

Ennui and *Alys*:

Conceptions of Complex Boredom in Plutarch



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Abstract

This thesis addresses the conceptualisation of boredom in Plutarch through a survey of relevant lexical terms, and analysis of the depiction of character in the *Moralia* and the *Lives*. A distinction is made between the temporary tedium of simple boredom, and the persistent and spiritual dissatisfaction of complex boredom.

The first chapter is composed of a discussion of the context necessary to understand boredom in an ancient context. It discusses relevant psychological theories for understanding emotion, as well as simple and complex forms of boredom. It also establishes the context for discussing ancient emotions. Depictions of simple and complex boredom in the ancient world prior to the work of Plutarch are summarised and addressed. Similar themes in the works of Seneca, Horace, and Lucretius are also discussed.

The second chapter charts the lexical course of words identified by modern scholarship as relating to concepts of boredom. Their occurrence and significance within Plutarch's oeuvre are discussed. These terms include *ἄλυσ* (boredom), *ἀλύω* (wandering, to be distraught), *ἀκηδία* (lassitude), *ἄση* (surfeit, distress), *ἀπληστία* (insatiate greed), *κόρος* (satiety) and *πλησμονή* (abundance, surfeit). This analysis attempts to identify the underlying semantic field of these terms, and to assess how much these correspond with modern conceptions of boredom. The discussion focusses on the themes of luxury and leisure, revelry, warfare, philosophy, exile, retirement, and dissatisfaction.

The third chapter attempts to contextualise the lexical research through the use of case studies in Plutarch's works. The paired *Lives* of *Pyrrhus* and *Marius* are analysed in terms of the dissatisfaction and insatiable ambitions of their protagonists. The paired *Lives* of *Antonius* and *Demetrius* are discussed in relation to the themes of dissatisfaction, luxurious excess, and the reversal of fortune. The theme of philosophical satisfaction, and the escape from dissatisfaction, are discussed in the context of the *On Exile* and *On Tranquility*.

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Cover Illustration

Philoctetes, red-figure lekythos, c. 420 BCE. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. (<https://www.utexas.edu/courses/larrymyth/images/postwar/E-philocteteslemn.jpg>)

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Introduction

Between Ennui and Ecstasy unwinds our whole experience of time.

(Emil Cioran *All Gall is Divided: Gnomses and Apothegms*, 50)

This thesis seeks to determine an answer to the question to what extent the affective state of complex boredom can be identified in the works of Plutarch. Plutarch is perhaps the perfect source for the identification and analysis of a concept as something as illusory as the occurrence of boredom in ancient literature. Firstly, Plutarch's extant oeuvre is large, detailed, and varied. Secondly, the very nature of Plutarch's work lends itself to the analysis of the subjective field of comparative psychological and emotional states; the *Lives*, with their focus on the character, virtue, and, to some extent, inner life of their subjects, and the *Moralia*, with its often direct interest in understanding the issues of morality, character, and virtue, provide a perfect vantage from which to assail this subject.

Plutarch's position in history and literature is also extremely useful for this study. Plutarch (c. 47-120 C.E.) was writing in Greek during the great regeneration of Greek literature known as the Second Sophistic of the first, second, and third centuries C.E.¹ Plutarch, the minor aristocrat from Chaeroneia, was educated at Athens by the Neo-Platonist philosopher, Ammonius of Lamptrae.² He travelled widely, and lived and lectured in Rome. As such, the works of Plutarch display a vast knowledge of contemporary and earlier Greek literature, and a familiarity with some Latin texts. In many ways, Plutarch straddled the divide between the Greek and Roman worlds of the early Roman empire. Plutarch never provides an unambiguous description or definition of boredom. However, I would argue that he has a familiarity with a concept that would be recognisable to us as complex boredom. He identifies this as an aspect of the characters of several of the subjects in his *Lives*, and returns to this theme in several of the essays in the *Moralia*.

The first chapter is composed of a discussion of the context necessary to

¹ Anderson 1993, 13.

² Gianakaris 1970, 23.

understand boredom in an ancient context. It discusses relevant psychological theories for understanding emotion, as well as simple and complex forms of boredom. It also established the context for discussing ancient emotions. The limited, relevant secondary material, particularly the works of Peter Toohey and Reinhard Kuhn, are discussed. Depictions of simple and complex boredom in the ancient world prior to the work of Plutarch are summarised and addressed. Similar themes in the works of Seneca, Horace, and Lucretius are also discussed.

The second chapter attempts to chart the lexical course of words identified by modern scholarship as relating to concepts of boredom. Their occurrence and significance within Plutarch's oeuvre are discussed. These terms include *ἄλυσ* (boredom), *ἀλύω* (wandering, to be distraught), *ἀκηδία* (lassitude), *ἄση* (surfeit, distress), *ἀπληστία* (insatiate greed), *κόρος* (satiety) and *πλησμονή* (abundance, surfeit). This analysis attempts to identify the underlying semantic field of these terms, and to assess how much these correspond with modern conceptions of boredom. The discussion focusses on the themes of luxury and leisure, revelry, warfare, philosophy, exile, retirement, and dissatisfaction.

The third chapter attempts to contextualise the lexical research through the use of case studies in Plutarch's works. The paired *Lives of Pyrrhus* and *Marius* are analysed in terms of the dissatisfaction and insatiable ambitions of their protagonists. The paired *Lives of Antonius* and *Demetrius* are discussed in relation to the themes of dissatisfaction, luxurious excess, and the reversal of fortune. The theme of philosophical satisfaction, and the escape from dissatisfaction, are discussed in the context of the *On Exile* and *On Tranquility*.

This thesis attempts to contextualise discussions of complex boredom in Plutarch through a survey of relevant lexical terms, and analysis of the depiction of character in the *Moralia* and the *Lives*. While boredom in Plutarch is often superficially alluded to in scholarship, no detailed survey of the subject of boredom in Plutarch has been published. To attempt to fill this hole in the scholarship is the intent of this thesis.

Chapter I

Boredom and Emotion, Modern and Ancient

There are no two ways about it: boredom is not simple. We do not escape boredom...with a gesture of impatience or rejection.

(Barthes *The Pleasure of the Text*, 25)

This chapter is an attempt to contextualise the research into the works of Plutarch presented in the second and third chapters. In this chapter, I briefly outline the modern and ancient context necessary to understand any concept of boredom in the ancient world. It addresses issues of current research and methodology.

The first section is a discussion of relevant psychological theories for understanding emotion in a cross-cultural context. The second section establishes the context for discussing ancient emotions. This consists of a discussion of ancient views of the *παθή*, and the effects of these on character and ethics. The relevant scholarship is also briefly discussed. In the third section, I focus on the conceptualisation of simple and complex forms of boredom in modern literature. This section seeks to provide a summary of the expanding field of research into the psychological underpinnings of boredom. In the final section, I review the depictions of simple and complex boredom in ancient literature prior to the work of Plutarch. Similar themes on complex boredom in the works of Seneca, Horace, and Lucretius are presented. A brief summary of the relevant scholarship, including the work of Kuhn and Toohey, is also presented.

I.i

Modern Emotion

I will now briefly discuss the modern psychological models for understanding emotion. Modern theories of mind generally tend to separate mental processes into three divisions: the cognitive, the conative, and the affective. Incidentally, I believe there is something rather appropriate about this tripartite division of the self, which would have appealed to the Platonist in Plutarch. Affect is constituted of emotion, mood, temperament and sensation. Emotion, as either a state or a process, is a response to certain external or internal stimuli. Beyond this simple consensus, the discipline of psychology varies on how emotion should be understood. The three major schools of thought are that emotion should be understood in terms of evolutionary adaption, socio-cultural forces, or through analysis of the emotional process itself.

I have found the emotional process model proposed by Paul Griffiths helpful in understanding emotion. He suggests that emotion can largely be understood in terms of the 'input' and 'output' sides of emotional response.³ The input side is the stimulus that cause emotional response, and can differ between societies. The output side is the subject's response to the stimuli, and these are largely pan-cultural. He says that 'emotion' is an unhelpful and meaningless term that can be separated into three unique phenomena.⁴

The most basic of these is what he calls "affect program emotions", following Paul Ekman. Affect programs are complex, involving multiple biological and neuro-chemical responses; coordinated, in that they follow recognisable patterns; and automated, in that they require no conscious thought.⁵ These non-cognitive phenomena are the most universal and uncomplicated of affects. The affect program theory, which is not without its detractors, was developed by

³ Griffiths 1997, 55-6.

⁴ Griffiths 1997, 14.

⁵ Griffiths 1997, 75.

Ekman through research into facial expression recognition between remote cultures. Ekman says that “there is unambiguous evidence of universality only for the expressions of happiness, anger, disgust, sadness, and combined fear/surprise.”⁶ Later refinements of the theory have separated fear and surprise into their own affect programs, and suggested the inclusion of contempt as a seventh.⁷

The second tier are emotions that mimic affect programs, and are “socially sustained pretenses.”⁸ The analysis of these emotional phenomena incorporates social constructionist theory into the affect program model. These affects are social constructs that are largely unrecognisable outside of their cultural context.

The third tier, ‘irruptive motivational states’, are the higher cognitive emotions. These include envy, guilt, jealousy, and love.⁹ He suggests that these, in particular, cannot be easily explained by psychological theories. These higher register emotions combine different elements of the basic affect program emotions.

Griffiths makes it clear that the study of emotion, even in a contemporary, English-speaking society, is complicated by the vague language used in this area. Personal, poetic, and scientific vocabularies blend and blur. He notes, for example, that a form of what is called anger can be found in any of the three categories described above.¹⁰ He also notes that there is examples of cultures using hypercognition in relation to specific emotional states, whereby these emotional states are attributed greater social importance and prevalence.

To summarise, the scientific consensus on emotions is that they are complex systems, involving observable biological changes and include a number of conscious and subconscious processes. Psychological theory has largely been unable to construct a unified theory to explain them, particularly with regard to the higher register emotion. This is due to their complexity and their subjectivity, both in individuals and in individual societies. However, we can say that, at the

⁶ Ekman and Oster 1982, 149.

⁷ Griffiths 1997, 78.

⁸ Griffiths 1997, 15-6.

⁹ Griffiths 1997, 9.

¹⁰ Griffiths 1997, 17.

basic output level of affect programs, there are certain universal human emotions. There also exist complex forms or combinations of these basic evolutionary processes, which are shaped by cultural forces and are best understood within their cultural contexts.

Ancient Emotion

In the previous section, it was established that understanding emotion, even in a modern and scientific context, is complex. We can state that there is evidence of some pan-cultural emotions, which we should expect to be depicted in ancient sources. However, the vocabulary used to describe these affects differs between societies, as does how they are conceptualised. Indeed, the circumstances in which certain emotions are evoked (the input) depends, to at least some degree, on the contemporary social mores. The truth of this assumption is clear to even the first-time reader of the *Iliad*, who, when witnessing Achilles' tears of rage and frustration, can empathise with the hero's emotion if not his causes for experiencing it, or the manner in which he expresses it. I would now like to briefly address the idea of emotion in the ancient world.

Primary Sources

Emotions in the ancient world were inextricably bound up with philosophical discourse, ethics, the soul, and the self. One of the most important texts for the study of ancient emotions is the second book of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Aristotle gives this definition:

The emotions are all those affections which cause men to change their opinions in regard to their judgements, and are accompanied by pleasure and pain; such are anger, pity, fear, and all similar emotions and their contraries.

(Aristotle *Rhet.* 2.8.1-9.1, trans. Freese)

Aristotle goes on to say that when considering emotions it is necessary for the inquiry to be split into three parts: analysis of the state of mind leading to the emotional response, towards whom the emotion is directed, and the reasons which

cause it. Each emotion is conceived of as having, at least one, opposite emotion. Cairns suggests that the *πάθος* to which Aristotle refers is a broader category of experience than our term 'emotion', and includes not only psychological responses, but also physiological changes and methods of "evaluating states of affairs in the world."¹¹ Konstan argues that ancient emotions, particularly for Aristotle, reflect agency and effects on social standing.¹² It is for this reason, Konstan suggests, that affects without human agents, such as melancholy and disgust, do not warrant mention in Aristotle's categorisation of emotion.¹³

In this Aristotelian view, which influenced Plutarch significantly, emotion is conceived as a combination of cognition and sensation.¹⁴ Aristotle's insistence that emotions were cognitive allowed for the belief that they were open to reason and persuasion.¹⁵ Aristotle considered emotions to be governed by the same rules that governed other social actions and interactions.¹⁶ For this reason, virtue lies in achieving the mean (*μέσον*) in emotions. For example, Aristotle says that it is praiseworthy to be angry, so long as the manner, object, and duration of that anger is in accordance with reason (Arist. *N.E.* 1125b33-1126a1).

The study of emotion continued to play an important role in philosophy and ethics from Aristotle onwards. Concerned as it was with conceptions regarding character, the composition of the soul, and virtuous action, it was treated differently by the competing philosophical schools, which formed the major strands of intellectual life in the ancient world.

The fundamental difference between the Stoic view of emotion and that of the Platonists was how one should correctly deal with the *πάθη*. The Stoics sought a practical philosophy that allowed the achievement of happiness (*εὐδαιμονία*), with the pursuit of virtue as the only good.¹⁷ To the Stoics, the passions were fundamentally bad, and had to be entirely extirpated. This idealised state of total

¹¹ Cairns 2008, 45, 58.

¹² Konstan 2006, 258.

¹³ Konstan 2006, 39.

¹⁴ Fortenbaugh 1975, 12.

¹⁵ Fortenbaugh 1975, 17, 23.

¹⁶ Gill 1997, 5.

¹⁷ Zeyl 1997, 528-9.

insusceptibility to the emotions was referred to as *ἀπαθεία*.¹⁸ Plutarch, a Platonist, considered this to be unachievable, misguided, and based on a misunderstanding of the interaction between irrational and rational parts of the soul, and the expression of virtue in character.

The Epicureans followed a therapeutic school of philosophy, which sought to cure human ills. The path to this was through the presence of pleasure, and the absence of physical and mental pain.¹⁹ To achieve happiness, the fear of death had to be overcome, and the desires limited. The views of the much-maligned Epicureans on emotion are difficult to deduce, and lacking in theoretical consistency. However, evidence such as Philodemus' *On Anger* suggests that a separation was made between natural and unnecessary forms of each emotion.²⁰

In the first and second century C.E., there was a continuing interest in the investigation of emotion. For example, within a sixty year period both Plutarch and Seneca published essays concerned exclusively with the subject of anger.²¹ These, and other similar works, engaged with the Aristotelian views on emotion, as well as Stoic and Epicurean schools of philosophic thought. Due to limited access to Aristotle's work between the third and first centuries C.E., the Peripatetic school of philosophy diverged from the views of Aristotle.²² In particular, the later Peripatetic school was influenced by the teachings of Stoicism. Plutarch disagreed with aspects of Peripatetic teaching, particularly related to emotion and virtue. In these areas, his philosophy was closer to that of Plato and Aristotle.

The Platonist view was that the *πάθη* were irrational, but not fundamentally bad. The aim of Platonist ethics was to control the emotions, through *μετριοπάθεια*. Because the passions were powerful, and an ineradicable part of the soul, Plutarch believed that they had to be controlled, and their extremes limited. This *μετριοπάθεια* was achieved through reason harmonising the passions to create virtue.²³ This idea was in concordance with Platonic and Aristotelian views on

¹⁸ Opsomer 2012, 319.

¹⁹ Zeyl 1997, 215.

²⁰ Annas 1989, 147-164.

²¹ Van Hoof 2007, 59, 147.

²² Gill 1997, 7.

²³ Opsomer 2012, 316.

reason as the moderating influence in the irrational.²⁴

In Plutarch's view of the self, humans were composed of body (σῶμα), soul (ψυχή), and mind (νοῦς) (*The Face of the Moon* 943a).²⁵ The combination of body and soul created the irrational (ἄλογος) and affective (παθητικός) part, which was the source of pleasure and pain. The combination of the soul and mind created reason (λόγος); the source of virtue and vice. Plutarch states that in all emotions there is some reason, and in all logical actions there is some appetite. He criticised the Stoics and the Peripatetics (for different reasons) for not understanding the inseparability of the two aspects (Plut. *On the Birth of the Spirit in Timaeus* 1025d).²⁶

Plutarch's view of emotion is closely connected to his views on virtue and character. Stability of character (ἔξις) was achieved through the combination of nature (φύσις), habit (ἔθος), and reason (λόγος).²⁷ Virtue was achieved by reason harmonizing and moderating emotion. Emotion itself is not banished, but overcome. Plutarch saw no perfectibility in human nature, nor the perfect control of the irrational by the reasoned.²⁸ Plutarch also considered there to exist a wicked flaw (ἔμφυτος κακία) in the character, which could expose itself suddenly or gradually, having been concealed in goodness for a long time.²⁹ Plutarch says:

...to discriminate and distinguish between similar and dissimilar propensities before the actual passions bring them to light by involving them in great acts of wrong. For whereas the young of bears and wolves and apes reveal their congenital character from the outset, undisguised and unfalsified, man has a nature that can enter into customs and doctrines and codes of conduct and thereby often conceal its failings and imitate a virtuous course, with the result that it either wipes out and escapes altogether an inherited stain of vice, or else eludes detection for a long time by enveloping itself in duplicity...

²⁴ Opsomer 2012, 316-7.

²⁵ Dillon 1977, 211.

²⁶ Opsomer 2012, 315.

²⁷ Gill 2006, 233.

²⁸ Russell 1973, 85.

²⁹ Becchi 2012, 43.

For Plutarch, the path to virtue was finding moderation in the emotions and desires. This was achieved through reason, and was connected to good habit, education, and environment.

Scholarship and Methodology

In the last few decades, there has been a burst of academic interest in the subject of emotion in the ancient world. David Konstan has written extensively on the Greek *πάθη*, and the extent and manner in which they match up to English emotional concepts. In his seminal text, *The Emotions of the Ancient Greeks*, Konstan discusses 12 emotions in an ancient context, primarily viewing them through the work of Aristotle. Konstan starts from the scientifically supported assumption that emotions are not universal between societies, and that they have a cognitive element that is affected by culture. For example, Konstan does not see any evidence for an ancient equivalent of romantic jealousy, which as a complex affect (comprised of anger, fear, and lust) is largely dependent on cultural factors.³⁰ Konstan's conclusion on Greek emotions is that they are complex, culturally specific, and often conceptualised in different terms to modern emotions. One of the major differences that he identifies is the conclusion that Greek emotions are largely predicated on the ideas of social interaction and competition. He sees ancient Greek emotions as motivated by actions, rather than events, and the social consequences of these actions. His work is important for its challenging of the assumption of universality of emotion.³¹

A number of other scholars have addressed the issues of the emotions. Martha Nussbaum has written extensively on desire and compassion from an extremely cognitivist position. Richard Sorabji has illustrated the interaction between Stoic views of emotion and the ameliorating effects of the therapeutic approach, and early Christian philosophy. Peter Toohey has published on a

³⁰ Konstan 2003, 219-20.

³¹ Konstan 2003, 40.

number of the negative affects, including melancholy, grief and boredom. Volumes such as *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature*, edited by Susanna Braund and Christopher Gill, have addressed specific emotions in specific contexts. Most scholarship uses a mix of lexical and contextual research, and focusses on literary evidence as the only available source.

There are clearly several major issues with the study of emotion in another society, particularly one separated by a vast gulf of time, and preserved in an incomplete patchwork of sources. The classicist does not have the luxury of sending out questionnaires, or measuring the neuro-chemical responses to applied stimuli under laboratory conditions. What the classicist does have is literature, which brings with it a host of problems. The largest of these is the persistent inexactness of language used to refer to emotion. Discussions of universality aside, the experience of emotion is deeply personal, subjective, and variable. The phenomenology of emotion will always be more nuanced than the language surrounding it, or the systems for codifying it. Even were a perfect system of codification to exist, it would still only reflect the experience of one individual within one society. This is true in modern society, but even more true in the foreign societies of the ancient world. Even the term *παθή*, for example, clearly has vastly different connotations for Stoic writers, than it does for Plutarch or Aristotle. Context is therefore extremely important. A philosophical work, such as Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, may seek to codify the experience of emotion for the purposes of furthering a doctrine. Useful as this is to the modern observer, it does not necessarily define the experience of emotion within that society. This in many ways highlights the problems for, and unfortunate necessity of, a lexical approach to ancient emotion.

Laurel Fulkerson acknowledges the complexity, subjectivity, and ambiguity of addressing emotion in ancient literature. She suggests that the studies with the best methodological approaches acknowledge the importance of cultural context, yet do not totally ignore the impact of lexical considerations.³² She further compares the advantages and disadvantages of using ancient terms or concepts as a starting point for an investigation, against using modern ones. She largely comes

³² Fulkerson 2013, 12.

to the conclusion that both have their merits if the scholar does not view their approach as infallible, and can see the compatibility of the two approaches.³³ Douglas Cairns, in his discussion of a methodology for studying ancient emotion, suggests that any analysis of ancient Greek emotion should include analysis of emotion terms, but would also have to consider all of the metonyms that are associated with the conveyance of emotion. He suggests that these include broader emotion language, physical symptoms, body language, and metaphor.³⁴ Cairns criticises Konstan's approach, which he generally applauds, over two issues. Firstly, he suggests that Konstan's analysis focusses too strongly on definitive emotion terms for his identification of an affect, and therefore discounts the existence of affective phenomena because of the absence of terms.³⁵ The lack of a word for a particular affect does not negate its existence within a society. Conversely, just because English has a word for an affective state, or the combination of several affective state, does not mean that this affect will be universally present between societies. This leads on to Cairn's second criticism, which is that Konstan's approach assumes that English emotional terms and concepts are normative.³⁶

These methodological cautions have informed my approach. It is for this reason that my study is split into two major sections. The first attempts to identify lexical evidence within its own context. The identified terms are approached in terms of their semantic and connotative fields. This interpretation of ancient concepts on their own terms is an attempt to avoid ethnocentricity. The second section, informed by the associations identified in the first, is a case study of several works. This section attempts to avoid an overly narrow lexical view, and to identify the broader phenomenology of the concept of boredom.

³³ Fulkerson 2013, 12-13.

³⁴ Cairns 2008, 58.

³⁵ Cairns 2008, 58.

³⁶ Cairns 2008, 51.

Modern Boredom

I would now like to address the subject of boredom. Boredom is a multifaceted and often contradictory affect. It is both prevalent and under-reported, seemingly intuitive and yet little understood. The very manifestation of the experience of boredom consists of the paradoxical conjunction of feelings of “restlessness combined with lethargy.”³⁷ The desire for occupation and the inability to be occupied walk hand in hand when one experiences boredom.

Defining Boredom

Boredom is a difficult affect to conceptualise, perhaps more so than other emotions. As a starting point, I have found Plutchik’s Wheel of Emotions useful (Figure 1). Plutchik used semantic field analysis in a 1970 study to create a model of the interaction of emotions as conceptualised by English speakers.³⁸ He modeled these in sets of four pairs of basic emotions with other emotions created by the intersection of these or through a change in intensity.³⁹ Plutchik conceived of boredom as a diluted form of disgust, bounded by annoyance and pensiveness. Few categorisations of emotion include boredom, but those that do connect it with either disgust, dissatisfaction, or despair.⁴⁰

Otto Fenichel suggests that boredom is felt as “the displeasurable experience of a lack of impulse.”⁴¹ He further says that it is characterised by the “coexistence of a need for activity and activity-inhibition, as well as by stimulus-

³⁷ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 193.

³⁸ Griffiths 1997, 75.

³⁹ It should be noted that there are some issues with Plutchik’s analysis. Firstly, as his methodology was to ask subjects which emotions they associated with which other ones, it is explicitly tied to English lexical conceptions of emotion. Furthermore, its very attempt to provide a universal code for understanding all emotions means that it lacks in complexity.

⁴⁰ Ekman 1982, 43.

