat", διὰ τῶν δυσχειμέρων καὶ ὑψηλοτάτων ὀρῶν […] ἀκαλύπτῳ τῇ κεφαλῇ ὡδοιπόρει: "while crossing the high mountain barriers where weather

Severus' paternal anxiety (Hdn. 3.10.1: ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην ἐπείγετο: "he grew anxious to get to Rome") is triggered by the same realization as Marcus': his sons had now reached manhood (Hdn. 3.10.1: τοὺς παῖδας ἐς ἡλικίαν ἐφήβων ἤδη τελοῦντας; cf. 1.3.1: ἐώρα τε τὸν παῖδα τῆς μειρακίων ἡλικίας ἀρχόμενον ἐπιβαίνειν, δεδιὼς […][61]). His ambition and provision for his sons' education and moral principles are clearly indicated by Herodian, with the keyword being the verb σωφρονίζω (to be chastened, recalled to senses, learn self-restraint[62]) which repeatedly denotes the emperor's attempts to initiate them into the art of self-control and moderation (Hdn. 3.10.2: τούς τε υἱεῖς παιδεύων καὶ σωφρονίζων, 3.10.4: σωφρονίζειν ἐπειρᾶτο, 3.10.5: γάμῳ σωφρονίσαι θέλων[63]). Moreover, Chrysanthou ([2022b] 218) notes that Geta is provided with a council of Severus' senior friends as advisors (Hdn. 3.14.9: συνέδρους τῶν φίλων τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους) just as Marcus Aurelius entrusted his friends and relatives with his son's care and guidance (Hdn. 1.4.1 – 6).[64] Herodian most probably consciously aims at giving prominence to Severus' new role as educator, as he avoids any reference to Euodus' role as Caracalla's τροφεύς (D.C. 77[76].3.2)[65] and describes the boys' rivalry in some detail from the mo-

conditions were difficult he marched bareheaded"), becoming an exemplar for his soldiers to imitate (Hdn. 3.6.10: μιμήσει καὶ ζήλῳ τοῦ βασιλέως; cf. 1.2.4: ζήλῳ τῆς τοῦ ἄρχοντος γνώμης βιοῦν: "subjects model their lives on the ideals of their ruler"); cf. *Med.* 6.2: Μὴ διαφέρου, πότερον ῥιγῶν ἢ θαλπόμενος τὸ πρέπον ποιεῖς, καὶ πότερον νυστάζων ἢ ἱκανῶς ὕπνου ἔχων: "Make no difference in doing thy duty whether thou art shivering or warm, drowsy or sleep-satisfied"; for more statements of Marcus Aurelius on φιλοπονία ("love of labour") and the consequent sense of duty see *Med.* e. g. 1.5, 1.15, 1.16.1, 3.4.3, 5.5, 6.2, 6.30.1, 8.5, 11.13.

61 "Realizing that his son (Commodus) was at the age of early adolescence, he was afraid […]"; cf. Hdn. 1.3.5, 1.4.3. This young age once more seems, as in Commodus' case, to be the main reason why Geta and Caracalla are easily influenced by fawners (Hdn. 3.10.4: πρὸς τὸ ἡδὺ τῆς ἡλικίας κολακεύοντες καὶ ἀνθέλκοντες: "fawning attendants were flattering and encouraging them to seek the pleasures of youth"; cf. 3.13.6; for the brothers' youth and for Commodus' case see previously) and indulged in the pleasures Rome provided (Hdn. 3.10.3: ὑπὸ τῆς ἐν Ῥώμῃ τρυφῆς; cf. 1.6.1 ὑπεμιμνήσκοντες αὐτὸν τῆς ἐν Ῥώμῃ τρυφῆς: "the fawners […] reminded Commodus of Rome's luxuries"; see also 1.7.1). In addition, the excessive enthusiasm for and occupation with spectacles and shows (Hdn. 3.10.3: περὶ τὰ θεάματα ὑπερβαλλούσης σπουδῆς; cf. 3.10.4, 3.13.1 – 2) remind us of Commodus' similar 'hobbies' (Hdn. 1.9.4: θέαις καὶ ἑορταῖς σχολάζειν: "spend your time at theaters and festivals"; for Commodus as gladiator see previously), and is characterized in both cases as 'improper' for an emperor (Hdn. 3.14.1: περὶ τὰ θεάματα ἀπρεπεῖ σπουδῇ, 3.13.1: ἀπρεπέστερον ἢ βασιλεῦσιν ἥρμοζεν; cf. 1.13.8: τοῦ δὲ ἀπρεπέστερον μετιόντος ἢ βασιλεῖ σώφρον ἥρμοζε; see also Hdn. 1.16.5). Therefore, Severus tries to move the young men away from Rome's temptations (Hdn. 3.13.1: ἀπάγειν γὰρ ἤθελε τοὺς παῖδας τῆς ἐν Ῥώμῃ διαίτης; cf. 3.14.2).

62 Liddell/Scott (1940) s. v.

63 "He hoped that the marriage would sober Caracalla"; cf. Hdn. 3.10.1 – 5, 13.1 – 6, 14.1 – 2, 14.9 – 15.1. Severus also gives his son the name of Marcus (Hdn. 3.10.5: Μάρκου θελήσας αὐτὸν προσηγορίαν φέρειν) in order to bear the glorious emperor's name and – hopefully – character; cf. Zimmermann (1999) 194 – 213; Chrysanthou (2020) 630 – 631; Chrysanthou (2022a) 224.

64 Hdn. 1.4.1: τοὺς φίλους ὅσοι τε παρῆσαν τῶν συγγενῶν: "summoned his advisers and the relatives that were with him", 1.4.4: γένεσθε δὴ οὖν αὐτῷ ὑμεῖς […] πατέρες: "you must be fathers to him".

65 Cf. Zimmermann (1999) 195 – 199, 199 with n. 243; Chrysanthou (2020) 630 – 631.

ment they appear in the narrative (Hdn. 3.10.3).[66] The readers thus have the time to focus on and attend to Severus' efforts to morally reform his sons' characters and especially his subsequent failure, since every attempt is pointless: Geta and Caracalla are already irreversibly corrupted by their luxurious way of life[67] and hate each other dreadfully (Hdn. 4.3.1: ἐμίσουν, 4.4.1: μῖσος).

This fraternal loathing is indeed Septimius Severus' main concern during the last years of his reign. He unsuccessfully tries numerous times to mend their dispute (συνάγειν ἐπειρᾶτο[68]) and convince them of the disastrous consequences of a siblings' enmity (Hdn. 3.13.3: ἀεὶ βασιλέων ἀδελφῶν συμφορὰς ἐκ στάσεως). Caracalla and Geta, though, are mutually antagonistic and hostile (Hdn. 3.13.2: ἔριδος καὶ ἔχθρας: "quarrel and enmity", 4.4.1: ἡ στάσις ηὔξετο: "the rivalry grew"),[69] which leads to Geta's brutal murder by his own brother (Hdn. 4.4.2–3). The fratricide recalls a statement from M. Aurelius on the importance of love for family members. In passage 1.14. of *Meditations,* the word φιλοίκειον is used, in which Marcus had failed − just like Severus − since Lucilla plotted against her brother, Commodus, who consequently ordered her execution (Hdn. 1.8.8: ἀκριβεστέρας τήν τε ἀδελφὴν ὁ Κόμοδος διεχρήσατο; cf. 1.8.3–8). Additionally, Herodian states that Caracalla tried to hasten his father's death as well,[70] an act which reflects the rumors about Commodus' attempted or actual patricide (D.C. 72[71].33.4.2: μετήλλαξεν, οὐχ ὑπὸ τῆς νόσου […] ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὸ τῶν ἰατρῶν […] τῷ Κομμόδῳ χαριζομένων[71]). Therefore, Caracalla is clearly portrayed as a "second Commodus"[72] be-

66 In Dio's text, it is the death of Plautianus that signals the two boys' uncontrollably extravagant behavior (D.C. 77[76].7.1), while Severus' advice to his sons concerning their anticipated harmonious coexistence is given just before his death (D.C. 77[76].15.2: ὁμονοεῖτε, τοὺς στρατιώτας πλουτίζετε, τῶν ἄλλων πάντων καταφρονεῖτε: "Be harmonious, enrich the soldiers, and scorn all other men"; cf. Hdn. 3.13.1–5; Chrysanthou [2020] 630–631).