⁴¹ Fenichel 1951, 350.

hunger and dissatisfaction with the available stimuli.”⁴² To Seán Healy, all instances of boredom are attributable primarily to a “loss of a sense of personal meaning, whether in relation to a particular experience or encounter, or to an entire life-situation.”⁴³ Lord Byron admirably summed up the sense of boredom (or, more correctly, ennui) as “that awful yawn which sleep cannot abate.”⁴⁴

Psychological Models

Modern psychological analysis of boredom generally makes a distinction between state-based boredom and trait-based boredom. The former should be understood in terms of emotion, and the experience of boredom. The latter is closer to being a part of the affective category of temperament, and is defined by the susceptibility to boredom. Several psychometric scales have been suggested to measure, explain, and quantify the experience of boredom and boredom susceptibility. These include the Boredom Proneness Scale, Job Boredom Scale, Boredom Coping Scale, Boredom Susceptibility Scale, Leisure Boredom Scale, Free Time Coping Scale, and Sexual Boredom Scale.⁴⁵ Vodanovich notes that these scales have issues with scope, applicability, and reliability, and that the field is limited by a lack of integrated theory or clear definitions and terminology.⁴⁶ For the purposes of this study, it should be noted that these scales rely on self-reporting, and are framed in English lexical terminology and concepts.

Despite these limitations, certain points can be taken from the psychometric analysis of boredom and boredom proneness. Boredom proneness has been shown to be correlated with higher measures on scales of depression, hopelessness, loneliness, impulsivity, sensation seeking, feelings of alienation, hostility, anxiety, and lack of life satisfaction.⁴⁷ This quantitative data confirms much of the literature and philosophy of boredom, and suggests that there is merit in approaching ennui through the field of psychopathology.

⁴² Fenichel 1951, 349.

⁴³ Healy 1984, 10.

⁴⁴ Byron 1828, 593.

⁴⁵ Vodanovich 2003, 569-89.

⁴⁶ Vodanovich 2003, 588-89.

⁴⁷ Farner and Sundberg 1986, 11-4; Seib and Vodanovich 1998, 644-5.

Boredom is consistently described as having a negative valence (the spectrum by which emotions are measured in terms of pleasantness and unpleasantness). Indeed, very few studies have even hypothesised any positive effects stemming from boredom.⁴⁸ Because of this boredom is often associated with other negative valence affects, such as depression, neuroticism, and anxiety.⁴⁹ Boredom and depression have overlapping symptoms, but are considered to be separate psychological phenomena.⁵⁰ The environments that produce depression are often ongoing processes, while boredom is caused by a perception that environmental stimuli are static.⁵¹ However, it should be noted that, like depression, boredom has been associated with suicide.⁵² It has been suggested that this is because of negative diversionary tactics, including substance abuse, or because of the increased perception of time leading to an awareness of time running out, and therefore death.⁵³

Like all affects, there are multiple elements that constitute boredom. These components include:

...affective components (unpleasant, aversive feelings), cognitive components (altered perceptions of time), physiological components (reduced arousal), expressive components (facial, vocal, and postural expression; for body movements and postures related to boredom...), as well as motivational components (motivation to change or leave the situation)...⁵⁴

The experience of boredom is also associated with feelings of entrapment, and physical sensations of tiredness or nausea.⁵⁵ There is also evidence to suggest that boredom is connected to specific types of situation. Results suggest that types of boredom with a more positive valence are demonstrated in “non-achievement” settings, likely due to the subjects ability to escape the situation.⁵⁶ It has been

⁴⁸ Harris 2000, 576-7.

⁴⁹ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 196-7.

⁵⁰ Farner and Sundberg 1986, 7.

⁵¹ Farner and Sundberg 1986, 15.

⁵² Patterson and Pegg 1999, 28.

⁵³ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 204.

⁵⁴ Goetz, Frenzel, Nett, Pekrun, and Lipnevich 2013, 3.

⁵⁵ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 196, 203, 206.

⁵⁶ Goetz, Frenzel, Nett, Pekrun, and Lipnevich 2013, 14.

suggested that situational factors leading to boredom include repetitive or undemanding tasks, coercion, or high cognitive activities.⁵⁷

The affect of boredom is commonly attributed to variations in arousal (the physiological reaction to stimulus) away from optimal, and satisfying, levels. Theorists disagree on whether the affect is caused by high or low levels of arousal. Barbalet suggests that boredom is caused by increased arousal, indicated by restlessness and irritability.⁵⁸ Mikulas and Vodanovich suggest that the affect is caused by low arousal, expressed as dissatisfaction with current stimuli.⁵⁹ Martin, Sadlo and Stew offer a third explanation that “boredom may simply be a lack of attention, and that the effort to sustain the high cognitive workload required for sustained attention may be leading to the fluctuations between both high and low arousal.”⁶⁰ This theory is somewhat supported by a 2013 psychometric study that attempted to chart different types of boredom using two pools of subjects reporting on their feelings of boredom at various points during a two week study. The intent of the study was to define types of boredom according to the levels of valence and arousal experienced by the subjects. Continuing from an earlier study, the authors were able to identify five classes of boredom: indifferent boredom, calibrating boredom, searching boredom, reactant boredom, and apathetic boredom. The model shows an increase in the arousal of the subjects and an increase in negative valence through the types of boredom. Indifferent boredom has a relative low level of arousal and the most positive valence, while reactant boredom has both the highest level of arousal and the most negative valence.⁶¹ The results also identified an unexpected fifth boredom type, apathetic boredom, which is defined by a negative valence and a low state of arousal.⁶²

There is increasing evidence to suggest that different individuals suffer from different levels of boredom proneness. The extent of this affective trait has not been fully addressed, and further quantitative studies are needed. Those with a high measure of negative self-awareness tend to have high levels of boredom

⁵⁷ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 196, 205.

⁵⁸ Barbalet 1999, 635-6.

⁵⁹ Mikulas and Vodanovich 1993, 3.

⁶⁰ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 208.

⁶¹ Goetz, Frenzel, Nett, Pekrun, and Lipnevich 2013, 3-4.

⁶² Goetz, Frenzel, Nett, Pekrun, and Lipnevich 2013, 14-5.

proneness.⁶³ There is also evidence of a positive correlation between boredom and mood monitoring (the tendency, related to negative affects and neuroticism, to scrutinise one's moods), and a negative correlation between boredom proneness and mood labelling (the ability, related to positive affect and high self-esteem, to categorise and understand one's moods).⁶⁴ Studies of boredom types have noted that individual subjects had a tendency to experience the same type of boredom repeatedly, rather than experiencing a random selection of types depending on situation. This leads the authors to the conclusion that boredom types are "related to personality-specific dispositions."⁶⁵

Modern psychology has made little progress on establishing any 'cure' for boredom, unsurprising considering the lack of agreement on a cause, but several coping strategies have been suggested. Boredom is associated with a number of diversionary tactics, as a function of stimulus hunger. Martin, Sadlo and Stew summarise these behaviours:

Boredom susceptibility has also been related to a range of dysfunctional behaviours, including sleep disorder, procrastination, drug abuse, cigarette smoking, gambling, drunk driving, high frequencies of sexual activity, deviant behaviour in school, and criminality.⁶⁶

Unless these diversionary tactics are valorised activities, these activities often do not help relieve any long-term sense of boredom, and the sufferer becomes bored with the diversionary activities.⁶⁷ Winterstein has suggested that there are two types of boredom sufferers: those who, through overstimulation, constantly seek pleasure but are unable to enjoy it, and those who seek an escape from boredom in hard work.⁶⁸ One study suggests increasing the perceived value of activities, albeit in a classroom context, to decrease the likelihood of boredom.⁶⁹ The simplest forms of boredom caused by dissatisfaction with external stimuli can

⁶³ Seib and Vodanovich 1998, 649.

⁶⁴ Harris 2000, 578, 587-9.

⁶⁵ Goetz, Frenzel, Nett, Pekrun, and Lipnevich 2013, 13.

⁶⁶ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 197.

⁶⁷ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 204.

⁶⁸ Fenichel 1951, 361.

⁶⁹ Nett, Goetz and Hall 2011, 58.

be removed by either escaping the dissatisfactory stimuli, or by increasing the perceived value of the activity. More chronic boredom, attributable to internal stimuli, is more difficult to address. Some coping activities that have been suggested include physical activities, valorised activities, and by addressing internal mechanisms through activities such as mindfulness meditation or making positive plans for the future.⁷⁰

Academic work on the subject tends to make some effort to deconstruct 'boredom' into its constituent elements. Lacking a common and accepted nomenclature in the area of study, it is common for scholars to identify different aspects of boredom, and to distinguish these with terms of their own choosing. The majority of these distinctions can generally be placed into two broad categories.

Simple Boredom

The first of the major elements of boredom is often referred to as 'simple boredom', although it is also called situational or state-based boredom, tedium, and *horror loci*. It is defined as an immediate dissatisfaction with present stimuli, which tend to be external.⁷¹

This form of boredom ceases to exist once these 'boring' stimuli are removed. Inadvertently channeling an ancient idiom (Plut. *De Tranq.* 466a-b; Hor. *Ep.* 93; Sen. *Ep. Mor.* 24.26), Healy notes that the symptoms of this type of boredom, like seasickness, disappear once one returns to land.⁷²

Simple boredom is temporary, attributable to an identifiable cause, and largely situation specific. This form of boredom is an output emotional response to a lack of stimuli. It can be understood as an affect program; a diluted form of disgust.

⁷⁰ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 204, 207.

⁷¹ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 205.

⁷² Healy 1984, 43.

Complex Boredom

The second element, 'complex boredom', is a more metaphysical, existential, or spiritual boredom. Terms for complex boredom include trait-based boredom, existential boredom, hyperboredom, ennui, lassitude, and pathological boredom. It is a chronic affliction with its roots in personality, rather than in situation. Hence, the stimuli causing it are usually internal.⁷³ It is distinct from simple boredom because of the duration of its occurrence, and because of the lack of a single attributable cause. It is a higher cognitive emotion. The input side to this emotional response is highly variable between cultures, although there seems to be a connection between general satiety and complex boredom.⁷⁴

Complex boredom is a blanket definition that incorporates several different modern concepts of boredom. It is necessary for scholars of modern boredom to accurately define the exact and specific range of their investigations. The connotations of specific English terms, the delineation between representations of boredom in different media, or the activities and situations that cause boredom in the modern world are of great importance to their work. However, it is the existence or extent of a form of complex boredom in ancient society that I am interested in. This study seeks to compare two different semantic fields in two different cultures. I suggest that a too prescriptive definition of complex boredom limits the viability of this comparison. This complex boredom is the focus of my research.

History of Boredom

It is necessary to state that our own concept of boredom is complicated, and has its own long history. The interest in, and discussion of, boredom has dramatically increased in significance since the 18th Century. As Healy notes, this is not a claim that can be made about any other emotion.⁷⁵

The discussion of boredom was largely part of religious discourse, due to its

⁷³ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 205.

⁷⁴ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 193; Svendsen 2005

⁷⁵ Healy 1984, 15.

inclusion in discussions of sin by Christian scholars of late Antiquity. The Desert Fathers, a group of 4th century Christian mystics, introduced the concept of a strange physical and spiritual malady that afflicted hermetic monks living in the desert. This *daemon meridianus* (demon of noontide) was identified as *ἀκηδία* (spiritual and physical lassitude). The phenomenon caused its sufferers to experience a slowing of time, feelings of meaningless, physical laziness in the performance of tasks, and spiritual indifference to religious duties. Evagrius Ponticus included a detailed description of *acedia*, which he attributed to demonic influences, in his work *Of the Eight Capital Sins*. John Cassian also devoted the tenth book of his *Institutes* to the subject. *Acedia* was considered not only to lead to other sins, but to be sinful in and of itself because it constituted a rejection of, and dejection in, the contemplation of God and creation.⁷⁶ The sin of *acedia* was combined with the similar sin of *tristitia* (dejection) and incorporated into Catholic canon of capital sins as sloth in the sixth century.⁷⁷

Due to its position in Christian doctrine, the concept of *acedia* was familiar during the medieval period. Latin terms, such as *acedia*, *tristitia*, and *melancholia*, were also in usage in English works.⁷⁸ In the late medieval period, Chaucer provided one of the first detailed description of *acedia* in English:

Wol I speken of the synne of accidie. For
 Envye blyndeth the herte of a man, and ire
 Troubleth a man, and accidie maketh hym
 Hevy, thoghtful, and wraw...
 Is mooder of accidie, and bynymeth hym the
 Love of alle goodnesse. Thanne is accidie the
 Angwissh of troubled herte...
 But accidie dooth no swich diligence. He
 Dooth alle thyng with anoy, and with wrawnesse,
 slaknesse, and excusacioun, and with
 Ydelnesse, and unlust...⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Svendsen 2005, 50-1.

⁷⁷ Kuhn 1976, 54.

⁷⁸ Healy 1984, 18.

⁷⁹ Chaucer 1957, 250.

Chaucer gives a description of an affliction that affects all aspects of life, and causes the sufferer to take no pleasure in them. This moralistic view of *acedia* was common until the Renaissance, when a more naturalistic perspective took hold.⁸⁰ This manifested as interest in boredom as a medicalised subject, related to the interest in melancholy, depression, and spleen.⁸¹ Burton provides this description of *taedium vitae* in the 1621 *The Anatomy of Melancholy*:

...*tædium vitæ* is a common symptom, *tarda fluunt, ingrataque tempora*, they are soon tired with all things; they will now tarry, now be gone; now in bed they will rise, now up, then go to bed, now pleased, then again displeased; now they like, by and by dislike all, weary of all, *sequitur nunc vivendi, nunc moriendi cupido*, saith Aurelianus, (lib. 1. cap. 6), but most part *vitam damnant*, discontent, disquieted, perplexed upon every light, or no occasion, object: often tempted, I say, to make away themselves: *Vivere nolunt, mori nesciunt*: they cannot die, they will not live...⁸²

Boredom continued to play an important role in Western philosophy from the Renaissance through to the modern era. Pascal, influenced by the *acedia* tradition, conceived of boredom as the “diversion” and lack of satisfaction inherent in a life without God.⁸³ For Kant, boredom was the wearying drive in civilised individuals for new pleasures that could only be cured by immersion in work. It was expressed as existential nausea, awareness of death, and a sense of emptiness.⁸⁴ Boredom was well represented in the philosophy of the nineteenth century, appearing in the works of Kierkegaard, Ibsen, Schopenhauer, and Nietzsche, among others.⁸⁵ Kierkegaard even said that, because of its repulsive capacity to initiate motion, “boredom is the root of all evil.”⁸⁶ From this period, boredom is commonly identified as a defining characteristic of modernity, and of what it means to exist. In the twentieth century, boredom was omnipresent in literature, whether it was discussed, celebrated, or bemoaned, in the works of such

⁸⁰ Svendsen 2005, 51.

⁸¹ Healy 1984, 22; Svendsen 2005, 51.

⁸² Burton 1883, 320.

⁸³ Svendsen 2005, 52-3.

⁸⁴ Svendsen 2005, 53-5.

⁸⁵ Healy 1984, 25.

⁸⁶ Healy 1984, 25.

authors as Proust, Kafka, Sartre, Camus, and Beckett. In the writings of the last several centuries, boredom is, quite appropriately, inescapable.

Similarly to the concept in Greek, boredom in the modern world has been often accompanied by lexical difficulties. The term 'bore' did not appear appear in English until 1766, as a verb meaning to make weary by being dull or tiresome, and, in 1768, as a noun meaning a fit of boredom or ennui.⁸⁷ The back-formed 'boredom' eventually made an appearance in Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* in 1852.⁸⁸ Before this, it appears that discussion of complexified forms of boredom was largely conducted in Latin forms. This reflects Latin's previous importance in the spheres of religion, science, and medicine. The anglicised 'accidie', as used by Chaucer above, existed briefly in the late medieval period, but had disappeared by 1621 forcing Burton to turn to the Latin *taedium vitae*.⁸⁹ The term 'ennui', which is itself a French adaptation of either *in odio* (in odium) or *inodiare* (to make odious), has been in use in English since 1667, and as a naturalised English word since 1742.⁹⁰ Since the Early Middle Ages, this term has been used to refer both to petty vexations, and a profound and shiftless sorrow.⁹¹ In modern usage, it is more often identified with the complex form of boredom, relating to a listless and sorrowful state caused by a fundamental dissatisfaction with surroundings, way of life, or state of being. Before the appearance of the term 'boredom', which serves to identify both simple and complex forms of the affect, simple boredom seems to have been addressed in English largely in terms of annoyance or weariness.⁹²

The literary, philosophical, and scientific history of boredom in modern, Western society is long, complex, and involved. I contend that summarising the history of this concept is important for this study for a number of reasons. The first is that it shows the connection between ancient and modern ideas about boredom, and discredits the idea of boredom as an entirely modern invention. The second is to show that boredom, even in a modern or pre-modern context, is difficult to conceptualise and define. Despite centuries of discussion, definitions are still vague

⁸⁷ Barnhart 1988, 108.

⁸⁸ Barnhart 1988, 108.

⁸⁹ Healy 1984, 17-8.

⁹⁰ Barnhart 1988, 332; Healy 1984, 18; Kuhn 1976, 5.

⁹¹ Kuhn 1976, 5-6.

⁹² Healy 1984, 19.

and diverse. Thirdly, I argue that the history of boredom in Western thought shows that the concept has long been evident even when there was a lack of a clear and formal terminology.

Ancient Boredom

In modern boredom scholarship, it is a common claim that Classical interest in, or awareness of, the complexities of boredom began with the discussion of the *daemon meridianus*, or *acedia*, in the fourth century by the Desert Fathers.⁹³ I consider this claim to ignore hints of the concept much earlier. I contend that the concept of boredom, or a concept with recognisable semantic and connotative similarities, was more pervasive in the ancient world than is commonly credited. Simply calling to mind the punishments of Sisyphus, Tantalus, and particularly the Danaïdes, hints at a society that had an awareness of the perils and power of monotony.⁹⁴

However it is approached, boredom was not a particularly important concept in the ancient world. There are no lengthy treatises on the subject, Aristotle did not include it in his conception of the emotions, and there is no definitive philosophical treatise devoted solely to its discussion and definition. During the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods there appears to have been very little interest in, or awareness of, the subject, and a lack of a clear vocabulary for discussing it. While simple boredom is evident in these periods, identifying examples of such is contextual and subjective. Indeed, it is clearer to say that there are descriptions of individuals being bored, or of boring situations, often framed in terms of annoyance or frustration. There is not a term for *boredom* as a condition. However, by the fourth century C.E. the affect of *ακηδία* (lack of care, ennui) had become a mental affliction of almost epidemic proportions among ascetic monks. It caused them to experience nauseous disgust with life, and indifference towards their religious duties and exercises. I am interested in the intervening period, the first and second century centuries C.E., in which this concept grew. In the works of Seneca, Horace, and Plutarch, it is possible to see the first detailed familiarity with

⁹³ Healy 1984, 16; Svendsen 2005, 50.

⁹⁴ Kuhn 1976, 18.

the concept.

Scholarship

Boredom in the ancient world has not been studied in great depth, and there remains a huge amount of work to be done to fully understand this topic. While there is still a dearth of research on the subject, two authors have addressed the subject in detail.

The first scholar to address the subject of ancient boredom was Reinhard Kuhn in his extensive work, *The Demon of Noontide*. His work is an impressive attempt to chart the *idée-force* of ennui through a large part of the canon of European literature. Kuhn is specifically searching for ennui, an affect for which he provides a definite and stringent definition. Kuhn manages to identify four different types of complex boredom that are all related to, but separate from, ennui. He names these as *désœuvrement*, a mechanical, temporary boredom dependent on external circumstances; psychosomatic boredom, caused by the prolonged tension between mental activity and inadequate stimulation, and relieved in diversionary or prohibited activities; monotony, which accompanies meaningless or repetitive labour; and anomie, the destructive alienation caused by exclusion from society.⁹⁵ Kuhn admits to difficulty in defining this very ennui, the presence or absence of which he is content to argue. The definition of ennui that he decides upon is characterised by affecting the body and soul, being independent of external circumstances, and producing sensations of estrangement, timelessness, meaninglessness, moroseness, and thoughts of death.⁹⁶ His final criterion is that ennui is defined by the sufferers inability to banish it by willing it to be banished.⁹⁷ This pathological alienation from life and existence is a contemplation of nothingness and the void that strikes at the very roots of being.⁹⁸ The fundamental unanswered question for Kuhn is whether ennui is a creative or destructive force.⁹⁹ Does ennui, in making existence untenable, spur on activity, or make it impossible?

⁹⁵ Kuhn 1976, 6-9.

⁹⁶ Kuhn 1976, 9-12.

⁹⁷ Kuhn 1976, 12.

⁹⁸ Kuhn 1976, 13, 376.

⁹⁹ Kuhn 1976, 376.

Kuhn does identify four elements of the affect in ancient literature. He notes that, while Aristotle does not explicitly acknowledge ennui in his conception of the emotions, Aristotle's framework of the humours includes the melancholic. Aristotle compares the effects of this humour to the effects of wine on the character: it can cause loquacity, irritability, inspiration, depression, or frenzy (Arist. *Pr.* 30.1). This variability is caused by the different effects of hot and cold temperatures on the black bile in the body. In this variability, particularly the contrast between depressive and inspirational qualities, Kuhn sees parallels with ennui.¹⁰⁰ He also sees an alienating *horror loci* in Horace's views on the country and the city, work, and leisure (Hor. *Ep.* 1.8, 1.14, 1.11, 1.16).¹⁰¹ This is also present in Lucretius' depiction of a dissatisfied nobleman moving between city and estate (Lucr. *D.R.N.* 3.1053-75). In both authors, travel or work are presented as limited ameliorations of dissatisfaction, which should be sought in tranquility of the mind. Kuhn also sees elements of complex boredom in Seneca's nauseous discontent, which expresses itself in restlessness and feelings of meaninglessness (Sen. *De Ot.*, *De Tranq.*, *Ep.* 24, *Ep.* 28).¹⁰² As has been noted by several authors, these affective descriptions are the clearest example of a form of complex boredom in ancient literature. Kuhn also identifies instances of causeless sorrow in ancient literature. This is the section of his argument with the weakest correlation to ennui.

While undoubtedly a scholar of tremendous depth and perspicacity, Kuhn is not a classicist. His forays into ancient literature serve to outline the origins of the main subject matter for his study. As he himself says the concepts of boredom evident in ancient literature are "but omens of what was to come."¹⁰³ His analysis of his ancient material is therefore limited in that he is attempting to find evidence of a prescriptively defined ennui, rather than attempting to divine what form an ancient concept of boredom might take. However, this is largely explained as a difference of purpose.

Peter Toohey has written the most on the subject of boredom in the ancient world, along with several other forms of affective discontent. Toohey argues that in

¹⁰⁰ Kuhn 1976, 19-20, 375.

¹⁰¹ Kuhn 1976, 26-8.

¹⁰² Kuhn 1976, 28-31.

¹⁰³ Kuhn 1976, 36.

the first and second centuries C.E. there was a paradigmatic shift in the presentation of the self, and that this was expressed in various affective states that blurred the boundaries of this new self.¹⁰⁴ He includes *melancholia*, love, love-sickness, and boredom among these. His argument is that the conceptualisation of affective states was complexified through the processes of “spiritualization/interialization, corporealization, and medicalization.”¹⁰⁵ He further argues that this was accompanied in this period by an increased willingness to depict the self in literature, and to do so in greater complexity.¹⁰⁶

Toohey has done the most to systematise the study of boredom in ancient literature. He has established a firm chronological framework for the evolution and complexification of this concept through ancient thought. Toohey suggests that boredom in its simple form is recognisable throughout Greek literature, although a strict terminology does not exist until the fourth century C.E.¹⁰⁷ Generally, he argues for the difficulty of identifying simple and complex boredom prior to the fourth century, and suggests that the best avenue for identifying it is through the use of metaphor.¹⁰⁸ He posits that the first detailed discussions of the oppressive qualities of leisure, and therefore a complex form of boredom, are evident in Latin literature of the late Republic and early Empire. This is particularly realised in the work of Seneca.¹⁰⁹ He argues that Plutarch was influenced by this intellectual culture, and incorporated many of these themes into his own work, thereby providing the first detailed accounts of complex boredom in Greek.¹¹⁰ He argues that a concept of complex boredom expressed in Greek is fully realised in the discussions of *ἀκηδία* in the works of the Desert Fathers in the fourth century C.E.¹¹¹

Toohey has also contributed substantially to the vocabulary of boredom in the ancient world. He notes that there are several words whose meaning can be associated with a sense of boredom. Greek terms include *ἄλυσ* (boredom), *άλύω*

¹⁰⁴ Toohey 2004, 1, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Toohey 2004, 128.

¹⁰⁶ Toohey 2004, 128.

¹⁰⁷ Toohey 2004, 127.

¹⁰⁸ Toohey 2004, 108.

¹⁰⁹ Toohey 1988, 163.

¹¹⁰ Toohey 1987, 202; Toohey 2004, 124-6.