67 Hdn. 3.13.6: ἐς πάσας ἡδονῶν ὀρέξεις ἁπλήστως ὁρμωμένους: "seeking every kind of pleasure without restraint", 3.10.3: ὑπὸ […] τρυφῆς καὶ διαίτης […] τὰ ἤθη διεφθείροντο: "they were corrupted in their habits by the life of luxury"; for Geta's and Caracalla's corrupted and immoral life see Hdn. 3.10.3–4, 3.13.1–2, 3.13.5–6, 3.14.1–2. However, after Severus' death, Geta is established as a more positive figure than Caracalla in the narrative (Hdn. 4.3.1–4).

68 Hdn. 3.13.3: αὐτὸς δὲ ἐπειρᾶτο συνάγειν ἀεὶ τοὺς παῖδας ἐς φιλίαν καὶ προτρέπειν ἐς ὁμόνοιαν καὶ συμφωνίαν: "he was always trying to reconcile his sons and bring them to live in harmony and agreement", 3.13.5: ποτὲ μὲν λιπαρῶν ποτὲ δὲ ἐπιπλήττων, σωφρονίζειν αὐτοὺς ἅμα καὶ συνάγειν ἐπειρᾶτο: "sometimes pleading with them and sometimes upbraiding them, trying to bring them to their senses and make them cooperate"; cf. Hdn. 3.10.4, 3.13.3–6.

69 See also Hdn. 4.3.1: πάντα τε ἔπραττεν ἑκάτερος πειρώμενος τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἀποσκευάσασθαι: "Each brother tried every way to get rid of the other"; cf. Hdn. 3.10.3–4, 3.13.2–6, 3.15.4–5, 4.1.1, 4.1.5, 4.3.1–2, 4.3.5–4.1.

70 Hdn. 3.15.2: ἀνέπειθέ τε ἰατροὺς καὶ ὑπηρέτας κακουργῆσαί τι περὶ τὴν θεραπείαν τοῦ γέροντος, ὡς ἂν θᾶττον αὐτοῦ ἀπαλλαγείη: "he tried to persuade his doctors and attendants to mistreat him so that he would be rid of him sooner"; cf. Hdn. 3.15.4. Dio mentions a direct attempted murder (D.C. 77[76].14.3: ὁ δ᾽ Ἀντωνῖνος ἀποκτεῖναι αὐτὸν ἄντικρυς αὐτοχειρίᾳ ἐπεχείρησεν: "Antoninus attempted to kill his father outright with his own hand").

71 "He passed away […] not as a result of the disease […] but by the act of his physicians […] who wished to do Commodus a favor"; cf. Hdn. 1.3.4 for M. Aurelius' reference to Nero's matricide (ἐχώρησε μέχρι

cause of the way he handles power, notably when he crowns himself as the sole emperor. At the same time, this brings some problematic aspects of Severus' character and role as paternal figure to the fore.

To begin with, it is worth mentioning that the first thing Caracalla does after his father dies is to put an end to the war with the barbarians by granting them peace, since he is uninterested in joining the warfare (Hdn. 3.15.1: μετρίως ἐφρόντιζεν; cf. 3.15.6). Commodus had similarly abandoned the war against the Germans, meeting the barbarians' financial demand "to buy his peace of mind" (Hdn. 1.6.9: τὸ ἀμέριμνον ὠνούμενος).[73] Furthermore, both of them end up becoming cruel emperors, and Herodian emphasizes Caracalla's insatiably murderous and aggressive temper (Hdn. 4.9.3: φύσει ὄντα ὀργίλον καὶ φονικόν; cf. 4.12.8).[74] The most gruesome instances are the massacres against the Alexandrians (Hdn. 4.8.6 – 9.8) and the Parthians (Hdn. 4.10.1 – 11.9). In the first case, Caracalla arrives in Alexandria to allegedly see the city founded by Alexander (Hdn. 4.8.6: πρόφασιν, 4.8.7: προσεποιεῖτο). Even though he joins the local celebrations (Hdn. 4.8.7–8, 4.9.4), this attitude is a pretense, a part of his plan to slaughter the residents (Hdn. 4.9.1: λανθάνουσαν γνώμην: "secret intention", ὑπεκρίνατο: "he was acting"). Caracalla likewise formulates a plan to attack the Parthians (Hdn. 4.10.1: μηχανᾶται τοιόνδε τι): longing to bear the title of Parthicus (Hdn. 4.10.1: ἐπιθυμήσας […] Παρθικὸς κληθῆναι), and boast about it,[75] he feigns a desire to marry the king's daughter. The wedding feast then provides the setting for the massacre (Hdn. 4.11.4 – 8). Caracalla's role-playing (ὑπόκρισις)[76] is also obvious right after Geta's murder[77] when he successfully enacts the role of victim (Hdn. 4.4.3 – 5.7).[78] Thus, just like Commodus, who turned into Heracles and a gladiator in the arena, Caracalla appears as an actor and a director[79] with an extensive repertoire on Herodian's theatrical stage.[80]

μητρῴου φόνου). It could be assumed that Herodian omits any reference to Commodus' patricide for "konzeptionellen Gründen" (Zimmermann [1999] 201), for the "aura of excellence" in Marcus' death to be preserved (Chrysanthou [2022a] 253).

72 Chrysanthou (2020) 628 – 629.

73 Cf. Kemezis (2014) 250 – 251.

74 Hdn. 3.15.1 – 2, 3.15.4, 3.15.6, 4.5.7 – 6.5, 5.1.3.

75 Hdn. 4.10.1: Ῥωμαίοις ἐπιστεῖλαι ὡς χειρωσάμενος τοὺς κατὰ τὴν ἀνατολὴν βαρβάρους: "He wanted to report to the Romans that he had mastered the barbarians in the East".

76 Baumann (2022) 71 – 72, 74, 79, 82 – 83.

77 Caracalla's motive for killing his brother is again the desire for power and glory (Hdn. 4.4.2: ἀλλ᾽ ὑπὸ τῆς περὶ τὴν μοναρχίαν ἐπιθυμίας ἐλαυνόμενος; cf. 4.10.1).

78 E. g. Hdn. 4.4.3: ἐβόα μέγαν κίνδυνον ἐκπεφευγέναι μόλις τε σωθῆναι ("he claimed that he had just escaped from a great danger"), 4.5.4: ἐπῆλθέ μοι ὄντι ξιφήρεις ("Geta attacked me with a sword"). Similarly, he enacted the role of a German soldier (Hdn. 4.7.3 – 7, where the keyword προσεποιεῖτο also appears [§6]), of Alexander (Hdn. 4.8.1: Ἀλέξανδρος ἦν), and Achilles (Hdn. 4.8.4: Ἀχιλλέα ἐμιμεῖτο), while always adopting the relevant clothing (Hdn. 4.7.3, 4.8.2).

79 The reenactment of Patroclus' funeral is the best example of Caracalla's directing skills (Hdn. 4.8.4 – 5).

80 According to Baumann ([2022] 70 – 71), in chapters 4.7–11, the historiographer "turns his readership into an audience of a theatrical play"; for Caracalla as an actor and director see Baumann (2022) 70 – 85.

Occasioned by the aforementioned plots, Zimmermann's remark ([1999] 211; cf. 203–214) about Caracalla as "Severus' caricature" seems apposite: the young emperor's hypocritical attitude reminds us of his father's similar behavioral patterns. Severus had managed to gain the support of the army by promoting his expedition as a necessary retaliatory act for Pertinax's murder (Hdn. 2.9.8: ἔλεγέ τε δεῖν ἐπαμῦναι καὶ ἐπεξελθεῖν τῷ Περτίνακος φόνῳ; see 2.9.5–10.4, 2.14.3).[81] Judging by the vocabulary used, his claims were false and concealed his true aspirations to personal power and accession to the throne (Hdn. 2.9.10: προσποιούμενος,[82] 2.9.11: τῷδὲΣεβήρῳδὲπροσποιουμένῳ). Herodian underscores the underlying character of Severus (Hdn. 3.5.6: ὕπουλον αὐτοῦ ἦθος), who is presented as an expert at deception (Hdn. 2.14.4: ὑποκρίνασθαί τε καὶ προσποιήσασθαι πᾶν ὁτιοῦν ἱκανώτατος; cf. 2.9.13, 3.8.7) and a master of stratagems (Hdn. 2.14.4: εἴη ἀνὴρ πολύτροπός τις καὶ μετὰ τέχνης εἰδὼς προσφέρεθαι πράγμασιν). In particular, he plots against Albinus (Hdn. 2.15.3: τιμῇὸτοίνυν προσποιήτῳ: "pretending to pay him honor", 3.5.3: ἐξαπατήσας αὐτόν; cf. 2.15.1–3, 3.5.2–8) and tricks him (Hdn. 2.15.2: ἠθέλησεν ὁ Σεβῆρος σοφίσματι προλαβὼν; cf. 4.10.1) with insidious techniques used by his sons later on as well.[83] For instance, the attempted poisoning of Albinus (Hdn. 3.5.5: ἔδωκε δὲ αὐτοῖς καὶὸδηλητήρια φάρμακα) evokes the brothers' poisoning attempts against each other (Hdn. 4.4.2: ἐμβαλεῖν δηλητήρια φάρμακα; cf. 4.1.1, 4.5.4, 4.8.4), while the supposedly friendly letters sent to the British general (Hdn. 2.15.4: φιλικώτατα [γράμματα δῆθεν]) remind us of Caracalla's letters to Artabanus (Hdn. 4.10.1–2: ἐπιστέλλει […] γράμματα). Moreover, Severus devises a plan against Pertinax's murderers (Hdn. 2.13.1: σοφίσματι ἐχρήσατο; cf. 2.13.12),[84] according to which he lures them into a trap with a feeble excuse. When these soldiers are gathered in his camp, they are encircled and caught in a ring of weapons (Hdn. 2.13.4: κυκλώσασθαι αὐτοὺς, 2.13.5: σαγηνεύσας[85] ἐντὸς τῶν ὅπλων δοριαλώτους εἶχε), just like the Alexandrians who, at Caracalla's signal (Hdn. 4.9.6: ὑφ᾽ ἑνὶ δὲ σημείῳ),[86] find themselves sur-

81 Severus organizes his propaganda using Pertinax's name and popularity to his advantage, aiming to secure the Romans' content and approval by reviving his memory (Hdn. 2.10.1: ἤλπιζε […] εἶναι κεχαρισμένον […] διὰ τὴν ἐκείνου μνήμην; cf. 2.10.4) and presenting himself as an allegedly destined substitute for the former emperor (Hdn. 2.9.7: θείᾳ προνοίᾳ ἐπὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν [αὐτὸν] καλεῖσθαι, cf. 2.9.3–7; Hdn. 2.14.3: ἔξειν δὲ τοῦ Περτίνακος οὐ μόνον τοὔνομα ἀλλὰ καὶ τὴν γνώμην: "adopting both the name and outlook of Pertinax"; cf. 2.10.1). It should also be mentioned that in the narrative, Pertinax has the role of Marcus' 'alter ego', which underscores the aforementioned references to Severus' desire to imitate Marcus.

82 προσποιούμενος οὐχ οὕτω τῆς ἀρχῆς ἀντιποιεῖσθαι, οὐδ᾽ αὐτῷ τὴν ἐξουσίαν μνᾶσθαι, ὡς θέλειν ἐπεξελθεῖν τοιούτου βασιλέως αἵματι: "he pretended that his aim was not so much to lay claim to the empire or to win personal power as the desire to avenge the murder of so fine an emperor.".

83 Zimmermann (1999) 203–206.

84 For the whole episode see Hdn. 2.13.

85 σαγηνεύω: "surround and take fish with a drag-net" (σαγήνη), generally, "catch as in a net" (Liddell/Scott [1940] s. v.); cf. Hdn. 4.9.6–8.

86 Severus also gives the signal for his soldiers to encircle Pertinax's murderers: ὑφ᾽ ἑνὶ συνθήματι (Hdn. 2.13.4). The same phrase marks the beginning of Caracalla's massacre against the Parthians (Hdn. 4.11.4–5), who must have also been surrounded by soldiers.

rounded by arms, like animals trapped in a net (Hdn. 4.9.6: πᾶν ἐκυκλώσατο […] ἐντὸς τῶν ὅπλων περιειλημμένους ὥσπερ ἐν δικτύοις σεσαγηνευμένους).[87]

Caracalla displays Severus' insatiable imperialism and lust for glory as well. It has been stated before that he slaughters the Parthians just to gain the title of 'Parthicus' (Hdn. 4.10.1). His father likewise insisted on attacking Britain because he was still "keen to win a British victory and title" (Hdn. 3.14.5: βουλόμενος προσκτήσασθαι τὴν κατὰ Βρεττανῶν νίκην τε καὶ προσηγορίαν), and also made an expedition to the East since he was naturally ambitious (Hdn. 3.14.2: φύσει […] φιλόδοξος ὑπάρχων; cf. 3.14.1–5) and eager to win a reputation for himself (Hdn. 3.9.1: βουλόμενος δόξαν ἄρασθαι νίκης […] καὶ κατὰ βαρβάρων ἐγεῖραι τρόπαια;[88] cf. 4.10.1). Generally speaking, Caracalla adopts and exaggerates all of Severus' negative qualities.[89] He eventually turns into "a tyrannical distorted image of his father",[90] and Severus' pedagogical methods prove to have been insufficient. The latter hopes that changing his name along with forcing him to marry (Hdn. 3.10.5–6) might call his older son to reason, while a demonstration of financial and military abundance and power could become a motive for the brothers to unite (Hdn. 3.13.4–5). At this moment, Severus' vices emerge: he projects onto his sons what he himself would enthusiastically pursue.[91] Particularly regarding Caracalla, Severus' failure as a father and educator is illustrated by the fact that he himself is not the right exemplar to be imitated by his son.[92] The young emperor is unable to absorb the virtues his father preached about, not only because his character is corrupted but also because Severus only advocated those principles in theory.[93]

Severus dies in anxiety and sadness due to his children's way of life (Hdn. 3.14.1: ἀσχάλλοντι, 3.15.2: λύπῃὸτὸ πλεῖστον διαφθαρείς), just like M. Aurelius who, on his

87 For the repeated identical patterns of action between Severus and his son see Zimmermann (1999) 210–211.

88 "He wanted to gain the glory of victory […] and to raise monuments for victories against the barbarians".

89 Zimmermann (1999) 207; e.g. Severus' occasional aggressiveness (Hdn. 3.6.1: πάντα μὲν ἐκθύμως πράττων, ὀργῆς δὲ ἥττων ὢν φύσει: "He brought furious energy to all his actions and was by nature short-tempered") and cruelty (Hdn. 3.2.3–5, 3.8.1–3, 3.8.7–8) is turned into ruthless bloodthirstiness by his son (see previously; D.C. 78[77].6.1a); for the attacks against the Parthians as a concrete example for the comparison see Zimmermann (1999) 213–214.

90 "tyrannisches Zerrbild seines Vaters" (Zimmermann [1999] 207, see also 206).

91 Zimmermann (1999) 200.

92 "Die These, daß sich an Geta and Caracalla die Folgen einer verfehlten Erziehung durch einen hierfür ungeeigneten Vater studieren lassen, versucht Herodian […] zu stützen" (Zimmermann [1999] 207); cf. X. *Mem.* 1.2.17: τοὺς διδάσκοντας […] αὐτοὺς δεικνύντας τε τοῖς μανθάνουσιν, ἥπερ αὐτοὶ ποιοῦσιν ἃ διδάσκουσι, καὶ τῷ λόγῳ προσβιβάζοντας: "all teachers show their disciples how they themselves practice what they teach, and persuade them by argument".