¹¹¹ Toohey 1990, 339.

(wandering, to be distraught), *ἀπάθεια* (apathy), *ἀκηδία* (lack of care, lassitude), *ἄση* (surfeit, distress), *ἀπληστία* (insatiate greed), *κόρος* (satiety) and *πλησμονή* (abundance, surfeit).¹¹² Latin terms include *taedium* (tedium), *otium* (leisure), *satietas* (satiety, surfeit), *fastidium* (nausea, distaste), *fatigo* (to weary), *defatigo* (to fatigue), *torpor* (torpor), *languidas* (languid), *nausia* (nausea, disgust, dissatisfaction) and *inertia* (inactivity).¹¹³ He notes that the semantic fields of these words are much wider than boredom, and can only be associated with it in certain contexts. He suggests that this implies that any notion of ancient boredom was not precisely defined.¹¹⁴

Toohey has also established much of the semantic context for complex forms of boredom in the ancient world. He sees simple boredom as conceptualised in terms of annoyance and frustration. He suggests that the more complex forms of boredom that appear from the first century B.C.E. are connected to satiety, restless dissatisfaction, nauseous disgust, estrangement from sensation, and awareness of death.

In regard to Plutarch's conception of boredom, Toohey argues for the definite, and entrenched, existence of trait-based boredom in *Pyrrhus* 13.1.¹¹⁵ He sees a strong connection in this passage between Plutarch's use of nausea as a physical symptom of physical boredom, and Seneca's depiction of *nausia* and existential weariness (Sen. *Ep.* 24).¹¹⁶ Toohey sees evidence for the corporealisation and medicalisation of a concept of boredom in Seneca's physical symptoms for existential weariness. In *Pyrrhus*, Toohey sees *ἄλυσ* as a pathological form of dissatisfaction that devours Pyrrhus' life.¹¹⁷ Toohey also suggests that *ἄλυσ* expresses a simple form of boredom caused by inactivity in *Eumenes* 11.3.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Toohey 1988, 153.

¹¹³ Toohey 1987, 200-1; Toohey 1988, 153.

¹¹⁴ Toohey 1988, 153.

¹¹⁵ Toohey 1987, 202.

¹¹⁶ Toohey 1987, 201.

¹¹⁷ Toohey 1988, 162-3; Toohey 2004, 125.

¹¹⁸ Toohey 1988, 162.

Ancient Simple Boredom

As stated above, boredom can be separated into simple and complex forms. While the focus of this paper is complex forms of boredom, I suggest that it is important to briefly outline the occurrence and depiction of simple boredom in ancient literature.

Recognising simple boredom in literature requires a subjective and conjectural reading of ancient works, particularly considering the lack of detailed terminology for the affect. One of the clearer ways of determining occasions of simple boredom is the appearance of the physiological components of the emotion. Clear symptoms of boredom include yawning and stretching. Yawning has been demonstrated to occur up to 70% more often in test subjects in situations designed to induce boredom than in stimulated groups.¹¹⁹ Aristophanes' Dikaiopolis, having to wait for the rest of the assembly to assemble, exhibits these symptoms:

I am always the first to come to Assembly and take my seat. Then, in my solitude, I sigh, I yawn, I stretch myself, I fart, I fiddle, scribble, pluck my beard, do sums, while I gaze off to the countryside and pine for peace, loathing the city and yearning for my own deme...

(*Ar. Ach.* 29-33, trans. Henderson)

While I would argue that Dikaiopolis is in an identifiable state of boredom, the language that Aristophanes uses to describe the character does not particularly reflect this. Dikaiopolis is trapped in a temporary monotonous situation, and exhibits signs of restlessness, sleepiness, listlessness (suggested by the use of *ἀπορέω* (*Ar. Ach.* 31)), and searches for diverting activities. Toohey uses examples of simple boredom such as this to suggest that boredom is not easily named in Classical literature, and that examples of it are alluded to via symptomatic, corporeal metaphors.¹²⁰

The wearying effect of boredom can be seen elsewhere, such as in Theophrastus' *Characters*. The garrulous man is portrayed as a distracting, frustrating character, who is physically restless and unable to ever still his tongue

¹¹⁹ Provine and Hamernik 1986, 437.

¹²⁰ Toohey 2004, 108.

(Thphr. *Char.* 7.7). The effect that he has on his audiences forces them to interrupt, fall asleep, or to walk away (*Char.* 7.6). Indeed, he is so wearying that his children request him to “talk to us a little, so we can get to sleep” (*Char.* 7.8.3-4, trans. Rusten). The troubling effects of garrulity are also discussed in Theophrastus’ characterisation of *ἀδολεσχία* (garrulity) (*Char.* 3). The discussion of this character vice is present in Aristotle (*Rhet.* 2.8.12), and in Plutarch’s *Concerning Talkativeness*, which will be discussed in greater detail below.

Simple boredom is defined as some form of negative affect resulting from dissatisfaction with present stimuli. However, the reaction to these stimuli can be interpreted in different ways. While the modern reaction to these is often automatically assigned to boredom, in an ancient context dissatisfaction can be expressed in terms of frustration and irritation. Toohey notes the possible interplay between boredom, weariness, and annoyance with the concept of *κόρος* (satiety) in oratory.¹²¹ He suggests that Pindar’s (*Pyth.* 1.81-3) fear of causing *κόρος* through speaking against *καιρός* (appropriate time) could hint at weariness, envy, hostility, or boredom in the audience. He concludes that the emotional context of *κόρος* is not clear enough to determine which affect is being produced.

Kristine Bruss continues the discussion of simple boredom, *καιρός*, and annoyance in oratory, focussing specifically on Isocrates’ *Panathenaicus*. Bruss’ focus is on situational boredom, a form of simple boredom, and her argument revolves around Isocrates’ use of *καιρός* and *ὄχλος* (annoyance, vexation) in his speeches.¹²² Bruss contends that it is a repeatedly expressed concern of Isocrates that he not violate *καιρός* through unnecessary repetition, excessive length, or a lack of originality and variety. To do so causes *ὄχλος* in his audience, which is manifested in frustration, weariness, and a lengthening of the perception of time. An affective state, often brought about by unnecessary repetition, that falls somewhere between vexation and weariness and effects the sensation of time is clearly recognisable as a form of simple boredom. Indeed, Bruss states that *ὀχληρός* (to cause *ὄχλος*) is a clear antecedent for ‘boring’ in Isocrates.¹²³ She also notes that Isocrates acknowledges the subjective qualities of both terms when he

¹²¹ Toohey 1988, 154.

¹²² Bruss 2012, 331.

¹²³ Bruss 2012, 322.

states that certain, trivial listeners of his work will incorrectly find it *όχληρός* and *άκαιρός* (Isoc. *Panath.* 2.135-6).¹²⁴ Bruss suggests that Isocrates sees the goals of delighting and instructing an audience as often contradictory, because the latter aim is tedious to a less serious type of listener. Although Isocrates' statements are in defence of his own style and flattery of those of the audience who appreciate it, there can be noted a differentiation between the masses, who find *όχλος* in ethical and political discourses, and a cultivated elite who can be instructed and delighted by these. This perhaps betrays an ancient assumption that the populist masses are more susceptible to tedium, particularly in relation to weighty, ethical matters. Bruss comes to the nuanced conclusion that a fourth century B.C.E. Athenian audience could experience affective states similar to boredom, but conceptualised them in terms of annoyance and frustration at the violation of *καιρός*.¹²⁵

The themes of dissatisfaction, satiety, and frustration in audiences continues as a common theme throughout ancient literature. Occurrences of these are some of the best for identifying cases of simple boredom (Diog. Oen. fr. 25; Plut. *Precepts of Statecraft* 804d9, *Per.* 7.7.2, *Concerning Talkativeness* 504d8-12; Sen. *Ep.* 40.3).

The examples given in the following section are largely from a period before the existence of any detailed conceptualisation of boredom. Firstly, I would like to address one final example from a period in which the concept of boredom exists in the intellectual landscape, and from an author who describes the phenomenon in himself as well as in others. I would argue that Horace's *Satire* 1.9 expresses a clear description of simple boredom. The narrator is set upon by a pushy and unpleasant virtual stranger, who is determined to make an acquaintance of him and of Maecenas. The narrator attempts several times to separate himself from the flatterer, and is eventually saved by a creditor of the flatterer. When he meets the flatterer, the narrator is seemingly content "musing on some trifles: totally absorbed in these" (Hor. *Sat.* 1.9.2). In the depths of the tedious exchange, he envies the dead (1.9.28) and speculates ironically on a prophesied doom (1.9.29-34). Rather than focussing on anger at the imposition of the flatterer, the focus of the

¹²⁴ Bruss 2012, 323-6.

¹²⁵ Bruss 2012, 330-1.

text is on the grief and sorrow experienced by the narrator. When he is delivered by the creditor, and by Apollo, it is implied that he returns to a state of contentment and occupation. Indeed, he cheerfully accompanies the creditor as a witness to the trial. The flatterer is the clear cause of the tedious situation, which is removed as soon as he is. The passage is part of a long literary tradition, most notably expressed in Theophrastus' *Characters*, concerning the unpleasantness of certain character types in society. What makes this passage of interest to a discussion of simple boredom is the lack of any vocabulary associated with this affect. Such a vocabulary does exist at this period and is used elsewhere by Horace. Even in situations where a modern reader can distinguish elements of simple boredom, this is not necessarily how the affective context is conceptualised by an ancient author.

Simple boredom in the ancient world is connected to inactivity, dissatisfaction, satiety, and the experience of time. It is often expressed, and may indeed be conceptualised, in terms of frustration and annoyance. The vocabulary for expressing it is imprecise; metaphorical and symptomatic language is therefore important for its identification. The affect of simple boredom, although clearly occurring, can be conceptualised in terms of other ancient affective states.

Ancient Complex Boredom

There is very little evidence of anything that can be termed complex boredom before the first century B.C.E. The inference to be made is that complex boredom requires several key factors for it to be conceptualised. The first of these is a reasonably advanced, literate society. The nuance required to express a complexified form of disgust, which is manifested as restlessness and lethargy and casts a pall over the experience of existing, requires an advanced lexical toolbox. This likely also implies a sophisticated conception of pathological medicine and of conception of the self. Secondly, and likely more importantly, a comparatively high level of resource satisfaction is required.¹²⁶ Abundance leads to satiety, satiety to surfeit, and surfeit to ennui. Paradoxically enough, one of the contributing factors

¹²⁶ Toohey 2004, 112-3.

to existential dissatisfaction is the satisfaction of the needs for existence. Both of these factors were satisfied in the literate, wealthy, and generally stable Roman world from the first century B.C.E. In the works of Plutarch, Seneca, Horace, and Lucretius there is the first evidence of familiarity with concepts similar to complex boredom.

The earliest unambiguous reference to ancient complex boredom is likely found in the *De Rerum Natura* (3.1053-75) of Lucretius, the Epicurean philosopher of the first century B.C.E. Lucretius famously describes a hypothetical aristocrat who is unable to find satisfaction in his life despite being surrounded by luxury. Restlessly and ineffectively, he travels from his urban residence to his rural villa, ever seeking satisfaction and never finding it.

There is one goes forth often from his palace who has been bored to death at home, and then suddenly returns when he feels himself no better abroad. Off he courses, driving the nags to his country house in a headlong haste, as if he were bringing urgent help to a blazing pile: suddenly yawns on reaching the threshold of the mansion, or falls into heavy sleep and seeks oblivion, or even makes haste to get back and see the city again. Thus each man flees himself (but of course, as you might expect, the self he cannot escape cleaves to him all the more against his will)...

(Lucr. *D.R.N.* 3.1060-69, trans. Rouse)

Lucretius says that the unknown sickness, which oppresses the sufferer with its weight, is an eternal matter which can only be lessened through recourse to philosophy. The sufferer experiences restlessness, lethargy, a desire for oblivion, unsuccessful diversion in activity, and a generalised and extended sense of dissatisfaction in life. Furthermore, the sufferer is unable to identify the origins or cause of his suffering. For Lucretius, this anxiety is caused by a failure to reconcile oneself with death.¹²⁷ Kinsey suggests that Lucretius himself has not experienced this emotion, and uses the exaggerated description of a negative affect to discredit

¹²⁷ Toohey 2004, 113-4.

the precepts of his philosophical opponents.¹²⁸

After Lucretius, Horace takes up the discussion of complex boredom and dissatisfaction. As with Lucretius, this takes the form of *horror loci* (dissatisfaction with place), a form of complex boredom.

For if 'tis season and wisdom that take away cares...they change
their clime, not their mind, who rush across the sea. Tis a busy
idleness that is our bane: with yachts and [chariots] we seek to
make life happy.

(Hor. *Ep.* 1.11.25-9, trans. Fairclough)

Horace's busy idleness (*strenua inertia*) is a form of restless dissatisfaction. He suggests that those who experience it think that travel is a cure, but that this is merely a diversionary tactic. The problem is internal, and must be addressed internally. Horace states that he himself suffers from a form of complex boredom, defined by fickleness and restless discontent. Horace defines his sickness as a deadly lethargy (*funestus veternus*) that he himself has caused. He says that it has removed wisdom and pleasure from his life, and made him fickle so that he yearns for Rome when at Tibur and for Tibur when at Rome (Hor. *Ep.* 8.3-12). Horace continues these themes elsewhere, such as in *Od.* 3.16.¹²⁹ Apart from the similarity to Lucretius, what makes Horace's conception of dissatisfying, inexplicable *inertia* interesting is that this is likely the earliest first-person account of complex boredom in ancient literature.

Many scholars have noted the occurrence of complex boredom in Plutarch as the earliest detailed reference in Greek to this affect. This discussion is almost exclusively concerned with the use of *ἄλυσ* at *Pyrrhus* 13.1 and *Eumenes* 11.3.¹³⁰ The former passage details Pyrrhus' sickened inability to deal with a life of leisure, and how this trait-based dissatisfaction defines and devours his entire life. The latter passage displays *ἄλυσ* as a form of simple boredom, which presents itself as a physical malady caused by enforced inactivity. There has been very little academic

¹²⁸ Kinsey 1964, 125-6.

¹²⁹ Kuhn 1976, 28.

¹³⁰ Kuhn 1976, 23-4; Toohey 1987, 199-202; Toohey 1988, 162; Toohey 2004, 124-6.

effort to broaden this discussion into analysis of boredom in Plutarch more generally. It is the intention of this work to provide an analysis of boredom as expressed in these passages, but also elsewhere in Plutarch's work.

Seneca is the most important source for conceptions of complex boredom in our period. Central to this is Seneca's *De tranquillitate animi*, which is a dialogue between Serenus and Seneca on the former's difficulty in adapting to a Stoic course of life. Kuhn suggests that the existential depth of Seneca's discussion of *inertia* and *taedium* indicates something very analogous to ennui.¹³¹ Seneca states that the symptoms of this condition include inconstancy and changing of one's mind, dissatisfaction with oneself, disdain for life, languor in leisure, grief, and the decay of the soul into torpor and hopelessness (*De tranq.* 2.6-15).¹³² This condition is the "boredom and dissatisfaction and the vacillation of a mind that nowhere finds rest" (*De tranq.* 2.10, Gummere). Seneca states that this condition is serious, widespread and can lead to suicide (*De tranq.* 2.13-5). The cures that he suggests include travel, variation, engagement in public life, self-understanding, and equanimity.¹³³

I would lastly like to discuss Seneca's *Epistula 24*, a letter addressed to his friend Lucilius on the subject of death. Seneca reassures his correspondent, who is concerned about the result of a law suit, that the very worst that can happen to him is death. He goes on to discuss how any man of learning and philosophical control ought to despise death, and while not seeking it, to not fear it either. Seneca signs off the letter with a cheery injunction not to seek death through fearing it. He then discusses those who are moved through satiety and dissatisfied monotony of the same stimuli to desire death.

Others also are moved by a satiety of doing and seeing the same things, and not so much by a hatred of life as because they are cloyed with it. We slip into this condition, while philosophy itself spurs us on, and we say: 'How long must I endure the same things? Shall I continue to wake and sleep, to be hungry and cloyed, shiver and

¹³¹ Kuhn 1976, 29.

¹³² Toohey 2004, 124.

¹³³ Toohey 2004, 124.

perspire? There is an end to nothing; all things are connected in a sort of circle; they flee and they are pursued...I do nothing new; I see nothing new; sooner or later one sickens of this, also.' There are many who think that living is not painful, but superfluous. Farewell.

(Sen. *Ep.* 24.26, trans. Gummere)

There are several key features to this passage. This passage expresses a clear and unambiguous dissatisfaction not with aspects of life, but with life itself. Seneca makes it clear that the sufferer does not find his experience either hateful (*odium*) or bitter (*acerbus*). The experience is much closer to a disinterested dissatisfaction with monotony, than it is to hatred of life. The use of the word *supervacuum* helps to illustrate a sense of pointlessness. The identifiable cause for this emotional response is a satiety, a surfeit, of existence. This is illustrated by the mechanics of life: the seeing, the doing, the sleeping, and the eating. There is no sense of need or want of resources, even in the mechanical reference to hunger. Finally the passage ends on a pessimistic note, in that there is no reassuring reference to the alleviating curative of philosophy. It is philosophy itself which drives on this malady, for which Seneca provides no cure.

From this brief survey of complex boredom in ancient literature it is possible to identify several themes. Complex boredom in the ancient world is thought of as a malady of the spirit. It expresses itself as restless dissatisfaction, loss of meaning, languor in leisure, and thoughts of death. It is repeatedly associated with futile attempts to dissipate it through diversionary travel. The only real cure is to understand the malady and address it internally.

Chapter II

Lexical Evidence in Plutarch

Our labour preserves us from three great evils - weariness, vice, and want.

(Voltaire *Candide*, 166)

One passage in Plutarch's *Pyrrhus* (13.1) has been repeatedly alluded to as one of the clearest and earliest examples of complex boredom in ancient literature.¹³⁴ Much of this interest has been spurred by Plutarch's intriguing use of the term *ἄλυσ*. Despite this interest, there has been little research carried out on Plutarch's broader use of this term, or of the concept of boredom in Plutarch's work. To do so is the intention of this study. Due to the dearth of scholarship on boredom in antiquity, and in Plutarch in particular, much of this argument relies on primary evidence.

Several terms have been identified as relating to any Greek concept of boredom. These include *ἄλυσ* (boredom), *ἀλύω* (wandering, to be distraught), *ἀκηδία* (lassitude), *ἄση* (surfeit, distress), *ἀπληστία* (insatiate greed), *κόρος* (satiety), *πλησμονή* (abundance, surfeit), and *ἄχθομαι* (to be annoyed, burdened).¹³⁵ Neither *ἄση* nor *ἀκηδία* appear in the works of Plutarch, so these have been discounted from this study.¹³⁶ The remaining six terms will be addressed in this chapter.

This chapter attempts to review all uses by Plutarch of Greek terms that have been identified as sharing a semantic connection with the modern concept of boredom. It attempts to demonstrate how these terms are used by Plutarch, and to establish a semantic context for understanding how they are conceptualised by the author. It also seeks to establish to what extent they can be identified with a Greek concept of boredom.

¹³⁴ Kuhn 1976, 23-4; Toohey 1987, 199-202; Toohey 2004, 124-5.

¹³⁵ Toohey 1988, 153.

¹³⁶ All such claims to the existence or quantity of a specific term in a specific work are based on lemma searches in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* database (<http://www.tlg.uci.edu/>).

II.i

History of *ἄλυσ* and *ἀλύω*

I would now like to address the use of the noun *ἄλυσ* (agitation, boredom), and its verbal counterpart *ἀλύω* (to be agitated, to wander). This term is often identified as the closest approximation to a Greek word meaning boredom before the fourth century C.E. This has been noted by several scholars on the subject, and is the word most often analysed in any discussion of boredom. The word even inspired Bergler's 'alysosis' for his early identification of a pathological form of boredom (unfortunately, the word has not been adopted outside of Bergler's work).¹³⁷ Both words are comparatively rare in Greek literature, particularly in the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods. Compared to earlier and contemporary authors, Plutarch uses the terms surprisingly often. This is particularly true in regards to *ἄλυσ*, which is only used twice prior to Plutarch, yet appears six times in his corpus. Plutarch is also the earliest author in the extant canon of Greek literature to use this term more than once, or to use it unambiguously in a manner indicating a complex form of boredom. Plutarch's use of the word is therefore crucial to understanding any Greek concept of boredom and its evolving sense in the first and second centuries C.E.

History

In this section I will discuss the etymology, history, and use of the *ἄλυσ*/*ἀλύω* word cluster. The earliest extant examples of *ἀλύω* are found in Homer (Hom. *Il.* 5.352, 24.12; *Od.* 9.398, 18.333, 18.393). The verb is mostly used in participial forms, but is occasionally used in the present and imperfect tenses. It has been suggested by Puhvel that the word derives from the Hittite *alwanz-* (bewitched).¹³⁸ Beekes disagrees and suggests that the verb is a derivation in *-v-*

¹³⁷ Bergler 1945, 40.

¹³⁸ Puhvel 1984, 46-7.

from the *αλ-* stem, and that either *ἀλέομαι* (to avoid, shun, flee) or *άάομαι* (to wander, roam, to be banished) are the root words.¹³⁹ Beekes' dismissal of *ἀλέομαι* as a possible root on semantic grounds suggests that *άάομαι*, which derives from the same Proto-Indo European root as the Latin *ambulo* (to walk), is the more likely root word.¹⁴⁰ The nominal form *άλύς* is a back-formation from *άλύω*, and does not appear until much later.¹⁴¹ There is a larger cluster of words associated with *άλύω*, including *άλυσμός* (anguish, disquiet), *άλύσκω* (to escape), and *άλύσσω* (to be uneasy, restless), although these are not included in this study because they do not appear in Plutarch's corpus.

In the earliest extant examples of the term, in Homer, the word refers to mental agitation, or the state of being distraught. The most powerful illustration of this is Homer's description of Achilles at the beginning of the final book of the epic. Achilles is ruled by his grief for Patroklos, and his unsatisfied rage at the dead Hektor.

τῶν μμνησκόμενος θαλερὸν κατὰ δάκρυον εἶβεν,
 ἄλλοτ' ἐπὶ πλευρὰς κατακείμενος, ἄλλοτε δ' αὔτε
 ὕπτιος, ἄλλοτε δὲ πρηγνής· τοτὲ δ' ὀρθὸς ἀναστὰς
 δινεύεσκ' **άλύων** παρὰ θῖν' άλός

Thinking on these things he would shed large tears, lying now on his side, now on his back, and now on his face; and then again he would rise to his feet and roam **distraught** along the shore of the sea.

(Hom. *Il.* 24.9-12, trans. Murray)

Achilles' primary emotion in this scene is, of course, grief, but it is interesting to note the sense of restlessness that this scene evokes. Prefacing this passage, Homer states that Achilles cannot enjoy rest or sleep, and that he "turn[s] constantly this way and that" (*Il.* 24.3-6, Murray). Achilles is not only distraught, but restlessly distraught. I would suggest that a better translation of *άλύω* in this passage would be 'agitated', because it reflects a sense of movement as well as

¹³⁹ Beekes 2010, 76.

¹⁴⁰ Beekes 2010, 65.

¹⁴¹ Beekes 2010, 76.

dejection. I would argue that Achilles' *ψυχή*, like his body, is being tossed around. Achilles is restless; static and desirous of movement, then moving and dissatisfied with his movement.

This scene of Achilles distraught upon the shore also precedes the first mention of the mutilation of Hektor since before the funeral games (*Il.* 22.395-404, 23.19-23). It is perhaps important to note the sense of Achilles' dissatisfaction in revenge; this will not be resolved until the embassy of Priam and is the focus of the final book of the epic. Patroklos has been avenged, and laid to rest, yet still Achilles finds himself leaping into his chariot again and again to abuse the corpse further, having even this mutilation foiled by Apollo's protection. This minor use of *άλύω* takes place in a context of mental agitation, physical restlessness, and emotional dissatisfaction. I argue that these themes remain important throughout the use of this term.

I suggest that the above passage was a clearly recognisable and important scene in later literature. It was quoted by Plato in the *Republic* during Socrates' discussion of the advisability of censoring poetry for the purposes of educating young men in virtue (*Plat. Rep.* 388a).¹⁴² Socrates suggests that depicting heroes, or gods, in such uncontrolled emotion does not inspire courage. Juvenal also satirises the line (*Juv. Sat.* 3.279-80), suggesting that the troublesome drunk, if he is unable to find a victim to assault, will spend the night grieving and dissatisfied like Achilles, lying on his face and then on his back.