93 As will be suggested below, the lack of virtues' practical appliance is what makes an advocator of philosophy or moral life, in general, a caricature.

deathbed, seems to be really worried about Commodus' upbringing (Hdn. 1.3.1–4.7).[94] Nonetheless, the ascent of Commodus and Severus' sons is not debated but rather granted in the text. In a broader sense, it might be suggested that Severus was unable to reverse the succession since Caracalla and Geta had clearly overpowered him with their already corrupted and intractable characters. Commodus' unsuitability for the throne, though, was – at least in Herodian's text – still not a settled fact and only detected by his father's insightfulness (also in D.C. 73[72].1.2: καί μοι δοκεῖ […] ὁ Μᾶρκος σαφῶς προγνῶναι and *HA Marc.* 28.10). Therefore, theoretically, Marcus could have protected Rome by not choosing Commodus as his heir. However, according to Hekster ([2002] 25), "the dynastic principle was too engrained in Roman imperial succession to ignore".[95] It was then nearly impossible for Commodus, as a natural son, to be excluded from power,[96] and Marcus could only offer him either the throne or the death blow.[97] Interestingly enough, in the *Historia Augusta* it is explicitly stated that he indeed would prefer Commodus' premature death (*HA Marc.* 28.10: *fertur filium mori voluisse*),[98] while, if we trust Dio, Severus blamed Marcus for not eliminating his son (D.C. 77[76].14.7: τὸν Μᾶρκον αἰτιασάμενος ὅτι τὸν Κόμμοδον οὐχ ὑπεξεῖλε),[99] a crime that he himself refrained from committing against Caracalla (D.C. 77[76].14.7: πολλάκις δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς τῷ υἱεῖ ἀπειλήσας τοῦτο ποιήσειν). We cannot be sure whether M. Aurelius actually ever considered passing over his son as heir, but his actions to promote him are well-attested:[100] he enhanced his prestige and granted him social and military recognition. Commodus became the youngest consul in Rome, was integrated into the political stage, and had a place to rule next to his father (*HA Comm.* 2.4–5, 12.4–6; *HA Marc.* 16.1–2, 17.3).[101] After all, whether Marcus was betrayed by his judgment (Jul. *Caes.* 312a: τὰ περὶ τὸν υἱὸν […] πολυπραγμονῶν ἁμαρτήματα)[102] or was unable to

94 For similarities between Severus' and M. Aurelius' last moments in Herodian's narrative see Chrysanthou (2020) 630; Chrysanthou (2022a) 205–207, 252–253; Mallan (2022) 49 with n. 12.

95 For Roman monarchy, the transfer of power to a biological son represented the continuation of a well-ordered universe (Kemezis [2014] 45; see 45–47).

96 Even if Marcus Aurelius had adopted someone else or disinherited his son, Commodus would still have had the right to claim the throne or could have contested this decision of disinheritance (Hekster [2002] 28). Hekster ([2002] 29) continues by mentioning the high risk of civil war if Commodus was ignored as a successor.

97 Hekster (2002) 30, cf. 25–30; Hekster (2005a) 208–209.

98 See previously for the whole passage; cf. Kemezis (2014) 46 with n. 45.

99 Zimmermann ([1999] 201 with n. 252) regards this passage as fabricated; cf. Galimberti (2014) 58.

100 In 1.17.4 of *Meditations*, Marcus expresses his gratefulness for not having children devoid of intelligence or physically deformed (τὸ παιδία μοι ἀφυῆ μὴ γενέσθαι μηδὲ κατὰ τὸ σωμάτιον διάστροφα), which could potentially indicate the hope to be succeeded by a son; see Zimmermann (1999) 37 with n. 98.

101 See Mattingly/Sydenham (1968) 207–268; Hekster (2002) 32–39.

102 See 312a–c; cf. Hekster (2011) 318.

act against his son – even though he foresaw his vices – due to social or personal[103] commitment issues, Commodus' ascent to power proves to be destructive and so does Marcus' choice to entrust him with his legacy.

It should be mentioned at this point that both emperors tried to educate[104] their sons themselves (D.C. 78[77].12.3: πᾶσι τοῖς ἐς ἀρετὴν τείνουσι,[105] 72[71].36.4: θρέψας καὶ παιδεύσας ὡς οἷόν τε ἦν ἄριστα[106]) and, in addition, to find the best teachers for the boys, even while they were absent from their lives for an extended period of time: "Marcus spent his son's whole youth in wars",[107] and Severus most probably did the same.[108] The lack of close paternal supervision and guidance contributed to the youngsters deviating from the road of virtue,[109] a possibility that Marcus had taken into consideration (Hdn. 1.3.1). In the end, both Commodus and Caracalla misused their inherited power (Hdn. 5.1.6: ἀποχρῶνταί τε καὶ ἐνυβρίζουσιν ὡς ἄνωθεν ἰδίῳ κτήματι) proving themselves to be unworthy of the Romans' expectations and their fathers' aspirations. These cases of failures prompt us to consider to what extent the political and military successes of Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus hindered them from properly training and educating worthy successors.

3 Interpreting the Ambiguous Pairs: Pretexts and Intertexts

Herodian's presentation of two young emperors' inability to be taught and improve their characters along with their fathers' ineffective role in the educational process constitutes a well-established recurrent theme that can be traced in many texts of various genres and authors. These figures of unteachable people are typically comical and this is the reason why they 'star' mostly in works with comic coloring (such as comedies, satires, satirical compositions). As a result, the fact that – to some extent – Herodian depicts Commodus and Caracalla as 'laughing stocks' (Hdn. 1.14.8: καταγέλαστον

103 This would be odd for Marcus Aurelius since he advocated common interest (*Med.* 3.4: κοινωφελὲς), which should have been, according to him, the only goal of conduct (*Med.* 12.20: μὴ ἐπ᾽ ἄλλο τι ἢ ἐπὶ τὸ κοινωνικὸν τέλος τὴν ἀναγωγὴν ποιεῖσθαι; see also 10.6).

104 For the topic of *paideia* see Zimmermann (1999) 29–31, 36–37, 45, 62, 233–237; Hekster (2002) 32 with n. 83; Chrysanthou (2020) 631; Roberto (2022).

105 "[Severus] had trained Caracalla in absolutely all the pursuits that tended to excellence"; cf. Hdn. 3.10.1–5, 13.1–6, 14.1–2, 14.9–15.1.

106 "[Marcus] reared and educated his son in the best possible way"; cf. Hdn. 1.2.2, 1.5.3–4.

107 Kemezis (2014) 48. Commodus must have been around eight years old when his father left for war, and in his early teenage years when Marcus saw him again (175 CE, Hekster [2002] 35–38).

108 Severus comes back from his expedition in the East when his sons were in the age of manhood (Hdn. 3.10.1: ἐς ἡλικίαν ἐφήβων ἤδη τελοῦντας; cf. Whittaker [1969] 325 with n. 1).

109 According to Wiedemann ([1992] 169) Marcus Aurelius was obliged to ensure the resumption of *ludi* and *munera* "during his absences on the northern frontier", which allowed Commodus "to become more interested in the arena".

αὐτὸν,[110] 4.8.2: καὶὀχλεύης εἴδομεν ἀξίας εἰκόνας,[111] 4.8.5: ἐγελᾶτο,[112] 4.9.3: ἐκεῖνον δὲ χλευαζόντων[113]) cannot be coincidental.

Plautus will be the first example since he raises the issue of how crucial it is for a child's upbringing that the father, a figure that usually serves as an exemplar, is present and adheres to moral principles. Philolaches, in the play *Mostellaria*, clearly manifests the role of parents by comparing them with builders. They are responsible for building their children's characters with solid foundations so that they can be preserved and sustained through the years (Plaut. *Mostell.* 119–122: *homines aedium esse similis arbitremini. / primumdum parentes fabri liberum sunt: / i fundamentum supstruont liberorum; / extollunt, parant sedulo in firmitatem*: "You should consider man to be similar to a house. First, parents are the builders of their children: they lay their children's foundation. They raise them, eagerly prepare them to be strong").[114] In the play *Bacchides*, the necessity of solidarity between a father and an educator is indicated as well as the consequent obstacles that the lack of cooperation between them creates (Plaut. *Bacch.* 447–448: [Lydus:] *hocine hic pacto potest / inhibere imperium magister, si ipsus primus uapulet?*: "Can a teacher exert authority here under such conditions, if he himself is the first to get a thrashing?").[115] Specifically, Pistoclerus is seen by his tutor, Lydus, entering a house of "ill-repute" to meet his mistress, Bacchis (Plaut. *Bacch.* 109–169). Lydus is instantly disappointed in his student's habits and points out that his efforts to guide him down the path of morality were eventually in vain as Pistoclerus proved to be an ineducable student.[116] His father, Philoxenus, though does not seem to be really interested in reforming his son's conduct by at least rebuking him (Plaut. *Bacch.* 409–410: *minus mirandum est illaec aetas si quid illorum facit / quam si non faciat. feci ego istaec itidem in adulescentia*: "It's less of a surprise if a man of that age does

110 ὡς εἶναι καταγέλαστον αὐτὸν ὑφ᾽ ἑνὶ σχήματι καὶ θηλειῶν πολυτέλειαν καὶ ἡρώων ἰσχὺν μιμούμενον: "making himself a laughing-stock by wearing clothes which gave the impression of feminine extravagance and heroic strength at the same time".

111 ἔσθ᾽ ὅπου δὲ καὶ χλεύης εἴδομεν ἀξίας εἰκόνας, ἐν γραφαῖς ἑνὸς σώματος ὑπὸ περιφερείᾳ κεφαλῆς μιᾶς ὄψεις ἡμιτόμους δύο, Ἀλεξάνδρου τε καὶ Ἀντωνίνου: "In some places we saw some ludicrous pictures portraying a single body surmounted by a head whose circumference was split into two half faces, one of Alexander and one of Antoninus".

112 πάνυ τε ὢν ψιλοκόρσης, πλόκαμον ἐπιθεῖναι τῷ πυρὶ ζητῶν ἐγελᾶτο: "He made himself an object of derision by wanting to throw a lock of his hair upon the fire, as he was almost completely bald"; for the context, the reenactment of Patroclus' funeral, see Hdn. 4.8.3–5.

113 ἐκεῖνον δὲ χλευαζόντων ὅτι δὴ μικρὸς ὢν Ἀλέξανδρον καὶ Ἀχιλλέα γενναιοτάτους καὶ μεγίστους ἥρωας ἐμιμεῖτο: "[…] jeering at him for imitating Alexander and Achilles who were very strong, tall men, while he himself was only a small man"; for the context of the Alexandrians' mockery against Caracalla see 4.9.2–3.

114 Plaut. *Mostell.* 126: *expoliunt: docent litteras, iura, leges*: "They polish them: they teach them literature, laws, and statutes"; cf. 117–130.

115 See also Plaut. *Bacch.* 437–448.

116 Plaut. *Bacch.* 164–165: [Lydus:] *nimio es tu ad istas res discipulus docilior / quam ad illa quae te docui, ubi operam perdidi*: "You are a much more docile student of those subjects [namely, vices] than of the ones I taught you, where I've wasted my effort"; see also 132–137, 146–154, 159–167.

some of those things than if he doesn't. I too did this in my youth").[117] In this case, the father's personal deviation from virtuous principles and his detachment from his son's educational advancement is what has caused his tutor to appear as unsuccessful: "If it weren't for you, I would have turned him into a decent man" (Plaut. *Bacch.*, Lydus in v. 412). Even though Philoxenus eventually realizes his mistakes concerning Pistoclerus' misconduct (Plaut. *Bacch.* 1076–1083), his own vices emerge in the final scene when he succumbs to Bacchis' charm (Plaut. *Bacch.* 1155a–1206).[118]

The motif of ineducable students and unsuccessful teachers of (mainly philosophical) virtues also occurs in Aristophanes. In his play *Clouds*, Phidippides is a corrupted, lazy young boy (see e. g. Ar. *Nu.* 10–16, 25–32), urged by his father, Strepsiades, to enroll in Socrates' school (Ar. *Nu.* 85–125, 826–841) and give up his current discourteous manners (Ar. *Nu.* 88: ἔκτρεψον [...] τοὺς σαυτοῦ τρόπους). After the young boy's tuition, though, Phidippides is presented as a violent, insolent, immoral man (Ar. *Nu.* 1321 ff). He beats up his parents (Ar. *Nu.* 1322: [Strepsiades:] μοι τυπτομένῳ πάσῃ τέχνῃ; cf. 1321–1446),[119] while using arguments to justify his actions and to prove them right.[120] Consequently, despite Strepsiades' high hopes concerning his son's education and moral improvement (Ar. *Nu.* 1457),[121] his choice to trust Socrates' instructional methods is proved − according to the text − to be mistaken.[122] In the end, he admits his preference for his son's previous "commitment" to the horses (Ar. *Nu.* 1406–1407: ἵππευε [...] ἔμοιγε κρεῖττόν ἐστιν / ἵππων τρέφειν τέθριππον ἢ τυπτόμενον ἐπιτριβῆναι[123]). Moreover, in Lucian's text *Hermotimus*, a philosopher is blamed for a child's corrupted character, and the inability of philosophy to mold virtuous people is highlighted. In particular, Lycinus narrates an incident in which an uncle of a student complains about his nephew's immorality despite his philosophical studies: "And what about my hopes in sending the young man to you in the first place? [...] As for passion

117 Plaut. *Bacch.* 416–418; for Lydus' and Philoxenus' episode see 406–498.

118 Moreover, Nicobulus, Mnesilochus' father, constitutes a similar paternal figure in the play: he enjoys − like Mnesilochus − a prostitute's company (Plaut. *Bacch.* 1193–1206), as one of many fathers who "turn into their sons' rivals" at such places (Plaut. *Bacch.* 1210: *apud lenones riuales filiis fierent patres*).

119 For Phidippides' behavior after his apprenticeship see Ar. *Nu.* 1321–1378, 1409–1451.

120 Ar. *Nu.* 1405: [Phidippides:] οἶμαι διδάξειν ὡς δίκαιον τὸν πατέρα κολάζειν: "I'm sure I can demonstrate that it's right to spank one's father"; cf. 1331–1344, 1378–1446.

121 At first, Strepsiades regarded Socrates' school as his salvation (Ar. *Nu.* 77: ἢν ἢν ἀναπείσω τουτονί, σωθήσομαι: "if I can talk this boy into, I will be saved").

122 On a closer look, Phidippides is not the only ineducable student in the text: Strepsiades himself also attended Socrates' lessons without success and was suspended for his inability to learn (Ar. *Nu.* 783: [Socrates:] οὐκ ἂν διδαξαίμην σ᾽ ἔτι: "I am not going to teach you any longer", 785: εὐθὺς ἐπιλήθει σύ γ᾽ ἅττ᾽ ἂν καὶ μάθῃς: "you immediately forget anything you've learned"; cf. 427–509, 627–804).

123 "Back to the cavalry [...] I'd much rather support a four-horse team than get beaten to a pulp". Disappointment over philosophical education is also evident in the parody *Silloi* written by Timon of Phlius, in which a student laments about his futilely wasted fortune in philosophical schools (840 SH=66 D, see Clayman [2009] 146–148; for fragments see Lloyd-Jones/Parsons [1983] 391–392; Diels [1901] 202; Di Marco [1989] 98). Cf. Luc. *Herm.* 1–6, 23, 25, 60, 71, 83.

and anger and shamelessness and recklessness and lying, he was far better last year than he is now" (Luc. *Herm.* 81).[124]

Moving beyond purely comical and satirical contexts, one of the most relevant and famous cases are Critias and Alcibiades, who were Socrates' students[125] but proved to be emblematic figures of corrupted men.[126] Alcibiades was an Athenian politician and military commander, a man with uneven nature – according to our sources (Plu. *Alc*. 16.6: φύσεως ἀνωμαλίαν) – who is considered to be corrupted by his luxurious way of life (Plu. *Alc*. 16.1: τρυφὴν τῆς διαίτης; Plu. *Comp. Alc. Cor*. 3.1: τρυφὴν καὶ ἀκολασίαν; cf. Th. 6.15.3), and drawn by rivalry, preeminence (Plu. *Alc*. 2.1: τὸ φιλόνεικον ἰσχυρότατον ἦν καὶὸτὸ φιλόπρωτον),[127] distinction and fame (Plu. *Alc*. 6.3: φιλοτιμίας […] φιλοδοξίας). Critias is perceived as an immoral, cruel person[128] and a leading member of the Thirty Tyrants (404/3 BCE: Arist. *Ath*. 33–41; X. *HG* 2.3.11–4.23), whom Philostratus characterizes as "the most evil of all men, who possess a reputation for evil" (Philostr. *VS* 1.16: κάκιστος ἀνθρώπων ἔμοιγε φαίνεται ξυμπάντων, ὧν ἐπὶ κακίᾳ ὄνομα). It is obvious, then, why these two men could be clearly treated as ineducable students of philosophy: their characters did not improve, and Socrates failed to instill moderation and virtue into them, while he was later proclaimed responsible for their corruption (Aeschin. *In Tim*. 173: Σωκράτην […] ἀπεκτείνατε, ὅτι Κριτίαν ἐφάνη πεπαιδευκώς: "you put to death Socrates […] because he was shown to have been the teacher of Critias").[129] Furthermore, there is one interesting connection between Commodus and Critias: Commodus put up a statue of himself as an archer[130] in front of the senate-house, aiming to inspire the senators with fear (Hdn. 1.14.9). After his death it was removed and replaced by a Statue of Liberty, a sign that his reign was a byword for slavery (Hdn. 1.15.1: τὸν μὲν οὖν ἀνδριάντα μετὰ τὴν ἐκείνου τελευτὴν καθελοῦσα ἡ σύγκλητος Ἐλευθερίας εἰκόνα ἵδρυσεν). Similarly, when Critias died, a memorial is attested for