Homer uses the term for the highest forms of distress, and in extremely dramatic contexts. Polyphemos and Aphrodite are both described as experiencing *άλύω* during their memorable impalements (*Od.* 9.398, *Il.* 5.352). While *άλύω* cannot be described as an important or frequent word in Homer, its few appearances are in narratively important sections of the text.

Homer's final use of the term, and the verb's only appearance in the indicative mood, is in a verbatim repeated line used twice in the 18th book of the *Odyssey*. In both contexts Odysseus, in his lowly disguise as a beggar, is scolded by

¹⁴² Plato does not provide a direct quotation, but a near quotation with several deviations from the original text.

one of the new incumbents of his *οἶκος*. First Melantho the maid (*Od.* 18.333), and then Eurymachus (*Il.* 18.393) criticise Odysseus for his gall in daring to talk to his supposed superiors. Each ask:

ἢ ἀλύεις ὅτι Ἴρον ἐνίκησας τὸν ἀλήτην;

“Are you beside yourself because you have beaten that vagrant Irus?”

(*Od.* 18.333, *Od.* 18.393, trans. Murray)

This is an expression of the rarer meaning of ἀλύω, which indicates being beside oneself, not from grief or despair, but from joy or pride (cf. Plut. *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* 22e11-12). Other examples appear elsewhere, such as a description in a messenger speech of Tydeus’ taunting war cries (Aesch. *Sept.* 391).

Between Homer and Plutarch, the term ἀλύω appears intermittently in literature. There is one occurrence of ἀλύω in Aesop, referring to fishermen pulling up a net full of stones (*Fab.* 13.3.5). The fisherman could be described as dejected, disappointed, or dissatisfied. After this, the word appears most often in Classical Attic theatre, likely reflecting the distribution of extant sources, rather than any specific importance to Attic sensibilities. In the major tragedians, ἀλύω refers exclusively to mental agitation or madness, often accompanied, or typified, by raving on this state.¹⁴³ Prominent examples include Orestes lamenting on his madness (Eur. *Or.* 277), the chorus’ description of Oedipus’ aid to a Thebes beset by troubles (Soph. *OT.* 695), and Electra’s description of herself relating her troubles to the chorus (Soph. *El.* 135). Uniquely in Attic tragedy, the term appears twice in Sophocles’ *Philoctetes* (174, 1194). In both instances it is applied to Philoctetes, and emphasises his pain and his senselessness.

The term makes several appearances in the Hippocratic corpus of the fourth and fifth centuries B.C.E. The writers of the corpus make use of the verbal form on twelve occasions, as well as including the first appearance of a nominal form.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ The one exception is Tydeus’ wild boasting mentioned above (Aesch. *Sept.* 391).

¹⁴⁴ ἀλύω: Hp. *Int.* 7.13, Hp. *Virg.* 1.41, Hp. *Epid.* 1.3.13(11).5, 3.3.17(7).5, 5.1.64.7, Hp. *Morb.* 2.16.9, 2.17.7, Hp. *Nat. Mul.* 41.5, Hp. *Mul.* 1.2.39, 1.2.52, 154.5, 177.5; ἄλυσ: Hp. *Ep.* 1.9.

For Hippocrates, this word indicates a symptom of illness, which should not be particularly surprising considering the nature of the work. The impersonal and scientific tone means that the description is limited to physical and psychological states, rather than any musing on character. While the term is nowhere interrogated or defined, several things can be deduced from its usage.

Firstly, the term is used among lists of other symptoms to indicate the patient being agitated or fretful as a symptom of the illness or because of the pain. In the latter case, being in a state of experiencing *άλύω* could be described as a symptom of a symptom, with the pain as the specific cause (*Morb.* 2.16.9, 2.17.7). Secondly, there is an association with physical restlessness. This is both implicit, in the meaning of *άλύω*, and explicit, in the frequent combination of *άλύω* with *ρίπτω* (to toss oneself about) (*Int.* 7.13; *Morb.* 2.17.7; *Mul.* 1.2.39, 1.2.52). In this use of *άλύω*, I see a semantic parallel with *Il.* 24.12 in the sense of physical restlessness combined with mental restlessness. The patients are all bed-bound, and therefore static, but desirous of movement. These are all situations of enforced stillness, where the patient is coerced into remaining still by the physician, or by the illness itself. Thirdly, it is often accompanied by nausea (*Epid.* 1.3.13(11).5, 3.3.17(7).5, 5.1.64.7; *Mul.* 1.2.39). While the latter is perhaps made inevitable because we are discussing illness, the discussion of the connection between nausea and *άλυς* will be continued below.

One passage from the Hippocratic corpus warrants mention. In this passage, the author discusses the problem of rising menses affecting the brain and diaphragm. The condition, which is connected to the seizures, fits, and visions of the sacred disease, affects post-pubescent virgin females.¹⁴⁵ The effects are stated:

Ἐχόντων δὲ τουτέων ὧδε, ὑπὸ μὲν τῆς ὀξυφλεγμασίης μαίνεται, ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς σηπεδόνοϛ φονᾶ, ὑπὸ δὲ τοῦ ζοφεροῦ φοβέεται καὶ δέδοικεν, ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς περὶ τὴν καρδίην πιέξιοϛ ἀγχόνας κραινουσιν, ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς κακίης τοῦ αἵματος **άλύων** καὶ ἀδημονέων ὁ θυμὸς κακὸν ἐφέλκεται.

When the situation is such, from the acute inflammation the woman rages, from the putrefaction she becomes murderous, from the

¹⁴⁵ Flemming and Hansos 1998, 22.

darkness she is frightened and afraid, from the compression around their heart they are desirous of throttling themselves, and from the bad state of the blood the mind, being **distraught** and dismayed, tempts them to evil.

(Hp. *Virg.* 1.37-42, trans. Potter)

The text continues that those who do not engage in intercourse, and thereby provide an exit for the pooling, stultifying blood, will remain suicidal. The passage is interesting as it provides the suggestion of a connection between *άλύω* and a negative change in moral attitude, as well as an inclination towards suicide.

The word continues to be used in cases of mental agitation and physical restlessness caused by grief or pain throughout the second, third, and fourth centuries B.C.E. Examples of this include a lioness grieving her dead cubs and wandering a mountainside (Eudemus fr. 127.11, cf. Aelian *On Animals* 3.21.14), dismayed wanderings in the dark (Ap. Rhod. *Argo.* 4.1289), the distressed movement of the *θυμός* in intense pain B.C.E. (Ap. Rhod. *Argo.* 3.866), and an individual tossing in convulsions on the ground in incredible pain (Nic. *Al.* 317). However, in two authors of the end of the fourth and beginning of the third centuries C.E., there are uses of *άλύω* with slightly different connotations.

Metrodorus of Lampsacus refers to *άλύω* in combination with *ἐπὶ τῶν συμποσίων* [ν] (*Pap. Herc.* 831.13, Körte). The context is extremely fragmentary, but it seems to refer to the dejection or restlessness experienced at a dissatisfactory symposium.¹⁴⁶ The lack of context makes it extremely difficult to say more, but the association with a leisure situation is in stark contrast to the word's previous use in situations of intense grief and pain. Toohey cautiously reads simple boredom in this context.¹⁴⁷

In Menander's fragmentary *Epitrepontes*, there is a reference to a character (assumed to be Charisios) lounging in dejection. Charisios is moved by grief over the infidelity of his wife.

τί δ' οὐ ποεῖς ἄριστον; ὁ δ' ἄλύει πάλαι

¹⁴⁶ Toohey 2004, 321 n. 7.

¹⁴⁷ Toohey 1987, 200 n. 4; Toohey 1988, 155; Toohey 2004, 321 n. 7.

κατακείμενος.

Why aren't you cooking lunch? He's on his couch-
Been there for ages - **fretting**.

(Men. *Epit.* fr. 3.1-2, trans. Arnott)

Arnott disagrees with Photius' interpretation of this line, and insists that the meaning of *άλύω* is to be fretful.¹⁴⁸ Photius suggests that in this context *άλύω* means "to achieve nothing" (*τὸ μηδὲν πράττειν*) (Photius *Lexicon* α1060.1-3). While Photius' view in the ninth century C.E. may have been influenced by later uses of *άλύω*, I do not think that this interpretation should be entirely discounted. I would argue that *άλύω* consistently has a sense of purposelessness and listlessness that should not be ignored. In support of this, Menander's other use of *άλύω* in this work refers to the pointless agitation caused by love (Men. *Epit.* fr. 6.559). The simultaneous occurrence of mental agitation and stated physical lassitude is of particular interest in the quoted passage. This is the earliest connection between *άλύω* and languor.

At an uncertain date, *άλύω* acquired another meaning, which informed the later use of the word. This new instantiation (to wander or roam) is first identifiable in Polybius, providing us with a *terminus ante quem* of the mid second century B.C.E. In its new semantic form, the word largely loses its negative emotional context. The change of meaning towards aimless physical movement is perhaps anticipated by several factors. Firstly, several related words are largely concerned with physical movement. Both of the etymological root words suggested by Beekes (*άλέομαι* and *άλάομαι*) signify physical movement, as do the related *άλύσσω* and *άλύσκω*.¹⁴⁹ Secondly, *άλύω* is often used in contexts of restless movement. The presence of words such as *δινεύω* (Hom. *Il.* 24.12) and *ρίπτω* (Hp. *Int.* 7.13; Hp. *Morb.* 2.17.7; Hp. *Mul.* 1.2.39, 1.2.52) perhaps indicate that *άλύω* does not have this meaning unaccompanied. The movement implied in these contexts is also of a very different type; it is the frenetic, restless movement of agitation, rather than the aimless wandering of indolence. The factor that does unite both

¹⁴⁸ Arnott 1979, 393.

¹⁴⁹ Beekes 2010, 76.

examples of movement is a lack of purpose.

I have argued above that the sense of spiritual dislocation and agitation implied by *άλύω* shares an association with movement, or, at the very least, not being at rest. I contend that this reflects Cairns' assertion that the Greek *παθή* can have a physical aspect, as well as a psychological one.¹⁵⁰

Returning once more to this new meaning of *άλύω*, we see that Polybius uses it in describing the antics of the second century C.E. Seleucid king, Antiochus Epiphanes, dubbed Epimanes (the Madman). Polybius relates that Antiochus was known for escaping his court and wandering (*άλύων*) into the city with a few companions (Plb. *Hist.* 26.1.1.4). It was his custom to frequent the shops of gold and silver smiths, drink and converse with common folk, play music, distribute gifts, hold mock-Roman elections for himself, and attend the public baths. It is explicitly stated that his behaviour caused the respectable men of the city to be cast into *ἀπορία* (perplexity, anxiety) (Plb. *Hist.* 26.1.7.1). Diodorus Siculus, borrowing much of the language and subject matter from Polybius, also relates the activities of the eccentric monarch:

*Ὅτι Ἀντίοχος προσφάτως παρειληφώς τὴν
βασιλείαν ἐνεστήσατο βίον παράλογον καὶ ἀσυνήθη
τοῖς ἄλλοις βασιλεῦσι. πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ ἐκ τῶν βα-
σιλείων ὑπάγων λάθρα τῆς θεραπείας περιήει τὴν
πόλιν **άλύων** ὅπου τύχοι δεύτερος ἢ τρίτος· μετὰ
δὲ ταῦτα ἐφιλοτιμεῖτο μετὰ δημοτῶν ἀνθρώπων
συγκαταρριπτεῖν οἱ τύχοι καὶ μετὰ τῶν παρεπι-
δημούντων ξένων τῶν εὐτελεστάτων συμπίνειν.*

Antiochus on first succeeding to the throne embarked upon a quixotic mode of life foreign to other monarchs. To begin with, he would often slip out of the palace without informing his courtiers, and **wander** at random about the city with one or two companions. Next he took pride in stooping to the company of common people, no matter where, and in drinking with visiting foreigners of the meanest

¹⁵⁰ Cairns 2008, 45.

stamp.

(Dio. Sic. *Bib. Hist.* 29.32.1-8, trans. Walton)

The sense of *άλύω* in this context, far from mental dejection, is closer to ‘idling’. The scene clearly depicts Antiochus indulging in leisure and recreation activities. In both passages, Antiochus manages to earn the opprobrium of those who witness his actions, both by offending the respectable, and by scaring and astonishing feasters (Dio. Sic. *Bib. Hist.* 29.32.11-3, 29.32.23-6; Plb. *Hist.* 26.1.4.1-5.1, 26.1.7.1). Antiochus takes each of the normal leisure activities he engages in to excess. Not all of the connotations of stimulation seeking and luxurious excess inherent in Antiochus’ behaviour can be attributed to the one usage of *άλύω* at the beginning of the passage. However, it does establish a connection between *άλύω* and these types of actions.

Another example of *άλύω* indicating leisurely movement, here without such negative connotations, is evident in Josephus’ *Jewish Antiquities*. Josephus uses *άλύω* in a description of a party of Herod’s court swimming playfully in the palace at Jericho:

τοῦ δὲ περὶ τὸν τόπον ἰδιώ-
ματος θερινωτέρου τυγχάνοντος συνειλεγμένοι
τάχιον ἐξῆλθον **άλύοντες**, καὶ ταῖς κολυμβήθραις
ἐπιστάντες, αἱ μεγάλαι περὶ τὴν αὐλὴν ἐτύγγανον,
ἀνέψυχον τὸ θερμότατον τῆς μεσημβρίας

But as the place was naturally very hot, they soon went out in a group for a **stroll**, and stood beside the swimming-pools, of which there were several large ones around the palace, and cooled themselves off from the excessive heat of noon.

(J. A.J. 15.54.1-55.1, trans. Marcus)

Although this particular stroll leads to a deliberate drowning, I suggest that this is an example of *άλύω* at its most simple, as an example of idle movement.

Eventually, I argue, the combination of these two instantiations of *άλύω*, that of mental agitation and restlessness and that of idling and purposeless movement, finally forms a semantic package more recognisable as a form of boredom. This is most noticeable in the uses of the word by Plutarch, as will be discussed below. Writing after Plutarch, Aelian (*Var. Hist.* 14.12.1-2) comfortably uses the term to refer to a situation resembling simple boredom.

Note that when travelling the Persian king took with him, **in order not to be bored** (*ἵνα μὴ ἀλύῃ*), a small block of lime wood and a little knife to scrape it. This was the activity of the royal hands. He certainly did not take with him a book or serious thoughts, in order to be able to read something important and improving or meditate on a noble or worthwhile subject.

(Ael. *Var. Hist.* 14.12, trans. Wilson)

The use of *άλύω* in this passage still refers to the avoidance of a state of restless agitation. However this is not caused by grief or pain, but by a lack of occupation. In order that his mind not wander he engages in a diverting physical activity. The author also notes that worthwhile reading or philosophical enquiry might avert this situation. A complex term associated with mental agitation, dissatisfaction, restlessness, purposeless movement, physical languor, and stimulus seeking comes to fill a lexical gap for a society increasingly aware of the negative qualities of leisure.

It is now necessary to focus on *ἄλυσ*, the nominal form of *άλύω*. Appearing less than one hundred times in the entire extant corpus, *ἄλυσ* is a rare word. The dating for the appearance of the word is unclear, although by the late first century it appears with reasonable regularity. There are two sources of the word before Plutarch, but both are problematic in terms of dating.

The first comes from the Hippocratic corpus, and is attributed to Artaxerxes. The letter was almost certainly composed to serve as an introduction to the *Persian Letters* (*Hp. Ep.* 3-9), which suppose to illustrate an exchange between Hippocrates and Artaxerxes. The dating of their composition is not clear, although it has been suggested that they were written as late as the first century

B.C.E. or the second century C.E.¹⁵¹ As discussed above, *άλύω* is used repeatedly in the Hippocratic corpus, and almost exclusively in a participial form. The one appearance of *ἄλυσ* is in the pseudepigraphica, in an apocryphal letter supposedly written by Artaxerxes to a doctor named Partios, requesting his aid and that of Hippocrates (Hp. *Ep.* 1.9). The writer of the letter describes the “great agitation” (*πολὺς ἄλυσ*) of his army, who are beset by plague. While the Hippocratic writings generally avoids the nominal form, Galen uses it twice in his commentary on Hippocrates’ *Prognosticon* (Gal. *In Hippocratis Prognosticum Commentaria* iii 18b61.9, 18b66.2). In both situations it is used to discuss symptoms for which Hippocrates uses the nominal *άλυσμός*.¹⁵² This supports other evidence that the nominal form had increased in usage and importance by the second century C.E.

The second pre-Plutarchian occurrence of *ἄλυσ* is in a fragment (fr. 246) from Zeno of Citium, the founding Stoic philosopher of the fourth and third centuries B.C.E. The fragment was preserved in the *Paedagogus* (3.11) of the second century C.E. Christian theologian Clement of Alexandria. While the section is presented as the word of Zeno, and is treated as such by Toohey, there is no guarantee that the word choice was not modernised by Clement. This suggestion is strengthened by the fact that Clement himself uses both *ἄλυσ* and *άλύω* elsewhere in his works (*Paed.* 2.9.81.5, *Protr.* 2.27.3-5). Zeno is quoted at length as part of a discussion of the ideal in young women. Zeno discusses the comely and modest nature of her looks and deportment. He then expresses an injunction that this ideal be far from the *ἄλυσ* of the workshops of the perfumers, goldsmiths, wool sellers, and other merchants, because in these places women spend the entire day adorned like prostitutes (fr. 246.9-12). Toohey sees *ἄλυσ* in this situation representing an expression of satiety and simple boredom.¹⁵³ The *LSJ* also suggests this as the earliest example of *ἄλυσ* indicating a second meaning of boredom or ennui, rather than agitation. I agree that *ἄλυσ* is often connected to, and caused by, satiety, but I do not consider that there is enough evidence to gloss *ἄλυσ* as satiety or boredom in this situation. That is not to say that this is not a fascinating use of the word. In

¹⁵¹ Smith 1990, 18-9.

¹⁵² The term *άλυσμός* occurs 16 times in the works of Hippocrates. It is a rare word that is restricted almost exclusively to the medical texts of Hippocrates and Galen, in which it describes symptoms of distress and physical restlessness in the sick. This term has been largely excluded from this study because it does not appear in the works of Plutarch.

¹⁵³ Toohey 2004, 321 n. 7.

most other extant iterations the mental agitation of *άλύω* and *ἄλυσ* is brought about by grief, pain, or exultation. In this passage the context is luxurious spending, leisure, idling, and negative moral implications. In this instance, the restless dissatisfaction of *ἄλυσ* is defined in opposition to the steadiness of modesty. It could be argued that *ἄλυσ* represents a miasmatic sense of physical and moral lassitude caused by indulgence and leisure. I would argue that this suggests not a change of meaning of the term, but rather a broadening of the situations that induce it.

I would like to compare these passages to one from Diogenes of Oenoanda, the late second century C.E. Epicurean philosopher. Diogenes uses *ἄλυσ* in a direct appeal to the audience of his work, in an attempt to dictate the manner in which his work is viewed. Diogenes says:

οὐ-
δέννα δ' ὑμῶν συναρ-
πάζω ῥαδίως καὶ ἀνε-
πισκεπτὲι μαρτυρεῖν
τοῖς λέγουσιν ὅτι τάδε]
ἔστ' ἀληθῆ[-ἐδογμάτι-]
σα γὰρ οὐδέγ' - [ἀλλὰ πάν-]
τὰ περιθεω[ροῦντες ὁ-]
μοῦ συνλογ[ίξεσθε. ἐν]
μόνον δ' ἀξιῶ, [ὥς καὶ ἔ-]
νανχος, ὑμᾶς μ[ὴ πα-]
ροδευόντων τ[ρόπον,]
μηδ' ἄν τι ἀκηδ[εΐας]
καὶ ἄλυσος [ἤ, ἐφισ-]
τάναι τοῖς γεγρ[αμμέ-]
νοις, ποικίλως [εἰς αὐ-]
τῶν ἕκαστον ἐ[πιστρέ-]
φοντας καὶ πα[ραβαί]/νοντας...

Now I am not rushing any of you into accepting without thought what is said is true - I have made no dogmatic statements - but look

at everything from all angles and consider it in company with me. One thing I ask, as I did just now, that you do not look at what is written after the fashion of a passer-by, or in a spirit of carelessness and **boredom**, paying only fickle attention to one section after another and passing on...

(Diogenes of Oenoanda fr. 25.2.11-25.3.14, trans. Chilton)

Chilton translates *ἄλυσ* as boredom, but is that what is indicated? In this passage, Diogenes portrays *ἄλυσ* as a lack of attention. Similar to *ἀκηδία*, which is a lack of attention or care, *ἄλυσ* is a wandering or restless mind. It is portrayed as the antithesis of the proper enquiring mindset necessary for philosophy. The idea of superficial and cursory experience of *ἄλυσ* is similar to that of the passer-by (*παροδευών*). One interpretation is that again *ἄλυσ* refers to a sense of mental movement, and a restlessness that manifests as inattention. I would argue that *ἄλυσ* represents a state of restless indifference caused by a wandering mind subject to changeability and fickleness. In this instance, *ἄλυσ* can be stated with confidence to resemble simple boredom.

In his paper on understanding the semantics of ancient Greek signifiers in a modern context, Clarke discusses the difficulty of this form of metacognition. He argues that the academic study of ancient lexicographical evidence has been limited by the primacy of such sources as the *LSJ*. His argument is that the use of dictionary definitions, which somewhat arbitrarily and without explanation divide words into categories of semantic use, limits the understanding of ancient concepts and signifiers.¹⁵⁴ Clarke suggests that the study of Greek signifiers has been adversely affected by the attempt to conceptualise these, and their multifarious connotations, in terms of dictionary entries separated into discrete meanings. His argument is that Greek is a fundamentally associative language, and needs to be understood as such.¹⁵⁵ This can be attributed both to the inflected grammar, and the close associations between various word forms related to the same root word. A better approach is to attempt to discern the prototypical concept that permeates

¹⁵⁴ Clarke 2010, 123-5.

¹⁵⁵ Clarke 2010, 131.

the semantic field of the signifier in all its uses.¹⁵⁶ He suggests that different semantic instantiations branch out from these prototypes, and sometimes become established through syntactic entrenchment as new prototypes.¹⁵⁷

I argue that the prototypical meaning of the *άλύω* cluster is ‘to be mentally or physically moved’. It is the state of experiencing a restless, wandering, disturbed mind or spirit. This movement is often caused by another affective force. This is most commonly grief (e.g. Hom *Il.* 24.9-12, Eudemus fr. 127.11, Men. *Epit.* fr. 3.1-2), although it can also be pride or exultation (e.g. Hom. *Od.* 18.333, 18.393; Aesch. *Sept.* 391). It is also caused by the physical experience of pain (e.g. Hom. *Od.* 9.398, *Il.* 5.352; Hp. *Morb.* 2.16.9, 2.17.7; Soph. *Phil.* 174, 1194; Nic. *Al.* 317). I suggest that modern translations often misinterpret this word to make it represent the affect of which it is a symptom. Circa third century B.C.E., the situations that cause this mental dislocation broaden to include dissatisfaction in leisure, and physical lethargy is observed in combination with the mental restlessness (Metr. *Pap. Herc.* 831.13, Körte; Men. *Epit.* fr. 3.1-2).

This movement is also, by its reactive nature, directionless and therefore purposeless. This sense of purposeless movement is then also applied to less metaphorical types of movement. Hence, the instantiation of *άλύω* representing idle movement (Plb. *Hist.* 26.1.1.4; Dio. Sic. *Bib. Hist.* 29.32.1-8; J. A.J. 15.54.1-55.1). In this instantiation, restlessness rather than agitation is emphasised.

I would argue that the multiple instantiations merge to form a complexified meaning, the semantic field of which is remarkably similar to modern conceptions of boredom. In this new instantiation, *άλύω* can indicate the restlessness in, and dislocation caused by, purposeless leisure (Ael. *Var. Hist.* 14.12.1-2). This complexified form of *άλύω* is complemented by the appearance of the nominal *ἄλυσ*, in which the sense of restlessness is expressed as a form of indifference or lassitude. If we conceptualise *άλύω/ἄλυσ* as the experience of being moved to restless dissatisfaction by an affective force or material situation, it can also be the powerful experience of being moved by nothing. In this manner *άλύω/ἄλυσ* has a clear association with boredom.