124 τὰ δ' ἄλλα ὧν ἐξ ἀρχῆς ἐπιθυμῶν συνέστησά σοι τὸν νεανίσκον, ὁ δ' οὐδὲν ἀμείνων γεγένηται διὰ σέ […] τὰ μὲν γὰρ ἐς ὀργὴν καὶ θυμὸν καὶ ἀναισχυντίαν καὶ ἐς τόλμαν καὶ ψεῦδος μακρῷ τινι ἄμεινον εἶχε πέρυσιν ἢ νῦν; cf. Ath. 3.103b–c with Kock (1888) 328–329 and Olson (2014) 94. Eupolis also offers a variety of accusations against philosophers (especially Socrates) and sophists who seem unable to educate their students, such as fr. 367 K.-A. (337 K.) with Storey (2011) 248–249 and Olson (2014) 92–93; fr. 388 K.-A. (353 K.) with Storey (2011) 254–255 and Olson (2014) 138–139.

125 Especially Alcibiades was said to have been 'mastered' by his love for the philosopher Socrates (Plu. *Alc*. 6.1: Σωκράτους ἔρως […] ἐκράτει τοῦ Ἀλκιβιάδου, cf. 4.1–2; see also Pl. *Smp*. 215–222).

126 X. *Mem*. 1.2.14: ἐγενέσθην μὲν γὰρ δὴ τὼ ἄνδρε τούτω φύσει φιλοτιμοτάτω πάντων Ἀθηναίων: "The ambition was the very life-blood of both: no Athenian was ever like them".

127 Cf. X. *Mem*. 1.2.12: τῶν ἐν τῇ δημοκρατίᾳ πάντων ἀκρατέστατός τε καὶ ὑβριστότατος: "exceeded all in licentiousness and arrogance under democracy".

128 See e.g. X. *HG* 2.3.15: προπετὴς ἦν ἐπὶ τὸ πολλοὺς ἀποκτείνειν: "eager to put many to death"; cf. 2.3.15–17, 2.3.24–34; Philostr. *VS* 1.16: ὠμότητι δὲ καὶ μιαιφονίᾳ τοὺς τριάκοντα ὑπερεβάλλετο: "in savagery and bloodthirstiness he surpassed the Thirty Tyrants"; cf. X. *Mem*. 1.2.12.

129 Cf. X. *Mem*. 1.2.12: Ἀλλ' ἔφη γε ὁ κατήγορος, Σωκράτει ὁμιλητὰ γενομένω Κριτίας τε καὶ Ἀλκιβιάδης πλεῖστα κακὰ τὴν πόλιν ἐποιησάτην: "his accuser argued, having become associates of Socrates, Critias and Alcibiades did a great deal of harm to the state"; see 1.2.12–48.

130 For this statue see Zimmermann (1999) 134; Hekster (2005a) 211–212.

him, depicting personified Oligarchy carrying torches and setting Democracy on fire.[131] Additionally, Philostratus (*VS* 1.16) wonders why the highly educated (ἄριστα μὲν ἦν πεπαιδευμένος) Critias with honored ancestry (ἐς Δρωπίδην δ᾽ ἀναφέρων, ὃς μετὰ Σόλωνα Ἀθηναίοις ἦρξεν[132]) did not grow up to be like his teacher of philosophy, namely Socrates, who was a man with the reputation of being "the wisest and most just of his times" (ἄτοπον Σωκράτει […] μὴ ὁμοιωθῆναι αὐτόν ᾧ πλεῖστα δὴ συνεφιλοσόφησε σοφωτάτῳ τε καὶ δικαιοτάτῳ τῶν ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ δόξαντι). This question could easily be applied to Commodus, who, weirdly enough, is portrayed by Herodian as having nothing in common with his father, philosopher, and educator M. Aurelius, despite his noble lineage.

At the same time, it cannot be ignored that Alcibiades' guardian was Pericles (Pl. *Alc*. 2.143e: Περικλέα τὸν σεαυτοῦ ἐπίτροπόν; cf. Pl. *Alc*. 1.124c), whose principles and – allegedly – purely democratic ideas were again unable to tame the young man's depraved character.[133] However, Pericles was a controversial figure on the Athenian political stage and thus could be placed in the aforementioned pattern of fathers (or guardians in this case) who may not uphold the moral principles they themselves seek for their sons (or wards). He is described by numerous sources as a man who "seduced the audience"[134] due to his charming – but not always implemented[135] – words (X. *Mem.*, 2.6.13: ἤκουσα μέν, ὅτι Περικλῆς πολλὰς ἐπίσταιτο, ἃς ἐπᾴδων τῇ πόλει ἐποίει αὐτὴν φιλεῖν αὐτόν: "I have heard that Pericles knew many (spells) and cast them on the city, and so made her love him";[136] Pl. *Phdr.* 269e: [Socrates:] ὁ Περικλῆς πάντων

131 Ober (2005) 237–238; Tuozzo (2011) 59–60; Tanner (2018) 298–299; Moore/Raymond (2019) 20.

132 "His family dated back to Dropides who was archon at Athens after Solon"; for Alcibiades' also glorious family lineage see Pl. *Alc.* 1.103a, 121a; Plu. *Alc*. 1.1; Stuttard (2018) xv–xviii.

133 Alcibiades is presented as a man who rejects "the democratic ideal of equality" (Balot [2001] 170; see e. g. Th. 2.37.1, 6.16.4), "the democratic norms that once had held Athens together as a political community" (Balot [2001] 168; see e. g. Th. 8.47.2: ὅτι ἐπ᾽ ὀλιγαρχίᾳ βούλεται […] κατελθών: "he wished to come home on condition of there being an oligarchy"; Plu. *Alc*. 16.2), and also "Pericles' civic eros" (Balot [2001] 170; cf. e. g. Th. 2.43.1: τῆς πόλεως δύναμιν καθ᾽ ἡμέραν ἔργῳ θεωμένους καὶ ἐραστὰς γιγνομένους: "fix your gaze upon the power of Athens and become lovers of her" and 6.92.2: τῇ ἐμαυτοῦ μετὰ τῶν πολεμιωτάτων, φιλόπολίς ποτε δοκῶν εἶναι, νῦν ἐγκρατῶς ἐπέρχομαι: "I, who seemed once to be a lover of my city, now make an assault with all my might upon her"; for Alcibiades as traitor see Th. 6.88.9–93.1), in order to ardently pursue personal ambitions, power, glory, pleasure, and wealth (cf. e. g. Th. 6.12.2, 6.15.2–3, 6.16; Plu. *Alc.* 2.1, 6.2–3, 15.3, 16, 17.2; for Pericles' opposed presentation see Th. 2.40.1, 2.60.5–7, 2.65.5, 2.65.7–11; Plu. *Per.* 7.4–5, 15.5). For Alcibiades as Pericles' successor, and a comparison between them see Balot (2001) 159–172; Mara (2009) 119–123; Matzouranis (2018). In the following analysis, though, it will become obvious that Pericles and Alcibiades "might have been both similar and different" (Mara [2009] 122).

134 Christodoulou (2013) 238, see 238–239, 241–242, 247, 251–252.

135 See Cratinus fr. 326 K.-A.: λόγοισι προάγει Περικλέης, ἔργοισι δ᾽ οὐδὲ κινεῖ ("In word has Pericles pushed the thing; in fact he does not budge it", see also Plu. *Per.* 13.5) and fr. 327 K.-A: γλῶττάν τέ σοι / δίδωσιν ἐν δήμῳ φορεῖν / καλῶν λόγων ἀείνων, / ᾗ πάντα κινήσεις λέγων ("Offers you a tongue with fine flowing words to wield among the people, with which you will sway all when you speak"). Cf. Christodoulou (2013) 237–238.

136 Socrates' 'opinion'; see also X. *Mem.* 2.6.10 ff. Cf. Christodoulou (2013) 238–239.

τελεώτατος εἰς τὴν ῥητορικὴν γενέσθαι: "The supreme master of all in respect to rhetoric";[137] Plu. *Per.* 8.1–4), a tyrant[138] unable to control his personal desires and passions,[139] acting solely for his own political motives and goals.[140] Even Thucydides, who was one of his biggest supporters,[141] admits that Periclean democracy existed "only in name",[142] while Athens "gradually became, in fact, a government ruled by its foremost citizen" (Th. 2.65.10: ἐγίγνετόὸτε λόγῳὸμὲν δημοκρατία, ἔργῳ δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ πρώτου ἀνδρὸς ἀρχή).[143]

In Xenophon's work *Memorabilia*, Pericles is presented as being carried away by Alcibiades' arguments and opinions (X. *Mem.* 1.2.40–46) and in the end, "contests the nature of democratic law"[144] (X. *Mem.* 1.2.43: Alc.: Καὶ ἂν τύραννος οὖν κρατῶν τῆς πόλεως γράψηὸτοῖς πολίταις ἃ χρὴὸποιεῖν, καὶὸταῦτα νόμος ἐστί;: "If, then, a tyrant, being the sovereign power, enacts what the citizens are to do, are his orders also law?" / Per.: Καὶ ὅσα τύραννος ἄρχων, φάναι, γράφει, καὶὸταῦτα νόμος καλεῖται: "Yes,

137 See also Pl. *Phdr.* 269. Plutarch, using Plato's words, writes that Pericles proved rhetoric to be "an enchantment of the soul" (*Per.* 15.4: ἔδειξε τὴν ῥητορικὴν κατὰ Πλάτωνα ψυχαγωγίαν οὖσαν). According to some sources, Pericles' art of speaking was inspired by his teacher Anaxagoras (Pl. *Phdr.* 270a; Plu. *Per.* 4.4–6; for the ironic innuendos see Pl. *Phd.* 97d–99 with Emlyn-Jones/Preddyn [2022] 497 n. 114). Pericles – according to Plutarch – was also closely linked with Zenon, and Protagoras (Plu. *Per.* 4.3–6, 8, 32, 36.2–3); cf. Pl. *Alc.* 1.118c; Monoson/Loriaux (1998) 295.

138 Comic poets – mostly and clearly – vigorously attack Pericles; e. g. Cratinus (fr. 171 K.-A. 22–23: ὡς δὲ τυραννίδος ἀρχὴ λ[έλυται / δῆμος δὲ κρατεῖ: "Now that the rule of tyranny <is over> and the people rule", similarly fr. 258 K.-A; for Cratinus' fragments see Kassel/Austin [1983]; cf. Plu. *Per.* 3.3–4) presents "Pericles' death as the end of tyranny" (Christodoulou [2013] 237; cf. Gomme [1956] 188–189). Pericles is also compared to Peisistratus (Plu. *Per.* 7.1: καὶ γὰρ ἐδόκει Πεισιστράτῳ τῷ τυράννῳ τὸ εἶδος ἐμφερὴς εἶναι: "it was thought that in feature he was like the tyrant Peisistratus", see also 15–16; cf. Cratinus fr. 258 K.-A.; Christodoulou [2013] 234–235); cf. also Tamiolaki (2016) 14–24.

139 For the criticism of Pericles' sexual conduct see Plu. *Per.* 13.9–12, 32 with Christodoulou (2013) 235–236.

140 Christodoulou (2013) 232–233, 236.

141 Th. 2.65.5: καὶ ἐγένετο ἐπ' ἐκείνου μεγίστη ("it was under him that Athens reached the height of her greatness", see also 1.139.4, 2.65.1–13); cf. Monoson/Loriaux (1998) 286; Mara (2009) 112–113; Christodoulou (2013) 233–234, 240–252. Nevertheless, "the way Thucydides has presented Pericles 'democracy' does not constitute historical reality. It is rather […] a literary representation of the ideal relationship between the charismatic leader, the constitution and the citizens" (Christodoulou [2013] 253–254; cf. Foster [2010] 119–218).

142 Thompson ([2009] 81) states that "the only lasting model of an anti-tyrannical posture is not found in Pericles, the doer of deeds, but in the historian who shapes his memory" (cf. Straus [1964] 229–230). For the characterization of Pericles' rule as "a tyranny" see Th. 2.63.2: ὡς τυραννίδα γὰρ ἤδη ἔχετε αὐτήν; cf. also Th. 1.122.3, 1.124.3, 3.36.6–40.7; Ar. *Eq.* 1111–1114. For a discussion see Gomme (1956) 175–176; Strauss (1964) 169; Monoson/Loriaux (1998) 286–287; Thompson (2009) 90–91.

143 "Thucydides was no radical democrat […]. If Pericles had not maintained this aristocratic authority, it is doubtful whether Thucydides […] would have accepted him so warmly" (Chambers [1957] 82). For Thucydidean criticism of Pericles see Strauss (1964) 144–145, 151–154, 229–231; Monoson/Loriaux (1998); Balot (2001) 148–149; Mara (2009) 112–116.

144 Tamiolaki (2016) 15. Danzig ([2014] 20) declares that "Pericles deserved the treatment he received at Alcibiades' hands, since as leader of the government he ought to have had some understanding of law".

whatever a tyrant as ruler enacts is also known as law").[145] Moreover, Socrates in Plato's work *Gorgias* states that Pericles has corrupted the Athenian citizens and made them "idle, cowardly, talkative, and avaricious" (Pl. *Grg*. 515e: Περικλέα πεποιηκέναι Ἀθηναίους ἀργοὺς καὶὀδειλοὺς καὶ λάλους καὶἀφιλαργύρους)[146] while concluding that the notorious Athenian general "was not a good statesman" (Pl. *Grg*. 516d: Οὐκ ἄρ᾽ ἀγαθὸς τὰ πολιτικὰ Περικλῆς ἦν, see 515e–516a).[147] The fact that Pericles may be included among the cases of unsuitable paternal figures concerning his inability to provide a worthy 'successor'[148] is likewise underlined by his attempts to educate Alcibiades, which, unlike Marcus' and Severus', were not particularly deliberate or serious.[149] Specifically – according to our sources – the young boy was entrusted to Zopyrus, a Thracian common slave (Plu. *Lyc*. 16.4: Ζώπυρον ἐπέστησε παιδαγωγὸν Περικλῆς, οὐδέν τι τῶν ἄλλων διαφέροντα δούλων), "so old as to be the most useless of all the other slaves in Pericles' household" (Pl. *Alc*. 1.122b: Περικλῆς ἐπέστησε παιδαγωγὸν τῶν οἰκετῶν τὸν ἀχρειότατον ὑπὸ γήρως).

With that being said, even though Commodus, Caracalla – but also Alcibiades – are political and military figures whose careers are stigmatized by lust, violence, and arrogance, the responsibility of an unsuccessful father (or fatherly figure) or/and educator is again pointed out. Consequently, the status of Marcus and Severus as fathers and therefore as rulers is at stake. Especially Severus, who – as was mentioned before – clearly failed to embody the virtues he extolled, raises the issue of philosophical virtues applied solely in theory. A comic motif enters the picture here again. The satirist Lucian persistently highlights in his works the failure of these virtues' practical application and at the same time criticizes people who are "clever only in words" (Luc. *Symp.*

145 For the dialogue between Pericles' son and Socrates (X. *Mem*. 3.5) as "a rewriting of Athenian history based on un-Periclean principles" by Xenophon see Tamiolaki (2016) 20–24.

146 See also Plu. *Per*. 9.1: πολλοὶ πρῶτον ὑπ᾽ ἐκείνου φασὶ τὸν δῆμον ἐπὶ κληρουχίας καὶ θεωρικὰ καὶ μισθῶν διανομὰς προαχθῆναι, κακῶς ἐθισθέντα καὶ γενόμενον πολυτελῆ καὶ ἀκόλαστον ὑπὸ τῶν τότε πολιτευμάτων: "But many others say that the people was first led on by him into allotments of public lands, festival-grants, and distributions of fees for public services, thereby falling into bad habits, and becoming luxurious and wanton under the influence of his public measures"; cf. Herodian's similar statement on Severus' soldiers, who are lured into greediness by the emperor himself (Hdn. 3.8.5: χρημάτων τε ἐπιθυμεῖν διδάξας καὶ μεταγαγὼν ἐς τὸ ἁβροδίαιτον: "teaching the men to be greedy for riches and seducing them into a life of luxury").