¹⁵⁶ Clarke 2010, 122.

¹⁵⁷ Clarke 2010, 129-30.

II.ii

ἀλύω in Plutarch

There are six occurrences of the nominal ἄλυσ and 19 of the verbal ἀλύω in Plutarch, significantly more than in any other single, preceding, extant source. While this is still a relatively small number of appearances for an oeuvre the size of Plutarch's, it does give us an indication that Plutarch was aware of the concept and was ready to include it in his discourse.

This is reinforced by Plutarch's discussion of the multiple meanings that Homer ascribes to ἀλύειν in *How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* (22e8-12). This comes in the context of discussing the use of obscure words, and their multiple meanings, in poetry. In line with the above discussion, Plutarch notes that Homer uses ἀλύω in two different senses. He says that the word can be used as a synonym for δάκνω (to be stung or vexed) or for ἀπορέω (to be at a loss), and quotes *Iliad* 5.352 (22e8-10). He goes on to say that elsewhere ἀλύω is a synonym for γαυράω (to be proud or arrogant) or χαίρω (to rejoice), providing *Odyssey* 18.333 and 18.393 as examples (22e11-2). This is followed by the observation that it is artful composition to use the same word to indicate different meanings of the same word at different points in a text in order to suit the subject matter (22f3-6); an observation which applies aptly to this study. It need not concern us that Plutarch, in this discussion of the meaning of ἀλύω, does not explicitly state anything that suggests connotations of boredom; this passage refers to obscure, archaic, and poetic uses of words. This passage indicates that Plutarch was aware that the connotations related to this word cluster were complex and shifting, and had changed significantly since Homeric usage.

Although I have argued that ἀλύω is a complexified term by the period of Plutarch, there is still one passage where ἀλύω is used in a manner similar to its earliest use, of agitation caused by grief. The passage comes in the *Brutus* (15.5.4), where Plutarch describes the state of Brutus' wife Porcia prior to the assassination of Julius Caesar. Porcia is described as being in a state of terrible and neurotic

anxiety over the fate of her husband. This climaxes in a state of total physical and mental collapse, which is so severe that her maids and neighbours briefly conclude that she has died. The cause for this dramatic swoon is that her agitated spirit (*ψυχή ἀλύουσα*) is driven into a state of *ἀπορία*. Her fears and anxieties produce a complete stupor, in which she goes pale, and cannot speak or move. Her situation is caused by mental and affective factors, but leads to physical effects. This medical use of *ἀλύω* shares similarities with Hippocrates' use of the term. This passage is fascinating, not only for the corporeal effects of the affect, but also for the connection between *ἀλύω* and stupor. It could be argued that the agitated movement of the *ψυχή* leads to a physical inability to move. This reinforces the theme of the concurrence of movement and stasis.

Plutarch also uses *ἄλνω* in the sense of purposeless physical movement on six occasions. In first three of these instances, the sense of physical movement is emphasised by the close proximity of *πλανάω* (to wander or roam). However, I would argue that the context of these passages provides associations with the more complex meaning of this term.

In the first passage, Pelopidas and a group of fellow exiles are planning a coup in Thebes. They disguise themselves as hunters in the hope that they will be mistaken for aimless travellers (*ἀλύοντες*) (*Pelop.* 8.2.11). Here *ἀλύω* is used in the simple form of wandering in aimless and purposeless leisure. This neutral view of wandering is interesting in comparison with the second passage.

In this passage, Nasica, the murderer of Tiberius Gracchus, is described by Plutarch as wandering ignobly (*ἀλύων...ἀδόξως*) in exile before his death in Pergamum (*T.G.* 21.3.9). The tone of the passage is negative, in both his moral conduct and his aimlessness. Although this is idle movement, Nasica is agitated and dissatisfied. The passage also provides a connection with *ἀλύω*, exile, and death.

In the third passage, Antonius is also described as wandering aimlessly (*ἀλύων*) (*Ant.* 69.1.3). The scene comes in the aftermath of his disastrous defeat at Actium, when Antonius eschews his duty in order to wander the countryside with several companions. This is the most complex of the passages because it implies that Antonius finds the experience positive, and the solitude and peace a relief

from the burdens of his life. However, there are also negative aspects to the passage as well. Antonius is evidently indulging himself in leisure at a time when he should be taking action. Antonius is clearly in a state of some agitation and dissatisfaction. The reference to *άλύω* is closely followed by Antonius' attempted suicide (69.2), and a short-lived attempt to exile himself to Pharos to live in simple contentment (69.4). I argue that the spirit of physical restlessness implied by *άλύω* contributes to a sense of dissatisfaction with life.

The fourth passage also refers to Antonius (*Comp. Demetr. Ant.* 3.3.7). Antonius is compared to Herakles, and Cleopatra to Omphale (cf. *Whether An Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs* 785f2-9). Plutarch suggests that one of the flaws of Antonius was his tendency to be disarmed by Cleopatra, and his habit of neglecting his duty in order to roam (*άλύειν*) and play with her. As with the previous passage, *άλύω* here is displayed as experientially positive for Antonius, but negative for his aims and character, at least in the view of the biographer. I would argue that *άλύω* refers both to the physical movement and the spirit of indulgence and inconstancy that produces it.

This sense of *άλύω* representing physical movement at moments of dissatisfaction is also shown in *Sertorius*. Sertorius is described in a moment of setback during an assault on the cave-riddled hill fortress of the Characitani. Unable to assault the caves, and before the stroke of tactical genius that secures him a victory, Sertorius rides out to observe the field of battle. Plutarch describes the frustrated Sertorius as wandering aimlessly (*ἄλλως ἀλύων*) and indulging in empty words (*Sert.* 17.3.2). The emotional component of the usage does not imply idle movement, but rather agitated movement without purpose. This is emphasised by the use of the adverbial *ἄλλως* to indicate aimlessness and futility.

The term *άλύω* is also used in the sense of idling, or indulging in leisure. In almost all instances it is used to describe negative forms of leisure.

The connotations of indolent pleasure are explored in *Pyrrhus* (16.2.5). Pyrrhus, having accepted the Tarentines request for military aid against Rome, becomes frustrated with the indolence of the Tarentines, who would rather indulge in leisure than assist him militarily. The Tarentines instead pontificate on

the war while idling (*ἀλύοντες*) in the *gymnasia* and colonnades. Pyrrhus has these closed, along with banning *symposia* and festivals, and enrolls the men in military activity. This passage presents *ἀλύω* as a form of indolence that is antithetical to martial activities (cf. *Roman Questions* 274d6).

This association between *ἀλύω* and the leisure of negative excess and luxurious habits is perhaps most clearly seen in *Antonius*. Antonius' life is defined by his indulgence and focus on luxury. Antonius' indulgent nature is described thus:

βδελυττομένων
αὐτοῦ μέθας ἀώρους καὶ δαπάνας ἐπαχθεῖς καὶ κυλινδή-
σεις ἐν γυναίοις, καὶ μεθ' ἡμέραν μὲν ὕπνους καὶ περι-
πάτους **ἀλύοντος** καὶ κραιπαλῶντος, νύκτωρ δὲ κώμους
καὶ θέατρα καὶ διατριβὰς ἐν γάμοις μίμων καὶ γελω-
τοποιῶν.

They loathed his ill-timed drunkenness, his heavy expenditures, his debauches with women, his spending the days in sleep or in wandering about with **crazed** and aching head, the nights in revelry or at shows, or in attendance at the nuptial feasts of mimes and jesters.

(Plut. *Ant.* 9.3.1-4.1, trans. Perrin)

The sense of physical movement is provided by *περίπατος* (a walk), and *ἀλύω* gives a sense of moral and physical listlessness. Perrin has translated *ἀλύω* here as 'crazed', but it could as easily be translated as 'indolent' or 'restless'. This sense of *ἀλύω*, as referring to one who has descended into a state of leisurely and luxurious decline, is also expressed in *Timoleon* (14.3.2) and the *Comparison of Cimon and Lucullus* (1.2.4). In the former passage, Dionysius, the former tyrant of Syracuse, is described as idling in shops and perfumiers (cf. Diog. Oen. fr. 25), drinking, and consorting with prostitutes in Corinth. Plutarch suggests that observers were unsure whether this was Dionysius' true nature as an idler (*ἀλύοντα*), or whether it was a ploy to seem harmless. Lucullus is similarly described in a shameful retirement of luxury and indulgence. Plutarch states that

Cimon was lucky to have died at the head of an army rather than exhausted (*ἀπειρηκώς*) and listless (*ἀλύων*) like Lucullus (cf. *Whether An Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs* 785f2-9).

These passages all clearly have an association with a negative view of leisure. This may be reconciled with the discussed definition of *ἀλύων* by the conceptualisation of this indolence as symptomatic of a restless, purposeless, and dissatisfied mind. Perhaps it is possible to see in these descriptions the stimulus seeking behaviour often associated with boredom prone individuals. It is important to note Winterstein's conception of the type of boredom sufferer who through overstimulation is never able to enjoy pleasure, although it is constantly sought.¹⁵⁸ Clearly, for Plutarch, *ἀλύων* is associated with immoderate and appetitive desires, and a lack of the moderating influence of reason.

As has been discussed, there is a clear association between *ἀλύων* and leisure. I would now like to turn to two passages where the association with leisure is very explicit, but carries a different sense. I contend that these passages represent the clearest association between *ἀλύων* and simple boredom in Plutarch. In the first passage an unnamed priest challenges Herakles to a game of dice in a moment of inactivity.

ὁ νεωκόρος τοῦ Ἡρακλέους *ἀλύων*,
ὥς ἔοικεν, ὑπὸ σχολῆς προὔθετο πρὸς τὸν θεὸν
διακυβεύειν...

The keeper of the temple of Hercules, **being at a loss** for something to do, as it seems, proposed to the god a game of dice...

(Plut. *Rom.* 5.1.2-4, trans. Perrin)

I would suggest that in this passage the priest is metaphorically moved and literally motivated by leisure. He is dissatisfied in his lack of diversion and responds to his inactivity by seeking out entertainment, in a classic example of stimulation seeking. Although he loses, the outcome is far better than would be

¹⁵⁸ Winterstein 774 (from Fenichel 1951, 361).

expected for someone who gambles with a god. The second passage is remarkably similar:

λαβοῦσα

δὴ ποτε τὸν Ἄρτοξέρξην ὠρμημένον ἀλύειν σχολῆς οὔσης,
προῦκαλεῖτο περὶ χιλίων δαρεικῶν κυβεῦσαι...

So, one day, finding Artaxerxes trying **to amuse** himself in a vacant hour, she challenged him to play at dice for a thousand darics...

(Plut. *Art.* 17.3.1-3, trans. Perrin)

I disagree with the wording, if not the sense, of Perrin's translation in this passage. Perrin translates ἀλύω as the escape from oppressive leisure, rather than the experience of it. I would suggest the sense to be closer to 'Artaxerxes having begun to be adrift from being at leisure'. Similarly to the priest, Artaxerxes is motivated towards restlessness by his inactivity. He accepts a wager with Parysatis that does not turn out to his advantage.

I argue that both passages present ἀλύω as a stirring of restlessness in lethargy. I would argue that this is an example of ἀλύω expressing the metaphorical sense of movement discussed in the previous section. This is the dislocating, agitating experience of being caught in leisure. Perrin's translation of the first section admirably reflects the sense of aimlessness in this experience. It also clearly agrees with one of the meanings that Plutarch says can be ascribed to ἀλύω (*How the Young Man Should Study Poetry* 22e8-12).

The use of ἀλύω by Plutarch is diverse and nuanced. I do not intend to give the impression that the word in all of the discussed uses has the sense of boredom. I do however argue that, even in its polysemy, there are several connotations of the word that can be associated with boredom, dissatisfaction, and with complicated views of leisure. Firstly, the word is used to indicate mental agitation combined with physical stupor. Secondly, it is used for aimless movement either defined by indulgence or dissatisfaction. Thirdly, it is used in contexts of negative leisure and luxurious excess. In the final use, I suggest that it does represent a restlessness in leisure and desire for stimulus that can be compared to simple boredom.

II.iii

ἄλυσ in Plutarch

In this section, I will discuss the nominal ἄλυσ. Plutarch is the best and most extensive source for the early meaning of ἄλυσ. Earlier descriptions of ἄλυσ seem to depict it as a state of agitation, indifference, or dissatisfaction. The state described by Plutarch is a state of its own, defined by dissatisfaction and restlessness. Rather than a temporary experience, it is a state that one can fall into, and must struggle to escape. This is connected to Plutarch's view of practical ethics.

In *How a Young Man May Become Aware of His Progress in Virtue*, Plutarch depicts ἄλυσ as a temporary phase along the path to virtue through the study of philosophy. Plutarch's path to virtue is gradual, steady, and consistent. Plutarch rejects the concept that there are no shades of evil, with all men categorised together in vice who have not reached ultimate perfection (76a). Those seeking virtue must maintain a constant effort since "vice always makes an onset on the man who yields ground by loitering (κατὰ σχολήν)" (76d6-7, Babbitt). He suggests that those who engage in philosophy in fits and starts get wearied, dissatisfied with their progress, and give up (77b). Plutarch suggests that philosophy needs to be a constant urge like hunger and thirst, not the transitory enjoyment of perfume, for which there is no desire once it has been removed (77c). He suggests that philosophy is most difficult at the outset, as the path has not yet been made smooth through habituation. At the beginning of the study of philosophy, one is beset by "perplexity (ἀπορία), errant thoughts (πλάνη), and much vacillation (μεταμέλεια)" (77d9, Babbitt). Plutarch describes Diogenes of Sinope in this position, having devoted himself to philosophy, but stung by a sudden dejection. Diogenes is temporarily seized by this emotion at not being able to participate in feasting, drinking, and merry-making, although he quickly banishes it.

ὅταν οὖν οἱ τοιοῦτοι
κατασπασμοὶ γένωνται μὴ πολλάκις, αἱ τε πρὸς αὐ-
τοὺς ἐξαίρεσις καὶ ἀνακρούσεις τοῦ φρονήματος

ὥσπερ ἐκ τροπῆς ταχεῖαι παρῶσι καὶ διαλύωσι
ῥαδίως τὸν ἄλυν καὶ τὴν ἀδημονίαν, ἔν τινι βεβαίῳ
τὴν προκοπὴν εἶναι δεῖ νομίζειν.

Now when such fits of dejection become of infrequent occurrence and the objections and protests made by sound sense against them quickly come to our help, as though rallying after a temporary rout, and easily dissipate our **depression** and dismay, we may believe that our progress rests on a firm foundation.

(Plut. *How a Young Man May Become Aware of His Progress in Virtue* 78a5 10, trans. Babbitt)

Diogenes descends into a fit of depression in which he sees his philosophical life as meaningless (77f). While he does not become suicidal like the similarly affected Sextius the Roman (77e), he experiences a weariness of a life without luxury. He experiences stimulus hunger in his desire to engage in the drinking and festivities, and is unable to sleep. Eventually, however, his ἄλυν and ἀδημονία are defeated by his recourse to φρόνημα, understood here as philosophy. This passage is fascinating in that it presents ἄλυν as cured by philosophy, but also caused by a temporary misunderstanding of it.

Babbitt's translation emphasizes the depressive qualities of Diogenes' ἄλυν, but it is important to note that a sense of restlessness suffuses both the depiction of Diogenes and Plutarch's previous narrative on the early stages of a dedication to philosophy. In this very desire to revert to a life of indulgence there is a sense of vacillation, inconstancy, and desire for experiential change.

Plutarch is also universalizing the condition as an expected step on the path to an ethical and philosophical life. His solution to these fits of lassitude is also characteristically temporary. In line with Plutarch's view of moderation of the παθή, he does not expect the virtuous to ever entirely banish such emotions. Instead, the virtuous become habituated to using reason to limit their frequency and effect.

While Diogenes' ἄλυν is too temporary and explicable to be called complex

boredom, this passage displays a negative affect caused by dissatisfaction with an entire mode of life, and accompanied by loss of meaning and the desire for diverting stimuli.

Plutarch's *On Exile* is, at its core, a discussion of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with one's mode of life. Plutarch argues for a rational approach to exile, and seeks to highlight that exile is an evil in name only. He argues that, if approached with the proper mindset, exile has its benefits. In this context, the word *ἄλυσ* appears in Plutarch's discussion of the life of the philosopher Zeno. Zeno's reaction to a disaster that befell his final ship, and therefore his wealth, is to thank fortune for removing these things so that he can fully devote himself to philosophy. Plutarch applauds this reaction, and suggests that the exile should react in a similar manner.

άνήρ δὲ μὴ τετυφωμένος παντάπασι μηδὲ
όχλομανῶν οὐκ ἂν, οἷμαι, μέμψαιτο τὴν τύχην
συνελαυνόμενος εἰς νῆσον, ἀλλ' ἐπαινέσειεν ὅτι τὸν
πολὺν ἄλυν καὶ ῥέμβον ἑαυτοῦ, καὶ πλάνας ἐν
ἀποδημίαις, καὶ κινδύνους ἐν θαλάσσῃ καὶ θορύ-
βους ἐν ἀγορᾷ περιελοῦσα μόνιμον, καὶ σχολαῖον
καὶ ἀπερίσπαστον καὶ ἴδιον βίον ὡς ἀληθῶς δίδωσι,
κέντρῳ καὶ διαστήματι περιγράψασα τὴν τῶν ἀναγ-
καίων χρείαν.

While a man not wholly infatuated or mad for the mob would not, I think, on being confined to an island, reproach Fortune, but would commend her for taking away from him all his **restlessness** and aimless roving, wanderings in foreign lands and perils at sea and tumults in the market place, and giving him a life that was settled, leisurely, undistracted, and truly his own, describing with centre and radius a circle containing the necessities that meet his needs.

(Plut. *On Exile* 603e1-9, trans. De Lacy and Einarson)

In this passage, *ἄλυσ* refers to a type of restless, dissatisfied, and agitated movement. It is used in conjunction with *ῥέμβος* and *πλάνη*, emphasising the sense

of movement. The sense of movement is also defined as expressly negative. Later in the text, Plutarch disagrees with those who suggest that those who spend their lives in constant travel are happy (604a4-6). There is in this a hint of the ceaseless, dissatisfied movement mentioned in Lucretius (*D.R.N.* 1053-75) and Horace (*Hor. Ep.* 8.3-12).

This condition is also interestingly universalised. Plutarch does not suggest that this *ἄλυσ* is restricted to a specific type of individual. Rather, it is presented as something that occurs generally in everyday, urban life. The agitation of a normal elite lifestyle, with its journeys, travels, and trips to the *agora*, is presented as somewhat inherent. In opposition, a life of enforced stillness has its pleasures for Plutarch. He suggests that any island of exile will provide the simple satisfaction of a house, walks, bathing, fishing and hunting (603e9-11). Most importantly, it allows quiet and peace from callers and those who desire something, including *πολυπράγμονες* (cf. *Plut. On Being a Busybody*) (603f-604a). Interestingly, Plutarch defines *ἄλυσ* against a positive, simple, and satisfied form of leisure (605e5). This positive view of satisfied leisure is emphasised later in the text, where Plutarch states that the exile can find leisure if he desires it and has learnt to use it (604a3-4).

Like *On Exile, Whether An Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs* is an essay concerned with occupying oneself, finding satisfaction, and behaving admirably in reduced circumstances. Old age and retirement from public life can be viewed as a parallel for exile. For Plutarch, the goal of a proper old age is to guard and enhance the reputation gained during the more vital periods of one's life (786a-b). The old statesman must accept that he is not a young man, and leave activities such as warfare to younger men (789c). While contemptibly clinging to power and ambition should be avoided, there is still much that the older man can contribute to society through his wisdom, knowledge, and experience (797e-f). The old man must particularly guard against a destructive descent into inactivity. The worst flaws in old men are *ἀπορία* (idleness), *δειλία* (cowardice), and *μαλακία* (slackness). The charting of this middle course between idleness and over-exertion is illustrated through the discussion of examples. Lucullus, whose own *Life* also emphasises the disgraceful nature of his retirement (*Luc.* 38-43, *Comp. Luc. Cim.* 1),

is used twice as an example of the worst sort of retirement (785f-786a, 792b). In the first example, he is portrayed slipping into a state of *ἄλυσ*.

αὐτὸν μὲν εἰς λουτρὰ καὶ
δεῖπνα καὶ συνουσίας μεθήμερινὰς καὶ **πολὺν ἄλυν**
καὶ κατασκευὰς οἰκοδομημάτων νεοπρεπεῖς μετὰ
τὰς στρατείας καὶ πολιτείας ἀφεικότα, τῷ δὲ
Πομπηίῳ φιλαρχίαν ἐγκαλοῦντα καὶ φιλοτιμίαν
παρ' ἡλικίαν

For Lucullus gave himself up after his military activities to baths, banquets, sexual intercourse in the daytime, **great listlessness**, and the erection of new-fangled buildings; and he reproached Pompey for his love of office and of honour as unsuited to his age.

(Plut. *Whether An Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs* 785f2-9, trans. Fowler)

Lucullus' *ἄλυσ* is displayed as symptomatic of over-indulgence in the more carnal desires. It can be viewed as part of a broader indifference towards actions and behaviours that are considered virtuous. This abdication of responsibility is criticised by Plutarch in the examples preceding the quoted passage. Plutarch states that what Lucullus represents is akin to sailors abandoning their ship during a voyage in order to devote themselves to endless sexual intercourse, or Herakles cavorting in effeminate ways with Omphale (*Whether An Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs* 785e, cf. Plut. *Comp. Demetr. Ant.* 3.3).

As with the *ἄλυσ* in *On Exile*, there is a suggestion of a misunderstanding of leisure. Lucullus is one of those who “give[s] to self-indulgence and luxury the names of rest and recreation” (785e2-3, Fowler). Lucullus even goes so far as to criticise those who do not think as he does (785e3-5, 785f7-9). Perhaps the reason that Lucullus' later life is treated so disapprovingly is that it appears at such a late stage and represents a complete change in character. Plutarch dwells on the good Greek education that Lucullus received and notes that he would spend his youth's

leisure hours reading philosophy (Plut. *Luc.* 1.4).¹⁵⁹ Degenerations in character late in life are particularly problematic for Plutarch and his conception of ethical practice through habituation.¹⁶⁰

There is also the opposition between military affairs and *ἄλυσ*. It is suggested that Lucullus' luxurious excess manifested itself late in life after his military career had ended (785f5). The theme of martial matters being antithetical to *ἄλυσ* will be discussed below. The *ἄλυσ* displayed in this passage is a type of moral indifference.

In the *Roman Questions* (274d6), *ἄλυσ* is defined against the qualities of masculinity and martial prowess. The reference comes in answer to Plutarch's self-posed question as to why the priests of Jupiter are prohibited from anointing themselves with oil in the open air. Plutarch suggests that this is one of many prohibitions for priests that should be applied to the general populace. He suggests that the practice is viewed by Romans as symptomatic of negative aspects of Greek culture.

τὸ γὰρ ξηραλοιφεῖν ὑφεωρῶντο Ῥωμαῖοι σφόδρα,
καὶ τοῖς Ἑλλήσιν οἷονται μηδὲν οὕτως αἴτιον δουλείας
γεγονέναι καὶ μαλακίας, ὥς τὰ γυμνάσια καὶ τὰς πα-
λαίστρας, **πολὺν ἄλυν** καὶ σχολὴν ἐντεκούσας ταῖς πόλεσι
καὶ κακοσχολίαν καὶ τὸ παιδεραστεῖν καὶ τὸ διαφθείρειν
τὰ σώματα τῶν νέων ὑπνοῖς καὶ περιπάτοις καὶ κινήσεσιν
εὐρύθμοις καὶ διαίταις ἀκριβέσιν, ὑφ' ὧν ἔλαθον ἐκρυέν-
τες τῶν ὀπλῶν καὶ ἀγαπήσαντες ἀνθ' ὀπλιτῶν καὶ
ἱππέων ἀγαθῶν εὐτράπελοι καὶ παλαιστρίται καὶ καλοὶ
λέγεσθαι.

For the Romans used to be very suspicious of rubbing down with oil, and even today they believe that nothing has been so much to blame for the enslavement and effeminacy of the Greeks as their *gymnasia* and wrestling-schools, which engender much **listless idleness** and

¹⁵⁹ Swain 1992, 309.

¹⁶⁰ Fulkerson 2012, 55.

waste of time in their cities, as well as pederasty and the ruin of bodies of the young men with regulated sleeping, walking, rhythmical movements, and strict diet; by these practices they have unconsciously lapsed from the practice of arms, and have become content to be termed nimble athletes and handsome wrestlers rather than excellent men-at-arms and horsemen.

(Plut. *Roman Questions* 274d2-12, trans. Babbitt)

This passage suggests that *ἄλυσ* is caused by the practices of the *gymnasia* and wrestling schools of the Greeks. It is not the anointing itself that causes these ill effects, but the setting, as evidenced by Plutarch's assurance that to anoint oneself in private is acceptable (274e). It is therefore likely that it is the social aspect of these places that is being referred to. This is likely connected to complicated Roman views on public baths, which were associated with excess, decadence, sexual immorality, effeminacy, the enfeeblement of bodies, and a relaxation of social hierarchies.¹⁶¹ The connotations of *ἄλυσ* in this context are moral lassitude and a negative and problematised view of leisure (*σχολή*).

In this passage *ἄλυσ* is again depicted as antithetical to martial qualities. Interestingly, both mental and physical aspects are suggested. Not only are the bodies of the young said to be weakened, but the Greeks have accepted and become indifferent to the fact that they are not viewed as martial. While *ἄλυσ* is only one of several factors contributing to the perceived effeminacy of the Greeks, I would argue that its use suffuses and defines the description. This is supported by its position as the sole affective word in the section.

In the next passage, *ἄλυσ* can be understood as a type of physical listlessness. Manifested like a disease, it afflicts Eumenes' soldiers besieged in the town of Nora.

ἐπεὶ δὲ τοὺς σὺν αὐτῷ πολιορκουμένους ἢ στενο-
χωρία μάλιστα πάντων ἔβλαπτεν, ἐν οἰκήμασι μικροῖς καὶ τόπῳ δυοῖν
σταδίοις ἔχοντι τὴν περίμετρον ἀναστρεφόμενους, τροφὴν δ' ἀγυμνά-
στους μὲν αὐτοὺς λαμβάνοντας, ἀργοῖς δὲ τοῖς ἵπποις προσφέροντας,

¹⁶¹ Toner 1995, 54-7.

οὐ μόνον τὸν ἄλυν αὐτῶν ὑπὸ τῆς ἀπραξίας μαραιομένων ἀπαλλάξαι
βουλόμενος, ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς φυγὴν, εἰ παραπέσοι καιρός, ἀμῶς γέ πως
ἡσκημένοις χρήσασθαι, τοῖς μὲν ἀνθρώποις οἶκον, ὃς ἦν μέγιστος ἐν τῷ
χωρίῳ, δεκατεσσάρων πηχῶν τὸ μῆκος, ἀπέδειξε περίπατον, κατὰ μικρὸν
ἐπιτείνειν τὴν κίνησιν κελεύων

But most of all detrimental to his forces thus besieged was their narrow quarters, since their movements were confined to small houses and a place only two furlongs in circumference, so that neither men nor horses could get exercise before eating or being fed. Therefore, wishing to remove the weakness and **languor** with which their inactivity afflicted them, and, more than that, to have them somehow or other in training for flight, if opportunity should offer, he assigned the men a house, the largest in the place, fourteen cubits long, as a place to walk, ordering them little by little to increase their pace.

(Plut. *Eum.* 11.3.1-4.4, trans. Perrin)

Plutarch states that the specific cause of Eumenes' ἄλυσ is ἀπραξία (inactivity), and that it is cured by physical activity. This is by far the most corporeal use of ἄλυσ in Plutarch. This is perhaps confirmed by the implication that it affects the horses as well.¹⁶² I argue for the physical aspect of the ἄλυσ in this passage because it is stated that spirits are high among the soldiers despite the lack of variation in food (11.1-2). Furthermore, it is the narrowness of the quarters and the lack of exercise that brings about the affliction. Toohey sees this as an example of simple boredom, but I would argue that this meaning is closer to lethargy.¹⁶³ The association with physical stupor is not completeley without precedent (cf. Men. *Epit.* fr. 3.1-2).

Plutarch's use of ἄλυσ in *Pyrrhus* has been repeatedly suggested to be one of the earliest, and strongest, sources for an example of complex boredom in the

¹⁶² This is not the only case of the affects of this word cluster being applied to animals. A lioness (Eudum. fr. 127.11, Ael. *N.A.* 3.21.14, Ar. *Byz. Epit.* 2.164.9) and a whale (Opp. *H.* 5.240) are described as experiencing ἀλύω in grief or pain.

¹⁶³ Toohey 2004, 109.

ancient world. The passage is at the very centre of the *Life*, and is also definitive for its characterisation of Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus, having finally secured his kingdom in Epeirus, is approached by the Tarentines to aid them in a campaign against Rome. Against the advice of his advisor, he accepts.

τότε δ' οὖν εἷς Ἥπειρον ἐκπесόντι τῷ Πύρρῳ καὶ προεμένῳ Μακεδονίαν ἢ
μὲν τύχῃ παρεῖχε χρῆσθαι τοῖς παροῦσιν ἀπραγμόνως καὶ ζῆν ἐν εἰρήνῃ
βασιλεύοντα τῶν οἰκείων· ὁ δὲ τὸ μὴ παρέχειν ἑτέροις κακὰ μηδὲ ἔχειν ὑφ'
ἐτέρων ἄλυν τινὰ ναυτιώδῃ νομίζων, ὥσπερ ὁ Ἀχιλλεὺς οὐκ ἔφερε τὴν
σχολήν,

ἀλλὰ φθινύθεσκε φίλον κῆρ
αὔθι μένων, ποθέεσκε δ' αὐτὴν τε πτόλεμόν τε.

At this time, then, when Pyrrhus had been driven back into Epeirus and had given up Macedonia, Fortune put it into his power to enjoy what he had without molestation, to live in peace, and to reign over his own people. But he thought it **tedious to the point of nausea** if he were not inflicting mischief on others or suffering it at others' hands, and like Achilles could not endure idleness,

but ate his heart away
Remaining there, and pined for war-cry and battle.

(Plut. *Pyrrh.* 13.1.4-9, trans. Perrin)

This passage expresses *ἄλυσ* in a manner that can definitely be identified with a sense of complex boredom. It is a fundamental dissatisfaction, to the very point of sickness, with a life of leisure. As with the two examples of *ἀλύω* leading to dicing discussed above (*Art.* 17.3.1-3, *Rom.* 5.1.2-4), the explicit impetus for Pyrrhus' dissatisfaction is *σχολή*. As a life of constant warfare is obviously untenable, this can be extended into a dissatisfaction with the mundane experience of existing. Pyrrhus cannot tolerate the absence of occupation in his valorised activity of warfare. I consider Pyrrhus' character to be similar to modern boredom sufferers, whose reaction to boredom is to seek out activity to escape the

experience.¹⁶⁴

Toohy considers the use of *ναυτιώδης* critical to understanding this passage. He suggests that it may be read literally as ‘nausea-inducing’, rather than metaphorically as ‘disgusting’.¹⁶⁵ He also suggests that this usage is heavily influenced by the ennui-like *nausia* expressed by Seneca (*Ep.* 16.3, 24.26).¹⁶⁶ The importance of this passage and its relation to the tone of the *Pyrrhus* in its entirety will be discussed in the next chapter.

A critique of my analysis of *ἄλυσ* could well be that I identify it with both restlessness and listlessness. The former is agitation and movement, while the latter is languor and stasis. Yet I contend that elements of both of these conflicting meanings are evident in this signifier. In *ἄλυσ*, I see both the retarding effects of inactivity and leisure, as well as the sense of restlessness that motivates one to escape it. I argue that these two elements can be united by interpreting a sense of lack of purpose. Restlessness is the desire for movement, but without any sense of a goal other than escape. Listlessness is a more generalised lack of purpose. I would argue that this is supported by the earlier semantics complexities of *ἀλύω*, which can be idling or agitated movement. Furthermore, I would argue that this duality of meaning provides the vehicle for interpreting this signifier as akin to a modern concept of boredom, and perhaps complex boredom. Boredom can be defined as the contradictory combination of “restlessness combined with lethargy.”¹⁶⁷ In some instances in Plutarch, *ἄλυσ* refers to dissatisfied restlessness, while elsewhere it refers to indifferent listlessness. However, if the word is viewed as a whole, across all of its occurrences, I contend that there are grounds to see a concept that has striking semantic and connotative similarities to modern conceptions of boredom. In certain instances, particularly *Pyrrhus* 13.1, I suggest that both instantiations of *ἄλυσ* combine to form something truly recognisable as a form of complex boredom.

¹⁶⁴ Fenichel 1951, 361.

¹⁶⁵ Toohy 1987, 202.

¹⁶⁶ Toohy 1987, 201-2.

¹⁶⁷ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 193.

II.iv

Other Words of Interest

In this section, I will discuss four other terms that have been identified as terms of interest for the study of boredom in ancient literature. The terms that will be discussed are *κόρος* (satiety), *πλησμονή* (surfeit, abundance), *ἀπληστία* (insatiability), and *ἄχθομαι* (to be vexed, burdened). These terms will be discussed largely in relation to their use, and meaning within the works of Plutarch.

κόρος

Among the words of interest for this investigation into boredom is *κόρος* (satisfaction or satiety). The word makes some 14 appearances in Plutarch's work, and is treated in a mostly negative manner.¹⁶⁸ Often a better translation than satisfaction is satisfaction's darker cousin, surfeit. I consider the concept of surfeit to be connected to boredom because of the implication of dissatisfaction through excess, monotony, and overstimulation.

A shift towards a more negative view of *κόρος* is identifiable between Homer and later authors.¹⁶⁹ Homer's use of the word, as well as the related terms *κορέννυμι* (to satisfy) and *ἀκόρητος* (insatiable), focusses on the satisfaction of the appetite for food, although it can be applied to the satisfaction of other activities, such as warfare.¹⁷⁰ For Homer, *κόρος* refers to a natural point at which desires, either positive or negative, have reached their limit.¹⁷¹ Menelaos says of *κόρος*:

Of all things there is satiety (*κόρος*), of sleep, and love, and sweet song, and the incomparable dance; of these things surely a man

¹⁶⁸ *Sayings of Spartans* 209f; *Roman Questions* 280f; *The E at Delphi* 389c; *Concerning Talkativeness* 504d; *On Inoffensive Self-Praise* 541e; *The Dialogue On Love* 756e; *Precepts of Statecraft* 804d; *Whether Beasts are Rational* 991c; *On The Eating of Flesh* 995e; *On The Eating of Flesh* 997b; *A Pleasant Life is Impossible* 1091c, 1098e; *Lyc.* 14.2; *Mar.* 45.4; *Numa* 6.3; *Per.* 7.5.

¹⁶⁹ Helm 1993, 5-11.

¹⁷⁰ Helm 1993, 5-6.

¹⁷¹ Helm 1993, 6.

hopes to have his fill rather than of war; but the Trojans are insatiate
(*ἀκόρητος*) of battle.

(Hom. *Il.* 13.636-9, trans. Murray)

Reaching satiety of a positive activity, or having quickly reached the conclusion of a negative activity, is generally implied to be a positive, or at least neutral, action. To go beyond *κόρος* can be a negative, and is implied at certain points in the text, particularly in relation to enemies being insatiable of battle. Helm suggests that there are only four occasions in Homer where *κόρος* or *ἀκόρητος* are seriously connected with excess (*Il.* 13.621, 13.639, 14.479; *Od.* 23.35).¹⁷²

While Hesiod uses *κόρος* in a similar sense to Homer, Helm suggests that in references to the concept by Alkman, Sappho, and Solon the concept refers not to a neutral point at which desires have been satisfied, but the ceaseless satisfying of desires, more akin to excess or greed.¹⁷³ Schmiel sees this sense of *κόρος* as having a double meaning of cause and effect, as satiety leads to self-satisfaction, and to insolence.¹⁷⁴ Solon identifies *κόρος* with a desire for wealth that cannot be satisfied, and advises that *κόρος* is something that needs to be actively restrained for the good of the state (fr. 4). Theognis also sees it as a destructive force, and describes its effects:

Excess (*κόρος*) to be sure has already destroyed many more men
than famine, men who were wanted to have more than their
allotment.

(Theognis 605-606, trans. Gerber)

The manner in which Plutarch uses the concept of *κόρος* continues this negative view. It is most often used as an expression of excessive and boundless appetites, particularly connected to eating and drinking. There are complexities in that *κόρος* refers to a natural limit, and also the crossing of this limit. Hints of *κόρος* as a neutral limit, as expressed by Homer, remain. An example is Plutarch's

¹⁷² Helm 1993, 6.

¹⁷³ Helm 1993, 6-10.

¹⁷⁴ Schmiel 1989-1990, 346.

description of animals, unlike Epicureans, turning from *κόρος* towards the delights of song, swimming, flight, and play (Plut. *It is Impossible to Live Pleasantly in the Manner of Epicurus* 1091c9). Echoing Homeric usage, the term also refers to a neutral limit in the *Life of Numa*. The people of Rome are described as experiencing *κόρος* of war, and are therefore desirous of peace and for Numa to reign (*Numa* 6.3.4). It can also be a state, the effects of which can be modified by other forces. For example, it is through Eros that intercourse is elevated from the level of ignoble appetites like hunger and thirst, and the unpleasant effects of *κόρος* of pleasure are dissipated (*Dialogue on Love* 756e).

Plutarch uses the term in relation to food and eating, although he uses it in a manner that suggests unquenchable hunger or desire. The concept seems to be particularly connected to the eating of meat, which Plutarch considers to be an unjust and impure act. Plutarch suggests that the cause of a carnivorous diet was that mankind was in a state of *κόρος* with the vegetarian munificence of earth and sought more illicit vittles (*Beasts are Rational* 991c8). He further states that eating meat comes from a spirit of insolence (*ὑβρις*), satiety (*κόρος*), and luxury (*πολυτέλεια*), and can be compared to a woman whose lusts are insatiable (Plut. *On the Eating of Flesh* 997b1, 997b3).¹⁷⁵ He also suggest that the eating of meat, and the spirit of plenty (*πλησμονή*) and surfeit (*κόρος*) that leads to this, has the effect of coarsening the spirit (Plut. *On the Eating of Flesh* 995e1). Plutarch's theory of the origins of a meat diet rests upon the assumption that humanity had simply had enough of vegetarian fare and turned towards meat out of a desire for something novel. Disregarding the moral overtones, Plutarch seems to assume that the motivating force was dissatisfaction with a certain activity and that a novel one was sought. A spirit of greed and indulgence is certainly indicated, but I contend that dissatisfaction with monotony, and therefore boredom, is also implied. This is supported by Plutarch's use of *άλύω* in a similar section (*Whether Land or Sea Animals are Cleverer* 965a6) on Plutarch's distaste for hunting, or any form of recreation that requires the death of an animal. In this passage, *άλύω* is used in the sense of the indulgent, arrogant indolence at the theatre that compels animals to

¹⁷⁵ There is perhaps a connection in Plutarch's choice of these terms and a formulaic sequence of related terms in the literature of the Archaic and Classical Periods. Schmiel (1989-1990, 343-6) sees a repeated use of permutations of *ἄλβος* or *πλοῦτος*, *κόρος*, and *ὑβρις* leading towards *ἄτη*.

be slaughtered for entertainment. Plutarch suggests that life and recreation should be matters of joy, rather than cruelty.

I suggest that this connection between *κόρος* and dissatisfaction with the familiar is implied elsewhere in Plutarch's work. In his *Precepts of Statecraft*, Plutarch discusses different approaches towards the entry into public life. He says that a man may build a reputation either slowly and safely, or quickly and brilliantly. He says that the latter course is made possible by the tendency of the *οἱ πολλοί* to more readily accept a newcomer. He attributes this to the *κόρος* and *πλησμονή* of the familiar (*συνήθης*) experienced by the multitude (Plut. *Precepts of Statecraft* 804d9). Plutarch further compares this experience to that of an audience who will happily accept new actors. Plutarch depicts a statesman avoiding this very tendency of crowds in *Pericles*. Plutarch says that Pericles consciously avoided speaking too frequently in the assembly, and limited himself to matters of great importance. The reason for this was that he wished to avoid "the satiety (*κόρος*) which springs from continual intercourse" (Plut. *Per.* 7.7.2). In both of these passages it is implied that an audience experiences *κόρος* from exposure to familiar experiences. While this is still clearly a demonstration of an experience of surfeit by the observers, I suggest that the absence of connotations of destructive greed could lead to an interpretation of simple boredom. The public in both passages are characterised by having reached a limit of their tolerance for a familiar stimulus, and exhibit a willingness towards the novel. While ancient attitudes towards the fickleness of the multitude are plentiful, it is interesting to observe an acknowledgement of simple boredom among non-elites.

Plutarch uses *κόρος* in a similar manner in *Concerning Talkativeness* (504d9). Plutarch quotes Homer in the *Odyssey* (*Od.* 12.452-3), in which the poet states that he scorns to retell a tale that has been well-told. Plutarch remarks that Homer alone has survived the fickleness (*ἀψικορία*) of men because he is ever fresh (*καινός*). He says:

...and he avoids and fears the satiety (*κόρος*) which lies in ambush for every tale, leading his hearers from one narrative to another and soothing away the ear's surfeit (*πλησμονή*) by constant novelty (*καινότης*). But babblers actually wear out our ears by their

repetitions, just as though they were smudging palimpsests.

(Plut. *Concerning Talkativeness* 504d8-12, trans. Helmbold)

In common with the above passages on statecraft, this passage demonstrates the concept of *κόρος* in opposition to novelty. While the familiar, the repetitive, or the monotonous are the cause of *κόρος*, novelty serves as its cure. It should also be noted that the *κόρος* experienced by the audiences in these three passages is not satiety of the act of being an audience. They are not suggested to have reached a surfeit of politicians (*Precepts of Statecraft* 804d9), of speeches (*Per.* 7.7.2), or of stories (*Concerning Talkativeness* 504d8-12). Rather the insinuation is that they have reached a satiety of the same politicians, speeches, and stories, and that there is an innate tendency for this to occur.

The audiences are implied to have reached a satiety of monotony within these activities. This *κόρος* of the audience is not portrayed in a particularly negative light, and is not suggested to have the same insolent excess as in Plutarch's discussion of the consumption of meat. However, it is implied in all cases that this *κόρος* is a powerful force within audiences, and one that the wise can manipulate for their own ends. The argument that the *κόρος* of audiences resembles an expression of simple boredom shows similarities with the experience of *καιρός* and *ῥῆλος* in Isocrates discussed in the first chapter.

For Plutarch, *κόρος* is a generally negative concept. It is connected to insolence, plenty and excess. It is often inspired by familiar stimuli, and causes a reaction against these. It is described as a force that affects and inspires reactions towards novelty in audiences, within both the political and literary spheres. It can be compared to simple boredom in that it is the negative experience of satiety of a particular stimulus.

πλησμονή

The term *πλησμονή* (surfeit, abundance) appears in Plutarch 34 times.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* 62a1; *Advice About Keeping Well* 123e1, 123e11, 125f9, 126c11, 128a10, 128b2, 130f8, 134a10, 134b3; *On Superstition* 168b7; *Greek and Roman*

The term refers almost exclusively to physical, corporeal excess, specifically gorging on food, often in combination with wine. This repleteness is conceptualised as both the process of indulgence and the physical result of it. Kuhn notes the semantic correlation between *πλησμονή* and *ennui*.¹⁷⁷

A clear example of the term referring to gastronomical excess, and the resulting sickness is expressed in *How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend* (62a). Plutarch suggests that a flatterer will spur his target on to eat and to drink more when he is already in a state of sickness caused by gorging (*πλησμονή*). In contrast, a friend will advise that the indulgent invalid rest. The term is used to describe a state of bodily repleteness, caused by eating and drinking too much, and potentially leading to dangerous sickness. The term is repeatedly used in this instantiation in *Advice About Keeping Well* (123e1, 123e11, 125f9, 126c11, 128a10, 128b2, 130f8, 134a10, 134b3). The effects of this repleteness can be very dangerous, and should be guarded against (130f8). These effects can be purely physical, such as finding it difficult to fight while weighed down with food, or blocking the seed in coitus after a heavy meal (*Mar.* 19.3.1; *Table-talk* 654a4, 655b2). They can also be deadly, as with Demetrius who died in a disappointing retirement because of inactivity (*ἀργία*) and a surfeit (*πλησμονή*) of food and wine (*Demetrius* 52.3.9). More generally, the effects of over-eating can be socially deleterious. Plutarch informs us that, just as over-eating (*πλησμονή*) throws the body into turmoil, Crates believed that it could be a cause of civic turmoil (*Advice About Keeping Well* 125f9).

This excessive filling of the body, and satisfaction of its most primal desires, is conceptualised in opposition to emptiness. Both abundance and deficiency provide an argument for moderation. In *Table-talk*, Marcion says that moderation in pleasure is essential (663d), but that abundance is preferable to deficiency. Deficiency is always negative, while abundance (*πλησμονή*) is only negative when it leads to disease (663e9-10). Plutarch, more directly, gives the dissenting opinion

Questions 280f7; *Concerning Talkativeness* 504d9; *On Being a Busybody* 520c8; *Table-talk* 654a4, 655b2, 660c1, 663e7, 663e9, 732b5, 732d11; *Dialogue on Love* 756e7; *Precepts of Statecraft* 804d10; *Natural Questions* 917b9; *Beasts are Rational* 991b4; *On the Eating of Flesh* 995e1; *Dion* 52.2.11; *Mar.* 19.3.1; *Lyc.* 10.2.3; *Cam.* 35.5.2; *Demetr.* 52.3.9; *Phil.* 3.3.4; *Frag.* 193.40.

¹⁷⁷ Kuhn 1976, 16.

that both fullness and emptiness of the body are inherently vexatious and against nature (*Advice About Keeping Well* 134b3). As with so much else, Plutarch navigates the middle course, advocating neither indulgence nor asceticism, but moderation.

From these iterations of *πλησμονή* it is possible to build a view of the term as appetitive, corporeal, and carnal. However, I suggest that it is also possible to detect a note of surfeit as being somehow dissatisfying. There is clearly a close connection for Plutarch between *πλησμονή* and *κόρος*, as they appear in close proximity on five occasions (*On the Eating of Flesh* 995e, *Precepts of Statecraft* 804d, *Roman Questions* 280f, *Concerning Talkativeness* 504d, *Dialogue on Love* 756e). On these occasions the terms are used as a synonymous, strengthening pair. As with the *κόρος* displayed in the *Dialogue on Love* (756e), there is the sense that the satisfaction of bodily appetites without some enervating principle is not enough. This is expressed, in a discussion on achieving friendship, when Plutarch states that wine needs conversation to serve its purpose. Without this, wine “provides nothing better than mere repletion (*πλησμονή*)” (*Table-talk* 660c1-2, trans. Hoffleit). As paradoxical as it sounds in English, satisfaction is not always satisfying.

Many of these elements are brought together by Plutarch in a discussion of the classes and origins of diseases. Plutarch says that:

“One might conjecture,” I said, “that those [diseases] which come as a result of a deficiency, and those which heat and cold produce, would assail the body first, and those arising from surfeit (*πλησμονή*) and luxuries (*ἡδυσπάθεια*) and over-indulgence (*θρύψις*) would appear later, along with idleness (*ἀργία*) and leisure (*σχολή*), which come when primary wants are well provided for.”

(Plut. *Table-talk* 732d9-e3, trans. Minar)

Deficiency and abundance are again, quite logically, depicted as a binary pair, both leading to negative physical consequences. The association between surfeit and indulgent luxury also continues. Most interesting, however, is the appearance of the concomitant factors of idleness and leisure.

This connection between *πλησμονή*, abundance and leisure is also found, in a slightly different tone, in the *Natural Questions* (917b-d). Plutarch asks why wild pigs farrow once a year, while their domesticated kindred will produce multiple litters. Plutarch again quotes Euripides' fragmentary line on Love being found in those experiencing *πλησμονή* (Fr. 895, Nauck). While he roundly rejected the notion in the latter context (Plut. *Advice About Keeping Well* 126c), here he whimsically entertains the thought. He notes that abundance of food allows for reproductive energy, and suggests that the sows' differences in behaviour could be ascribed to the effects of *σχολή* (leisure) and *ἀσχολία* (lack of leisure). While animal and human motivations are not interchangeable, this does solidify a connection between leisure and changes in behaviour.