147 See also Th. 2.59.1–65.4 and Plu. *Per*. 24.1–6, 30.4, 32; cf. Ar. *Ach*. 523–539. On this topic see also Gomme (1956) 182–189.

148 Socrates points out that Pericles (except for Alcibiades) reared two stupid sons, and a mad ward, Cleinias (Pl. *Alc*. 1.118e: Ἐπειδὴ τοίνυν Κλεινίας μὲν μαίνεται, τὼ δὲ Περικλέους υἱέε ἠλιθίω ἐγενέσθην). Alcibiades, in the same conversation, realizes that there is actually no man who "has become wiser through converse with Pericles" (Pl. *Alc*. 1.119a: Soc.: εἰπέ, ὅστις αἰτίαν ἔχει διὰ τὴν Περικλέους συνουσίαν σοφώτερος γεγονέναι […] Alc.: οὐκ ἔχω); for the debate on whether virtues can actually be taught and transmitted in general but also from a father to a son see Pl. *Prt*. 319–328, *Men*. 93–100b, *Alc*. 1.118–119a.

149 "The results of Pericles' indifferent guardianship of Alcibiades are thus laid at his door" (Vickers [2012] 155).

34: περιττοὺς ὄντας ἐν τοῖς λόγοις; cf. 30: ῥημάτια δύστηνα καὶ ἐρωτήσεις μόνον: "nothing but miserable phrase-makers and question-mongers"). He characterizes them as σχήματα φιλοσόφων (Luc. *Symp.* 30: "philosophers in dress"),[150] namely shameful impersonations (Luc. *Pisc.* 32: τὴν αἰσχύνην τῆς ὑποκρίσεως, 46: ἀνδρὶ ὑποκριτῇ φιλοσοφίας)[151] of genuine philosophers who have adopted only the philosophical outward appearance (Luc. *Pisc.* 37: [Frankness:] πώγωνας ἔχουσι καὶ φιλοσοφεῖν φάσκουσι καὶ σκυθρωποί εἰσι [...] ἀλλὰ ἤνεγκα ἄν, εἰ πιθανοὶ γοῦν ἦσαν καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς ὑποκρίσεως αὐτῆς: "they have long beards and claim to be philosophers and look sour [...] I could have put up with it if they were at least convincing in their roles").[152] Unfeigned virtue however can be perceived only through someone's behavior[153] (Luc. *Herm.* 79: [Lycinus:] ἡ μὲν ἀρετὴ ἐν ἔργοις δήπου ἐστίν, οἷον ἐν τῷ δίκαια πράττειν καὶ σοφὰ καὶ ἀνδρεῖα: "virtue lies in action, in acting justly and wisely and bravely") and Lucian predicates that philosophical education is thus pointless if its principles are not practically implemented in everyday life and do not improve someone's character and moral quality (Luc. *Symp.* 34: ὡς οὐδὲν ὄφελος ἦν ἄρα ἐπίστασθαι τὰ μαθήματα, εἰ μή τις καὶ τὸν βίον ῥυθμίζοι πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον[154], see also 35; *Pisc.* 34: τοὺς μὲν λόγους ὑμῶν πάνυ ἀκριβοῦσιν οἱ πολλοὶ αὐτῶν, καθάπερ δὲ ἐπὶ τοῦτο μόνον ἀναγιγνώσκοντες αὐτοὺς καὶ μελετῶντες, ὡς τἀναντία ἐπιτηδεύοιεν, οὕτως βιοῦσιν[155]).

150 In contrast to the people who "truly cultivate philosophy" (Luc. *Pisc.* 37: ἀληθῶς φιλοσοφίαν ζηλοῦντες).

151 They are also perceived as "impostors", see Luc. *Pisc.* 15: γόητας ἄνδρας, 42: πιθανώτεροι γὰρ οἱ γόητες οὗτοι πολλάκις τῶν ἀληθῶς φιλοσοφούντων: "These cheats are often more convincing than the genuine philosophers".

152 See also Luc. *Pisc.* 31: [Frankness:] πολλοὺς οὐκ ἔρωτι φιλοσοφίας ἐχομένους ἀλλὰ δόξης μόνον τῆς ἀπὸ τοῦ πράγματος ἐφιεμένους, καὶ τὰ μὲν πρόχειρα ταῦτα καὶ δημόσια καὶ ὁπόσα παντὶ μιμεῖσθαι ῥᾴδιον εὖ μάλα ἐοικότας ἀγαθοῖς ἀνδράσι, τὸ γένειον λέγω καὶ τὸ βάδισμα καὶ τὴν ἀναβολήν, ἐπὶ δὲ τοῦ βίου καὶ τῶν πραγμάτων ἀντιφθεγγομένους τῷ σχήματι: "many were not in love with Philosophy, but simply coveted the reputation of the thing, and that although in all the obvious, commonplace matters which anyone can easily copy they were very like worthy men (in beard, I mean, and walk and garb), in their life and actions, however, they contradicted their outward appearance", cf. 34; Luc. *Symp.* 35: [Lycinus:] οἰόμενοί τινας εἶναι ἀπὸ τῶν σχημάτων: "thinking that they were men of importance because of the garb they wore". Similarly, Juvenal in his second *Satire* points out that appearances cannot be trusted (2.8: *frontis nulla fides*), cf. Luc. *Herm.* 15–21, *Symp.* 28. On the topos of outward appearance versus philosophical substance see also the first section of this article where we analyze Hdn. 1.9.

153 Luc. *Herm.* 20: [Lycinus:] Πῶς οὖν οἷόν τέ σοι ἦν ἀφ᾽ ὧν ἔφησθα ἐκείνων τῶν γνωρισμάτων διορᾶν τὸν ὀρθῶς φιλοσοφοῦντα ἢ μή; οὐ γὰρ φιλεῖ τὰ τοιαῦτα οὕτω διαφαίνεσθαι, ἀλλ᾽ ἔστιν ἀπόρρητα καὶ ἐν ἀφανεῖ κείμενα, λόγοις καὶ συνουσίαις ἀναδεικνύμενα καὶ ἔργοις τοῖς ὁμοίοις: "How could you distinguish the true philosopher from the false by the marks (of external appearance) you mentioned? Such things are not usually shown in that way; they are secret and not visible, showing themselves in conversation and discussion and corresponding action".

154 [Lycinus:] "It is no good knowing the liberal arts if one doesn't improve his way of living, too".

155 [Frankness:] "most of them (the philosophers' imitators) are thoroughly up in your (Philosophy's) writings, but live as if they read and studied them simply to practice the reverse". For more instances of philosophers' caricatures in Lucian's works, where alleged philosophers behave disgracefully and totally in contrast to philosophical principles, see *Pisc.* 1–15, 17, 24, 29–38, 47–51; *Herm.* 9–13, 15–18, 76–83;

In contrast to Severus and Pericles, Marcus Aurelius indeed went down in history as a true philosopher. Yet although his personality and writings had a huge impact on thousands of people, who were initiated into philosophical thought and acquainted with the benefits of introspection, his words and direct teaching failed to pass on to his son the lessons that his pen had taught to mankind. Septimius Severus, on the other hand, advertised himself as Marcus' and Pertinax's replacement and continuator but clearly ended up being one of Lucian's caricatures of philosophers, a fact which impacted his sons' upbringing and later character and led to the famous fratricide. Eventually, even though he had managed to restore a period of overall stability and order for the empire, he totally failed in maintaining a peaceful family home.[156] In conclusion, despite the honest efforts of both emperors to provide worthy heirs, M. Aurelius and Severus chose poorly, confusing their familial paternal 'law' with Rome's well-being, thus condemning the empire to suffer. These tragic ironies led to their reigns being overshadowed by the underwhelming performances of their sons, which subsequently invite us to rethink to what extent they share the failure of their unworthy successors.

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DMort. 21; *Symp.* (the whole text of Lucian's *Symposium* narrates a philosophers' banquet where these men ridicule themselves due to their short-temperedness, aggressiveness, drunkenness, gluttony, and generally improper behavior); cf. also Juv. 2.1 – 8.

156 According to Christodoulou ([2013] 236 with n. 62) "the leader who has stasis in his own home, who is unable to harmoniously govern his own oikos, is probably unable to govern the city"; cf. Isoc. *Nic.* 41. This remark also applies to Marcus Aurelius since, as previously stated, Lucilla conspired against her brother, Commodus, who rushed her execution.

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