The most interesting occurrence of *πλησμονή* in Plutarch, and the one closest to our purpose appears in *On Being a Busybody* (520b-c). Plutarch discusses how some Roman busybodies, in constant search for the titillation of their sense of *Schadenfreude*, frequent the markets where slaves with physical deformities are housed. Plutarch disapproves of this ancient freak show, and the desire that motivates it. He suggests that if these *πολυπράγμονες* were conducted continually to these places they would quickly experience *πλησμονή* and *ναυτία* (nausea), ending their enjoyment of the practice (520c9). This is an intriguing passage, but it is a challenge to determine exactly what emotional response is ascribed to cause this change in heart among the voyeurs. The text indicates no explicit empathy or guilt. Indeed, the only term with an affective aspect is *πλησμονή*, except for Plutarch's statement that the curious need to reflect that their discoveries will not bring them any profit. One could ascribe the change to disgust or revulsion, but this is clearly not present in earlier, sporadic visits to the slave markets. It is continuous exposure to the experience that Plutarch considers so powerful. The *πολυπράγμονες* literally become so over-filled with the negative experience, which once they found so enjoyable, that they are driven to physical sickness. I do not consider this to be an expression of the modern concept of boredom. However, this ancient instance of *πλησμονή* displays an affective state that is reminiscent of disgust, caused by repetitive experience of a stimulus, leads to the subject becoming dissatisfied with the previously enjoyable stimulus, and experiencing concomitant nausea. As has been noted, the appearance of nausea has an

associative connection with some ancient concepts of boredom (Plut. *Pyrrh.* 13.1.4-9; Sen. *Ep.* 16.3, 24.26). However, in this context I do not support the identification of *πλησμονή* with boredom. I consider the correct interpretation is disgust through surfeit, much as too much rich food leads to physical sickness.

The term *πλησμονή* refers to the state of being over-filled, and the process of becoming so. It has damaging effects on the health, and to broader society. The word shares many associative and semantic similarities with the concept of boredom, but I do not consider it to be related. The sense of the word is corporeal and lacking in the spiritual dimension required for boredom. The dissatisfying experience of *πλησμονή* is used in a manner that literally suggests the feeling of being over-full after a heavy meal. There is no sense of restlessness, or the spurring on to activity. I suggest that this is a clear example of how English and Greek signifiers can share many connotative and semantic similarities, but still remain fundamentally alien to each other.

ἀπληστία

There are 17 mentions of *ἀπληστία* in Plutarch.¹⁷⁸ The term refers to insatiability, or the inability to reach satisfaction. There is a large amount of semantic similarity between this concept and the concepts of *κόρος* and *πλησμονή*, with which it also shares an etymological connection. The terms appear in similar contexts, such as those relating to destructive appetites and over-eating.

Like *κόρος* and *πλησμονή*, *ἀπληστία* is used to describe literal hunger (*Advice About Keeping Well* 125e11, 134b11). Similarly, the concept is used as part of Plutarch's discussion of the negative reasons for a move towards a meat diet, and the destructive results. In this case, a meat diet and the resultant consequences of wars and murder are ascribed to a spirit of *ἀπληστία* (*On the Eating of Flesh* 998b10).

¹⁷⁸ *Demetr.* 32.8.3, *Tim.* 36.8.3, *Comp. Aem. Tim.* 2.4.2, *Luc.* 38.3.5, *On Virtue and Vice* 101c4, *Advice about Keeping Well* 125e11, 127c8, 134b11, *On Love of Wealth* 524c11, *On the Delays of Divine Vengeance* 567c4, *On Exile* 606c3, *Whether an Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs* 793d3, *Precepts of Statecraft* 812e2, *That we Ought Not to Borrow* 829d5, *On the Eating of Flesh* 998b10, *On Common Conceptions against the Stoics* 1006b5, *Frag.* 150.2.

The results of *ἀπληστία* are more explicitly destructive than those of *κόρος* and *πλησμονή*, and the concept is often referenced in the context of moralistic examples of negative behaviour and resulting punishment. Examples of this include shipmasters who sink their ships because of avaricious overloading (*Advice About Keeping Well* 127c8), banishment (*That we Ought Not to Borrow* 829d5), and the general punishment of the avaricious (*On the Delays of Divine Vengeance* 567c4).

The destructive aspect of *ἀπληστία* is often discussed in the context of the ruin of the statesman. This can be viewed as part of Plutarch's wider interest in *φιλοτιμία* (ambition) in great natures. In this context, *ἀπληστία* refers to the desire for power, honours, wealth, and recognition. Plutarch suggests that this sort of *ἀπληστία* is the ruin of many generals (*Tim.* 36.8), encourages Marius to attempt to cling onto political power long after his age should have prevented it (*Luc.* 38.3.6), and leaves the statesman open to criticism (*Precepts of Statecraft* 812e2).

I argue that Plutarch's use of *ἀπληστία* in comparison to his use of *κόρος* and *πλησμονή* clearly demonstrates how Greek signifiers with similar English translations can carry extremely distinct semantic weight in their own context. It also perhaps underlines the limitations of a lexical approach. Kuhn sees a connection between ennui and *ἀπληστία*, but there is very little evidence of it in Plutarch.¹⁷⁹ I suggest that the insatiability of *ἀπληστία* essentially refers only to greed. Although both *ἄλυσ* and *ἀπληστία* are related to dissatisfaction, there is a huge difference between an incurable dissatisfaction and the inability to be satisfied. There are similar connections to carnivorous desires and warfare, but this does not reach have the same strength of association as *κορός* does.

ἄχθομαι

It has been noted that simple boredom and annoyance can be virtually indistinguishable from each other in both modern and ancient contexts.¹⁸⁰ The verbal *ἄχθομαι* makes 142 appearances in the work of Plutarch, and the nominal

¹⁷⁹ Kuhn 1976, 16.

¹⁸⁰ Bruss 2012, 312-31; Toohey 1988, 153.

ἄχθος appears 10 times.¹⁸¹ One of the many Greek terms that could be equated with annoyance is the verb ἄχθομαι, as well as the related noun ἄχθος. The word's definition is to be vexed, grieved, or burdened.

Toohy notes that one occurrence of ἄχθομαι in a passage in Plato's *Symposium* (173c7) has been translated as boredom by Kenneth Dover.¹⁸² Apollodorus states to his companion on the road that he finds delight in discussing philosophy, or hearing it discussed. This is in contrast to other topics of conversation, particularly those discussed by the wealthy, which cause him to emphatically experience ἄχθομαι, as well as pity. The attribution of boredom in this case is not universal, and other translations translate it as closer to annoyance. Although I would argue that the context is not clear enough to be definitive, the concurrence of pity and anger seems less likely.

In Plutarch, ἄχθομαι seems on all occasions to be directly attributable to an object or action, except for two possible exceptions (*Advice to Bride and Groom* 139f8, *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively* 543e2). An extremely reactive affect, it is not portrayed as inexplicable. I consider this affective term to support somewhat Konstan's arguments regarding the social reflexivity of Greek emotions.¹⁸³ While I note that the modern concept of annoyance is also highly reactive, I argue that the breadth of situations in which ἄχθομαι is used supports its divergence from the modern concept. The term is used to denote petty annoyances (*Table-talk* 674e6), slighted indignation (*Tim* 9.4.4), and more profound sorrow (*Consolation to Apollonius* 110f11). I would suggest that it occupies a position on an affective spectrum between grief and anger. I would further suggest that ἄχθομαι is another Greek complex affect that does not have a direct synonym in English. This term can be discounted as an indicator of boredom in Plutarch in almost its entirety. The term is used to indicate distress, sorrow, vexation, grief, and annoyance.

Plutarch uses the term in his description of the famous anecdote about Aristides' ostracism. The anonymous, illiterate Athenian states that his reason for voting Aristides from the city is that he feels ἄχθομαι at hearing Aristides

¹⁸¹ For the purposes of brevity, the full list of occurrences of these terms in Plutarch has been omitted.

¹⁸² Toohy 2004, 108.

¹⁸³ Konstan 2003, 258.

repeatedly called “the just” (*Sayings of Kings and Commanders* 186a12). While the story is used to emphasise how rightly Aristides bears the epithet, it is also a telling example of ancient views of the *demos*. In this vexation caused by repetition there is perhaps hints of boredom, but the affect is more likely to be a form of envious frustration. The term is used elsewhere in situations of generalised dissatisfaction of the people towards their leaders (*Galb.* 17.5.1, *Sol.* 29.1.5).

The term is also used twice in cases of the wicked displaying a generalised distaste towards their entire way of life (*Bravery of Women* 263b8, *On the Delays of Divine Vengeance* 556c5). In the former passage, Pythes, having lost all of his sons, cannot endure life and locks himself away in his own mausoleum. He entreats his wife to act as if he is already dead, and to run the kingdom in his absence. Plutarch says that this is because “he was afraid of death, and burdened with life (τῷ βίῳ δ’ ἤχθετο)” (*Bravery of Women* 263b7-8, trans. Babbitt). Pythes is pushed by grief to the point that he is entirely dissatisfied and burdened by the experience of living. While this is not the grief without cause of complex boredom, there is a sense of a profound loss of meaning in living that shares similarities with that affect. The distinction between Pythes’ experience and suicidal depression is supported by the repeated assertion that Pythes is unable to let go of life, despite yearning for death (263b7-9). Rather than desiring to die, he wishes not to live. Pythes’ experience is somewhat universalised by Plutarch, who states that this feeling is similar to that felt by bad and foolish men (263b6-7).

The strongest case which can be made for ἄχθος indicating boredom in Plutarch is a passage at the end of *Marius*. Marius is in a terrible state of dejection in Rome awaiting an invasion by his rival, Sulla. Marius is described as distressed, wearied, and afraid. Marius receives news from the coast and falls into an illness from which he does not recover. Plutarch suggests that these fresh terrors (νέοι φόβοι) cause the illness, and that he is particularly susceptible to them because:

...τὰ μὲν δέει τοῦ μέλλοντος,
τὰ δ’ ὥσπερ ἄχθει καὶ κόρῳ τῶν παρόντων...

...partly because he feared the future, and partly because he was
wearied to satiety by the present...

(Plut. *Mar.* 45.4.3-4, trans. Perrin)

Despite the above translation verbalising *ἄχθος* and giving it the semantic power in the sentence, both *ἄχθος* and *κόρος* are equally attributed with defining Marius' state. He is in a state of both burdened or sorrowful vexation and satiety in his attitude towards the present. I would argue that the combination of the two terms provides a meaning of dissatisfaction towards his present situation. Marius is over-full of his current situation and experiencing a sorrowful burden, which, in combination with his fears, will produce a mortal sickness. I consider there to be a similarity to complex boredom in this.

Despite the 152 appearances in Plutarch, the association of *ἄχθος* and *ἄχθομαι* with boredom can be ruled out almost entirely.

In this section, a relatively low level of correlation between the four identified terms and an ancient concept of boredom has been established. I suggest that even this negative result contributes to the field of study by eliminating possible sources for identifying boredom in Plutarch. The strongest correlation is between the term *κορός*, and Plutarch's presentation of an experience of simple boredom in audiences. I argue that this complements the research into simple boredom in Isocrates undertaken by Bruss.

II.v

Themes

In this section, I address the thematic connections between possible Greek signifiers of ancient boredom. The themes that are discussed are leisure and luxury, inconstancy and irresolution, warfare, retirement, and philosophy.

Leisure and Luxury

There is a strong correlation between Plutarch's use of *ἄλυσ/ἀλύω* and leisure activities. This takes the form of dicing, baths, banquets, hunting, attending the theatre, drinking and sexual intercourse. It is important to note that boredom susceptibility has been "related to a range of dysfunctional behaviours, including sleep disorder, procrastination, drug abuse, cigarette smoking, gambling, drunk driving, high frequencies of sexual activity, deviant behaviour in school, and criminality."¹⁸⁴ While some of these behaviours are clearly impossible in an ancient context, a spirit of destructive indulgence defines both sets of activities.

These distractions are sometimes introduced to stave off *ἄλυσ*, such as the recourse to dicing in *Romulus* (5.1.2) and *Artaxerxes* (17.3). Elsewhere, *ἄλυσ* is caused by the absence of such revelries, as in *How One May Measure his Progress in Virtue* (78a9), where the rejection of revelry and festival for a life of philosophy causes a temporary onset of *ἄλυσ*. The third connection is for these things to be synonymous with and symptomatic of a state of *ἄλυσ*, as is described in the hedonistic retirements of Lucullus (*Whether An Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs* 785f5, *Comp. Cim. Luc.* 1.2.4) and Dionysius of Syracuse (*Tim.* 14.3.2).

The verbal *ἀλύω* can indicate the simple idling activity of experiencing leisure. It can also indicate the restlessness induced by leisure. This sense is mostly fully expressed by the nominal *ἄλυσ*. This restlessness and agitation in leisure is

¹⁸⁴ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 197.

dichotomous to a sense of philosophic tranquility. It may be the sense of indifference and agitation in leisure that provides the connection to indulgent and negative luxury.

Of the 25 appearances of *ἄλυσ* or *άλύω* in Plutarch, eight occur within close proximity to a form of the words *σχολή*, *σχολαῖος* or *σχολάζω* (*Roman Questions* 274d, *On Exile* 203e, *Pyrrh.* 13.1, *Rom.* 5.1, *Comp. Luc. Cim.* 1.2, *Tim.* 14.3, *Art.* 17.5). Among these are the strongest occasions for identifying *ἄλυσ*/*άλύω* as a representation of complex or simple boredom (*Pyrrh.* 13.1, *Rom.* 5.1, *Art.* 17.3, *Roman Questions* 274d). The identification of the connection between *ἄλυσ* and a Greek concept of boredom in Plutarch is widespread in the apposite literature. However, a relationship between *ἄλυσ* and *σχολή*, which I suggest is central to the use of both terms in Plutarch, has not been identified previously. It is my contention that Plutarch complexifies *ἄλυσ* to mean something akin to complex boredom by placing it in conjunction with *σχολή*. The use of *σχολή* perhaps suggests the boredom instantiation of the term. This is in comparison to the combination of *ἄλυσ* and *πλανάω* (to wander, roam) to indicate the instantiation of physical movement (*Pelop.* 8.2.11, *T.G.* 21.3.9, *Ant.* 69.1.3), or its combination with *ἀδημονία*/*ἀδημονέω* (distress, to be distressed) to render the dejection instantiation (*How a Young Man May Become Aware of his Progress in Virtue* 78a, *Ant.* 51.1, cf. *Ael. N.A.* 3.21.14).

Toohey notes that the use of *ναυτιώδης* derives from a Latin term for an affective state similar to complex boredom.¹⁸⁵ I posit that *σχολή* could be understood as a corollary for *otium*. The word *otium* can refer to either leisure, leisure time, or a negative sense of oppressive boredom in leisure.¹⁸⁶ Likewise, *σχολή* can express, among other meanings, either leisure or a waste of time. The term *σχολή*, unlike *ἄλυσ*, is a common word in Greek with a large range of connotations. It is a loaded and idealised term, with a host of related concepts and ideals. It plays a prominent role in both Plato's *Thaetetus* (172a1-177e7) and also in Aristotle's *Politics* (7, 8), and is identified as a corollary of freedom in distinguishing the Greek, the aristocrat, and, ultimately, the philosopher.¹⁸⁷ It is not

¹⁸⁵ Toohey 1987, 200-2.

¹⁸⁶ Toner 1995, 27.

¹⁸⁷ Stocks 2004, 177-8.

this idealised form of *σχολή*, that is evident in conjunction with *ἄλυσ*. Instead, as *ἄλυσ* is complexified and lent a different set of connotations, so too is *σχολή* complexified by the arrangement. In particular, the negative aspects of this concept are explored.

Inconstancy and Irresolution

One of the other themes present in Plutarch's presentation of *ἄλυσ* and *ἀλύω* is the association with inconstancy and irresolution (*Brut.* 15.5, *Sert.* 17.5, *Ant.* 9.3, *Pelop.* 8.2). This is expressed through the sense of restlessness and aimlessness in the term. One of the clearer examples of this is portrayed in the *Cicero*. At the end of his life, pursued and desperate, Cicero is described vacillating:

“But again **losing resolution (ἀλύων)** and changing his mind (*μεταβαλλόμενος*), he went down to the sea at Astura. And there he spent the night in dreadful and desperate calculations; he actually made up his mind to enter Caesar's house by stealth, to slay himself upon the hearth, and so to fasten upon Caesar an avenging daemon. But a fear of tortures drove him from this course also; then, revolving in his mind many confused and contradictory purposes...

(Plut. *Cic.* 47.4, trans. Perrin)

It is hard to argue that Cicero is bored in this situation of disaster, flight, and death. However, he is certainly in mental anguish. He is literally and physically wandering in his travels. His death appears to be something that he, at least at moments, welcomes. He is inconsistent, and changes his mind constantly and dramatically. He selects new plans and then quickly becomes dissatisfied with them, or loses the resolution to carry them out. This passage does not exhibit clear signs of boredom, but it does exhibit elements of anguish, physical wandering, inconsistency, dissatisfaction and loss of resolution.

Plutarch finds inconstancy a troubling character trait, and a flaw present in

Coriolanus, Themistocles, Demosthenes, Cicero and Alcibiades in particular.¹⁸⁸ Unlike many of the morally ambiguous lives that I have discussed above, Aristides is portrayed as a paragon of virtue and philosophical moderation. I would argue that Aristides exemplifies everything that is antithetical to my conception of dissatisfaction in Plutarch. Aristides is portrayed as a man of “steadfast constancy” (*Arist.* 3.4).¹⁸⁹

Warfare

I suggest that one of the most important themes associated with Plutarch’s conception of boredom is its role as oppositional to martial qualities. Kuhn has argued that throughout the history of the concept of boredom there has been an association with it being antithetical to military matters and warfare.¹⁹⁰ In an ancient context, it has been noted that there is a repeated semantic association between *σχολή* and peace, as opposed to *ἀσχολή* and warfare.¹⁹¹ Whereas warfare is active and purposeful, the experience of boredom and of leisure is passive and purposeless.

The indifference, listlessness, and leisure inherent in the affective state of *ἄλυσ*/*ἀλύω* is dichotomously opposed to the state of mind required for the waging of war. For example, Lucullus’ descent into *ἄλυσ* is portrayed in opposition to his conduct and disposition while involved in military activity (*Whether An Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs* 785f). The indolence of the Tarentines is likewise frustrating to Pyrrhus because it is enjoyed over any sort of beneficial military activity (*Pyrrh.* 16.2).

Furthermore, I would suggest that it is possible to interpret a causal relationship, operating in both directions, between the experience of *ἄλυσ* and of martial qualities. In the *Roman Questions* (274d) it is expressed that the state of *ἄλυσ* has been one of the factors that has made the Greeks less effective, both mentally and physically, as soldiers. To avoid such lassitude, Eumenes addresses

¹⁸⁸ Fulkerson 2012, 51.

¹⁸⁹ Nerdahl 2012, 343.

¹⁹⁰ Kuhn 1976, 23-4.

¹⁹¹ Stocks 1936, 181.

the appearance of *ἄλυσ* among his soldiers because it impinges upon their effectiveness as a fighting force (*Eum.* 11.3). In a more tenuous connection, Sertorius (*Sert.* 17.5) is cast into a state of *ἄλυσ* when his attack on the fortress of the Characitani is momentarily foiled. The experience of *ἄλυσ* adversely affects the ability of men to operate as soldiers.

Adversely, I argue that military activity is expressed as an alleviating curative of the experience of *ἄλυσ*. This is most clearly illustrated in Pyrrhus' experience of *ἄλυσ*, which he avoids by continually being engaged in warfare (*Pyrrh.* 13.1). It could also be argued that Pyrrhus' assignation of the Tarentines to military training is an attempt by Pyrrhus to cure the affective state exemplified by their idling (*Pyrrh.* 16.2). The therapeutic elements can, at least partially, be attributed to the occupation and physical exertion involved in military activity. I suggest that, while Plutarch does present military activity as having an ameliorating effect on the experience of *ἄλυσ*, it is not presented as addressing the underlying cause. In the next chapter, I will discuss Plutarch's view of the cause, rather than the symptoms, of this malady.

I also argue that warfare is often a valorised activity in the ancient world, particularly for characters such as Pyrrhus. It has been noted that the experience of boredom is often relieved or temporarily avoided by engaging in valorised activities, because these help to alleviate guilt over a lack of achievement and to negate feelings of worthlessness.¹⁹²

This antithetical relationship to warfare can also be partially explained by an association between the idleness of *ἄλυσ/ἀλύω* with effeminacy. This association is explicit in the Roman views of *gymnasia* as inducing *ἄλυσ* and effeminacy (*Roman Questions* 74d6). The repeated association of *ἄλυσ/ἀλύω* with Persian characters, both in Plutarch (*Plut. Art.* 17.3) and in other sources (*Hp. Ep.* 1.9, *Ael. Var. Hist.* 14.12), strengthens this connection. There is also some confirmation of this association in the comparison of Lucullus and Antonius to Herakles during his emasculating period of service with Omphale (*Plut. Whether An Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs* 785e, *Comp. Dem. Ant.* 3.3).

¹⁹² Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 204.

Retirement

Among the themes associated with *ἄλυσ* is the theme of retirement, and decline of character late in life (*Whether An Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs* 785f5, *Comp. Cim. Luc.* 1.2.4, *Tim.* 14.3.2). It has been suggested that Plutarch viewed character as essentially stable and unchanging once formed by education.¹⁹³ However, Plutarch provides several examples of character change occurring in retirement. It is perhaps interesting to note that there is modern evidence of oppressive boredom being first experienced in retirement.¹⁹⁴ Character regression in old age is presented as particularly morally worrying in *Whether An Old Man Should Engage in Public Affairs*.

The central question of *Whether Old Men Should Engage in Public Affairs* is what useful and virtuous activity can be expected of the elder statesmen. Plutarch's answer is that old men should chart the middle course of avoiding idleness, but remain occupied and of service to the state. The old man should neither over exert himself, nor become frozen by inactivity (793c). This essay suggests that retirement is a particularly dangerous time for ethical behaviour. As old age dulls the appetitive desires and quiets the *παθή* (788f), the old should have an increased opportunity to focus on cultivating the pleasures of the mind (786a-b). However, there are clear examples of individuals slipping into dissolution and slackness, which Plutarch finds reprehensible. I would argue that this essay displays Plutarch's concerns about the negative results of inactivity and of leisure, and the connection of these to *ἄλυσ*.

The clearest example of this, as discussed above, is Lucullus' retirement, which is held up as a negative exemplum twice in this essay. In the first example, Lucullus is said to have fallen into *πολὺς ἄλυσ* and turned to many of the negative leisure activities discussed in the previous section, much to the disgust of Pompeius (785f). The second example suggests that his inactive and thought-free life has left Lucullus, a formerly pre-eminent general, no better than a skeleton or a

¹⁹³ Fulkerson 2012, 54.

¹⁹⁴ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 202.

sea sponge (792b). The critique is also expressed in the *Comparison of Lucullus and Cimon*, where Plutarch says that Cimon was lucky to die at the head of an army, rather than experiencing *άλύω* like Lucullus (*Comp. Luc. Cim.* 1.2). Lucullus' character change is particularly offensive to Plutarch as he has changed from a man of good repute to one of bad. He says: "Better, surely, is the man in whom the change is for the better; for it argues a more wholesome nature when its evil withers and its good ripens" (*Comp. of Luc. and Cim.* 1.4, trans. Perrin). Not only does Lucullus engage in a life of decadence and luxury that Plutarch disapproves, but he is also depicted as being proud of his conduct, and considering it his due for earlier toil (*Luc.* 38.2, 41.1).

Whether the insolent and arrogant indulgence of Lucullus can be called a form of boredom is questionable. While Plutarch and Lucullus' contemporaries may have disapproved, Lucullus himself is portrayed as finding every manner of contentment in his luxury. It could be argued that Lucullus' luxury is inspired by dissatisfied stimulus seeking, but the lack of the experience of a negative affect argues against the identification of boredom.

What can be said with confidence is that Plutarch considers situations such as that of Lucullus as troubling, symptomatic of dissatisfaction with moderation or virtue, and as a mistaken understanding of true leisure. Clearly, for Plutarch, there was danger in the lack of occupation at the end of one's life. Plutarch says of the soul in idleness: "For a bow, they say, breaks when too tightly stretched, but a soul when too much relaxed" (Plut. *Whether Old Men Should Engage in Public Affairs* 792c11-d1, trans. Fowler). This destructive lethargy caused by inactivity could be averted through recourse to reason and philosophy:

For the habit of prudence does not last so well in those who let themselves become slack, but, being gradually lost and dissipated by inactivity (*ἀργία*), it always call for what may be called exercise of the thought, since thought rouses and purifies the power of reason and action.

(Plut. *Whether Old Men Should Engage in Public Affairs* 788b8-12, trans. Fowler)

Plutarch suggests that the Spartan elders were considered the wisest and the best because they did not engage in idleness, money-lending, drinking or dicing (795f).

Philosophy

I contend that there is a repeated association of *ἄλυσ/άλύω* and the theme of philosophy in Plutarch (*How a Young Man May Become Aware of his Progress in Virtue* 78a, *On Exile* 603e, *Whether Old Men Should Engage in Public Affairs* 785f).

I suggest that *ἄλυσ/άλύω* is portrayed in an oppositional manner to the tranquility and discipline of philosophy. While leisure and luxury might occasionally be presented as cures for the experience of *ἄλυσ/άλύω*, they are in fact only distractions and false cures. The true cure for a state of boredom in Plutarch is achieved through philosophical discipline, the application of reason, and the achievement of tranquility. This will be discussed in greater depth in the next chapter.

Interestingly, Plutarch's understanding of the cure of boredom shares many similarities with modern theories on the cure of this affective state. There is evidence of the amelioration of the effects of the affect of boredom through mindfulness meditation, and the ability to be "satisfied with simple pleasures."¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁵ Martin, Sadlo and Stew 2006, 207.

Chapter III:

Case Studies in Plutarch

We just philosophize away, complain about our boredom, or drink vodka.

(Anton Chekhov *The Cherry Orchard*, 274)

This chapter is an attempt to contextualise the lexical research discussed in the last chapter. Through discursive reading, an attempt has been made to discover passages and themes with a semantic connection of the previous chapter's investigated terms and to a concept of boredom.

In the first section, the *Lives of Demetrius, Antonius, Pyrrhus*, and *Marius* are discussed and analysed in terms of dissatisfaction, insatiability, indulgence, idleness, and leisure. In the second section, the connection between dissatisfaction, satisfaction, and philosophy is discussed with reference to *On Tranquility* and *On Exile*

III.i

Lives

Demetrius

As an introduction to his *Demetrius*, Plutarch explains why he has chosen to portray such negative characters as Demetrius and Antonius in his series of *Lives*. Plutarch says that as the musician must study discord and the doctor disease, the moralist writer must discuss blameworthy characters (*Demetr.* 1.1-6). He says that these *Lives* illustrate Plato's dictum that the greatest natures suffer great vices as well as great virtues (*Demetr.* 1.7). In both Antonius and Demetrius are characters defined as "amorous, bibulous, warlike, munificent, extravagant, [and] domineering" (*Demetr.* 1.7, Perrin). I argue that Plutarch portrays Demetrius, despite his many positive qualities, as one whose great weakness was his inability to weather idleness or leisure with temperance or virtue.

Demetrius is described in generally positive terms in his youth, showing fondness and loyalty towards his companions (4.1), and a natural inclination towards mercy, justice and kindness (4.4, 6.3). His nobility for attempting to free Greece, and particularly Athens, earns him praise from Plutarch (8.1-3, 10.2). Although this is initially positive, the decision of the Athenians to grant him disproportionate honours, including divine stylings, is suggested as one of the contributing factors in his later decline of character (10.2, 13.2). Plutarch notes that, while this divine flattery certainly exacerbated the perversion of Demetrius' character, he was not of an entirely sound mind (*διάνοια*) to begin with (13.2). This is a clear example of Plutarch's view of the character being susceptible to corruption by negative environment if it is not strengthened by education, habit, and reason.

Plutarch says that Demetrius styled himself on Dionysus, and resembled the god in being fearsome in warfare, but able to enjoy joy and pleasure in peace (2.3). He is described as being "the most dainty of princes in leisure devoted to drinking

and luxurious ways of living, [but] on the other hand he had a most energetic and eager persistency and efficiency in action" (*Demetr.* 2.3.3-7, Perrin). From the beginning of the *Life*, Plutarch emphasises how Demetrius is at his best when he is occupied with grand matters. For much of his life Demetrius is portrayed as being able to keep this Cartesian compartmentalisation of his character, and to put it to good effect. His father, Antigonus, with whom he has a remarkably good relationship for a Hellenistic heir, tolerates his excesses, because of his ability to divorce himself from his indulgence in times of warfare (19.3-6). Plutarch illustrates this division:

For although in time of peace Demetrius plunged deep into these excesses and devoted his leisure to his pleasure without restraint and intemperately, yet in time of war he was as sober as those who were abstemious by nature.

(Plut. *Demetr.* 19.3.7-10, trans. Perrin)

Plutarch compares Demetrius to the Scythians, who twang their bows during revelry in order to recall their martial qualities when overtaken by pleasure (19.6). Demetrius on the other hand devotes himself entirely to either business or leisure. A comparison could perhaps be made in this allegory to one that Plutarch makes to the soul as a bow that breaks when slackened (*Whether Old Men Should Engage in Public Affairs* 792d). Rather than being an example of moderation in all things, Demetrius is an example of complete immersion and indulgence in all things. This is demonstrated by Demetrius' interaction with Stilpo, a philosopher noted for his life of simplicity and tranquility (*Demetr.* 9.5, cf. *On Tranquility* 475c-d). Having captured Megara, Demetrius summons Stilpo and is twice rebuffed by the philosopher.

Even in his generally positive military achievements Demetrius displays some insatiability, forever dissatisfied with the size of the forces, fleets, and materiel that he devotes great time to organising (*Demetr.* 20.1). He also displays great rashness; by too ardently pursuing a routed section of Antiochus' force he ultimately loses the battle (29.3), and he is almost captured while indulging his *ἀκρασία* (rashness, ardour) in travelling to meet the beautiful Cratesipolis (9.3-4).

Demetrius' obsession with the preparations for war deserves to be addressed. Plutarch provides a lengthy description (*Demetr.* 20.1-5) of the military occupations of Demetrius, which he describes as "kingly" and different from the useless pleasures of other kings. There is surely a parallel with Pyrrhus' obsession with the regal nature of the study and preparation for war (*Pyrrh.* 8.2-3). Plutarch states that Demetrius' ships and siege engines are viewed with general admiration, even among his enemies (*Demetr.* 20.4-5). At the end of *Demetrius*, Plutarch suggests that Demetrius had for most of his life sought the highest good in the works of fleets, armies, and engines of war (52.2). Plutarch portrays this as an admirable use of a king's leisure, suggesting that the ingenuity and loftiness of purpose was admired by all (20.1-3). Plutarch positively compares this with the leisurely activities of other kings, who indulge in flute-playing, painting, metal-work, furniture design, the growth of poisonous plants, or the sharpening of spears (50.1-2). This is a fascinating passage as it suggests the methods that various monarchs have employed to stave off tedium (cf. *Art.* 17.3, *Ael. Var. Hist.* 14.12). Plutarch considers martial works to be a fit and virtuous activity for a bored monarch, which is interesting when considered in parallel with the negative view of Pyrrhus' negative, insatiable warring.

Plutarch's positive views of Demetrius' regal preparations for war do not extend to the other activities of Demetrius' σχολή. His excesses in leisure, particularly in regard to sexual conduct, drinking, and lavish expenditure, are negatively discussed throughout *Demetrius* (*Demetr.* 2.3, 10.2-3, 12.1-4, 14.2-3, 24.1-3, 27.1, 27.3). This perhaps reaches its zenith with the large-scale desertion of Demetrius' troops to Pyrrhus, because they were tired of fighting to support the luxuries of Demetrius (42.1, 44.6). It could be argued that Pyrrhus is presented as the polar opposite of Demetrius. While both are defined by a sense of dissatisfaction, the former spends his life engaged in activity to dispel the affect, and the latter spends his life indulging in pleasure to distract himself from it.

The *Life of Demetrius* is most fascinating for the purposes of this study at its conclusion. Demetrius finally succumbs to one of the swings of τύχη that define his life (1.7, 35.3-4), and is defeated and exiled by Seleucus (49.5, 50.5-6). Demetrius considers suicide over surrender, but is dissuaded (49.5). Demetrius, exiled in the

Syrian Chersonese, writes to his son and asks him to act as if he had already perished (50.5-51.2). Demetrius initially holds up well in exile, and keeps himself occupied with physical exercise, hunting, and riding (52.1). As with *Eumenes* (11.5), physical exercise keeps from him the negative affect of ennui. However, Demetrius eventually sinks into a moral and physical decline:

...then little by little he came to have the greatest indifference and aversion to these sports, he took to dicing and drinking and spent most of his time at these.

(Plut. *Demetr.* 52.1.5-2.1, trans. Perrin)

The language used suggests satiation (πίμπλημι) and physical torpor (νώθεια). It is also interesting to note his choice of activity in his listlessness, as both drinking and dicing have an association with the experience of boredom in modern and ancient sources.

Plutarch suggests that this decline is caused by a bid to escape from the thoughts of his present condition (τῶν παρόντων) (cf. *Mar.* 45.4.3-4) that torment him while he is sober (52.2). Alternatively, Demetrius convinces himself that this was the life that he had long strived for, and had failed to achieve through folly and ambition (52.2). Demetrius had thought that ships, armies, and siege engines were the highest good when in fact this was to be found in “idleness, leisure, and repose” (52.9-3.1, Perrin). This tormented state of idleness, and indulgence is presented as antithetical to the sense of purpose provided by warfare. Plutarch summarises his view of Demetrius:

Wicked and foolish are [worthless kings], not only because they seek after luxury and pleasure instead of virtue and honour, but also because they do not even know how to enjoy real pleasure or true luxury.

(Plut. *Demetr.* 52.3.3-7, trans. Perrin)

Demetrius' dissolution leads, after three years, to a death caused by inactivity (ἀργία) and surfeit (πλησμονή) of food and wine (52.3.9-10).

I contend that it is possible to read in Plutarch's portrayal of Demetrius a form of complex boredom, particularly in his decline in exile. I would argue that Demetrius, in his fundamental reinterpretation of life's purpose, experiences a "loss of a sense of personal meaning...to an entire life-situation."¹⁹⁶ I suggest that Demetrius' character falls into an affective condition similar to the bout of *ἄλυσ* that Diogenes of Sinope avoids (*How a Young Man May Become Aware of His Progress in Virtue* 78a5-10). His wholesale devotion to indulgence and idleness is characteristic of apathy, overstimulation, and negative stimulus seeking. I would argue that this portrayal is a powerful, negative example of Plutarch's views on satisfaction and virtue, as expressed in *On Exile* and *On Tranquility*.

Antonius

The *Life of Antonius* continues many of the themes of *Demetrius*, particularly in its focus on an insatiable desire for pleasure and an inability to understand true satisfaction. Of all the characters in Plutarch's oeuvre, Antonius is connected to *ἄλυσ* the most. He is described as experiencing this affect on three different occasions.

Antonius is described by Plutarch as another great nature perverted by bad habits. He is described as having had great promise in his youth, but having been led into drinking, sexual activity and extravagant expenditures by Curio, who is "unrestrained in his pleasures" (*Ant.* 2.3, Perrin). The character of Antonius is described as resembling the Asiatic style of oratory he studies in his youth, being "swashbuckling and boastful, full of empty exultation and distorted ambition" (*Ant.* 2.5, Perrin). Like Demetrius, Plutarch describes him as "insolent in prosperity" (*Comp. Dem. Ant.* 3.1, Perrin). However, unlike, Demetrius, Antonius was not able to reign in his enjoyment of luxury when it was appropriate. He is portrayed as the creator of his own downfall (*Comp. Dem. Ant.* 4.3, 5.2).

The discussion of Antonius' dissatisfied indulgence defines his *Life*. I contend that the sense of *ἄλυσ* that is applied to Antonius defines this sense of

¹⁹⁶ Healy 1984, 10.

insolence, indulgence, and inconstancy. Plutarch describes how Antonius' excesses make him odious to the people:

They loathed his ill-timed drunkenness, his heavy expenditures, his debauches with women, his spending the days in sleep or in wandering about **with crazed (ἀλύων)** and aching head, the nights in revelry or at shows, or in attendance at the nuptial feasts of mimes and jesters.

(Plut. *Ant.* 9.3.1-4.1, trans. Perrin)

The other factor that defines the *Antonius*, and could be described as a character flaw is his love of, and obsession with, Cleopatra. Indeed, Plutarch makes clear that Antonius is essentially destroyed by Cleopatra.¹⁹⁷ It is suggested that Antonius acts as if he has been drugged by Cleopatra (60.1). This should be compared to the suggestion that Lucullus, who was defined by ἄλυσ at the end of his life, was considered to have been drugged by his slave (*Luc.* 43.1).

He himself, however, went down with a small company to the sea...he waited for Cleopatra to come; and since she was slow in coming **he was beside himself (ἤλυε)** with distress, promptly resorting to drinking and intoxication, although he could not hold long at table, but in the midst of the drinking would often rise or spring up to look out, until she put into port...

(Plut. *Ant.* 51.1.3-2.4, trans. Perrin)

This passage clearly expresses Antonius' longing or pining for Cleopatra, as well as the restless dissatisfaction that defines ἀλύω. At first glance, this is an affect clearly distinguishable from complex boredom. However, it does share many salient features. Antonius' state is one of anguish caused by dissatisfaction with a perceived stimulus (the absence of Cleopatra), which expresses itself in behaviours which include an escape into revelry and a restless inconstancy. It is debatable whether this could be considered a form of boredom.

Antonius also shows great inconstancy and negative leadership and

¹⁹⁷ Jones 1971, 74.

generalship when influenced by Cleopatra (37.4, 58.2, 63.5, 66.4-5). As has been discussed, there is a strong correlation between *ἄλυσ/άλύω* and inconstancy and the impingement of military affairs.

Towards the end of his life, Antonius displays the indulgence that defines him. Having been defeated at Actium, he eventually returns to Alexandria, where he engages in drinking and banquets in the face of approaching death (7.1.2-3). While Antonius may not be defined as a character suffering from boredom, he is explicitly associated with many of the features that surround the concept of *ἄλυσ/άλύω*; he is indulgent, luxurious, inconstant, slack in his military activities, and dissatisfied.

Pyrrhus

As has been discussed, *Pyrrhus* 13.1 has often been identified as one of the earliest and most definitive appearances of complex boredom in ancient literature. While I have discussed the specifics of this passage, I would now like to turn to the surrounding narrative, and discuss how it affects the view of Pyrrhus and his *ἄλυσ*. It has been noted that one of the central themes of *Pyrrhus* is discontent.¹⁹⁸ What better place to search for the generalised dissatisfaction of complex boredom than in a discussion of discontent?

I would argue that Plutarch's characterisation of Pyrrhus focusses on this character's inability to be satisfied, and therefore to experience happiness and tranquility. *Pyrrhus* is one of the later *Lives*, and its themes are very closely related to those of *On Tranquility*. Generally, Plutarch's depiction of Pyrrhus is positive; he shows courage, valour, generosity, kindness, and some learning. It should be noted, however, that *Pyrrhus* is almost exclusively concerned with Pyrrhus' campaigns. Like Pyrrhus' life itself, the work's content is defined by the military actions of Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus' education, usually of such importance to Plutarch, is entirely absent from the *Life*. Perhaps this lack of mention of education goes some way to explaining the focus on Pyrrhus' powerful character flaws. For Plutarch, the ethical

¹⁹⁸ Duff 1999, 101.

education was vital for the cultivation of virtue.¹⁹⁹ Pyrrhus is presented as a perfect example of a great nature perverted by a lack of reason.²⁰⁰ The flaws of Pyrrhus are that he is beset by *πλεονεξία* (greed, ambition), constantly indulges his *ἐλπίς* (hope), and fantasises about *καινὰ πράγματα* (new actions).²⁰¹ I suggest that this dissatisfaction can be attributed to a form of pathological restlessness, not dissimilar to complex boredom.

Pyrrhus' career begins in earnest when he secures sole rule in Epeirus through the execution of his co-monarch, Neoptolemus. When he hears of a plot against him by Neoptolemus, he acts quickly and has him killed (*Pyrrh.* 5.6). One of the reasons that motivates him towards this action is the recognition that he has support among the Epeiroi elite, who wish for him "to follow his natural bent and attempt great things" (*Pyrrh.* 7.5-6, Perrin). Plutarch states that Pyrrhus' very *φύσις* (nature) is inclined towards attempting to achieve great things. Immediately upon taking sole power he begins to contemplate many large undertakings, but is constrained from them by Macedonian matters (6.1). It is emphasised that even his personal life was determined by maximising his interest through his several political marriages. Plutarch describes the ferocity of his *πλεονεξία* when he tells his young son that his heir will be the one with the sharpest sword, actively referencing the fratricide of the sons of Oedipus (*Pyrrh.* 9.2).

Pyrrhus focusses all of his powers of thought and leisure time to meditation of matters of warfare, which he considered the only branch of study worthy of a king (*Pyrrh.* 8.2-3, cf. *Demetr.*). His disinterest in other matters is illustrated in an episode from a symposium; when he is asked on his thoughts on the merits of two flute-players, he responds with his admiration of Polysperchon's generalship (*Pyrrh.* 8.3). Against his monomania, we should perhaps consider Plutarch's statement that war, like public life, does not consist solely of battles, but must also involve *σχολή* (*Whether Old Men Should Engage in Public Affairs* 787b). His character is defined by his desire for military activity. Intriguingly, Pyrrhus does

¹⁹⁹ Fulkerson 2012, 54.

²⁰⁰ Duff 1999, 101.

²⁰¹ Duff 1999, 103.

not consider himself alone in this and suspects that his soldiers are also positively affected by being kept busy.

For he found that the Macedonians were better disposed when they were on a campaign than when they were unoccupied, and he himself was by nature entirely averse to keeping quiet.

(Plut. *Pyrrh.* 12.5.5-7, trans. Perrin)

The experience of boredom is often combined with guilt over not performing the 'correct' activities, considering the breadth of options available. This is largely why boredom is connected to, and grows out of, a state of satiation. Martin, Sadlo, and Stew suggest that people in this state attempt to distract themselves with diversionary activities, and that they feel less guilt about performing activities involving physical activity because of the perceived social benefit of good health.²⁰² I see a parallel between this diversionary use of physical exercise and the desire for valorised activities by Pyrrhus. Pyrrhus' focus on warfare is even explicitly stated with his views on a regal nature.

At the central point of the text, Pyrrhus, having finally secured the kingdom of Epeirus after being ousted twice and having spent his youth warring with and against the Diadochi, is presented with the opportunity to live a life of peace and leisure. He decides to abandon this in order to accept a request from the Tarentines for his help against the Romans. The passage rests at the narrative centre of the life, between the campaigns of the successors of Alexander and Pyrrhus' ultimately disastrous invasion of Italy. Plutarch ascribes Pyrrhus' reasoning for this unnecessary invasion to Pyrrhus "considering it a nauseating boredom not to inflict harm on others nor to have this from them, just as Achilles could not bear inactivity" (*Pyrrh.* 13.1, Perrin). This passage depicts Pyrrhus displaying a personal and inherent dissatisfaction with the course of normal, peaceful life in favour of warfare.

The centrality of this small passage for the understanding of the character of Pyrrhus is reinforced by a following passage (14.2.1-8) in which Pyrrhus is cross-examined by his ambassador and lieutenant, Cineas. He asks what Pyrrhus

²⁰² Martin, Sadlo, and Stew 2006, 204.

will do once he has conquered the Romans, then Italy, then Sicily, then Libya and Carthage, and finally unified Macedonia and all of Greece under his control. Pyrrhus replies that they will enjoy much leisure (*πολλή σχολή*), and be able to indulge in the activities of drinking and conversation. Cineas asks if this is the ultimate goal why can they not be at leisure (*σχολάζειν*) now. Plutarch describes Pyrrhus' moment of perplexity:

τούτοις τοῖς λόγοις ἡνίασε μᾶλλον ἢ μετέθηκε
τὸν Πύρρον ὁ Κινέας, νοήσαντα μὲν ὅσῃν ἀπέ-
λειπεν εὐδαιμονίαν, ὧν δ' ὠρέγετο τὰς ἐλπίδας
ἀφεῖναι μὴ δυνάμενον.

By this reasoning of Cineas Pyrrhus was more troubled than he was converted; he saw plainly what happiness he was leaving behind him, but was unable to renounce his hopes of what he eagerly desired.

(Plut. *Pyrrh.* 14.8.1-4, trans. Perrin)

The use of *σχολή* and *σχολάζω*, and the reiteration of a phrase indicating the giving and receiving of evils, emphasises the connection to 13.1 and therefore to the *ἄλυσ* of Pyrrhus. Cineas provides no concrete argument against the campaign, which is only doomed to failure for those with the benefit of hindsight, but the passage instead serves to emphasise the perpetual nature of Pyrrhus' dissatisfaction. Cineas' cross-examination emphasises that not only is Pyrrhus suffering from an immediate dissatisfaction with his mode of life, but that this will continue for Pyrrhus perpetually, and therefore confirms the existence of a notion of complex boredom in the work.

Kuhn defines ennui as a condition of spiritual anguish or weariness that affects both the body and the soul, is independent of external circumstances, and produces estrangement from sensation and enjoyment.²⁰³ The first condition is easily satisfied. In *Pyrrhus* 13.1, *ἄλυσ* is clearly a form of affective dissatisfaction that has mental and spiritual connotations. The use of the adjective *ναυτιώδης* (causing nausea), a word with medical connotations, seems to imply that the *ἄλυσ*

²⁰³ Kuhn 1976, 9-12.

of Pyrrhus also manifests itself physically. It could be argued that Pyrrhus' *ἄλυσ* is not independent of external causes, as it has an obvious cause: a life of peace and leisure. However, it is untenable to live a life constantly engaged in warfare. If Pyrrhus is dissatisfied to the point of sickness with the ordinary experience of life, then he is condemned to live a dissatisfied and sickened existence. However, the dialogue with Cineas and Plutarch's description of Pyrrhus as somebody yearning for absent things (26.2) illustrate that Pyrrhus' condition is perpetual and a defining, inherent aspect of his character. Pyrrhus does express estrangement from enjoyment once in the text, at the one point in his narrative when he is not at war, the point when he is experiencing *ἄλυσ*. He does express the intention of enjoying sensation in the future, but this is somewhat undermined by Cineas' questioning.

Technically, Kuhn's three factors for ennui are met in the *Life of Pyrrhus*. I think however that it is erroneous to suggest that *ἄλυσ* represents ennui in Plutarch. While in *Pyrrhus*, *ἄλυσ* shares many similarities with ennui, the modern term is too foreign and too specific. The range of meaning for *ἄλυσ* is too broad and multivalent. A better conclusion to reach would be that in certain situations, particularly in conjunction with *σχολή*, there are elements of complex boredom evident in the use of *ἄλυσ*.

Apart from these specific references to Pyrrhus' *ἄλυσ*, a tone of inconstancy and dissatisfaction runs through the *Pyrrhus*. Pyrrhus is tormented in Italy when two different hopes present themselves to him simultaneously (22.2-3). Pyrrhus' inability to be satisfied is even diagnosed by his enemies. Fabricius, a Roman envoy, during his embassy hears Cineas discussing Epicurean doctrine about pleasure as the highest good, and the ultimate goal being a life filled with ease and comfort. Fabricius declares that he wishes that Pyrrhus would ascribe to this doctrine (*Pyrrh.* 20.3-4). Pyrrhus appreciates his spirit, but does not turn to self reflection.

Pyrrhus, in his constant hopes for new actions, shows great inconstancy and irresolution (26.8). His accomplishments as a master tactician are constantly undermined by his role as an ineffectual strategist, moving on to the next campaign before the successful completion of the first. Indeed at 26.2, Pyrrhus is described as a gambler who does not know how to capitalise on his throws. As already noted,

ἄλυσ has associations with dicing (*Rom.* 5.2, *Art.* 17.3). But the description of Pyrrhus as somebody who ultimately fails “through his desires for absent things” (δι’ ἔρωτα τῶν ἀπόωτων) (*Pyrrh.* 26.2, Perrin) provides us with a clear example of a personality suffused with an affliction of complex boredom.

The text of *Pyrrhus* is layered with references to the two great heroes to whom Pyrrhus aspires, Alexander and Achilles. From the very beginning of the *Life* a parallel is drawn between Pyrrhus and Achilles, with the a genealogical connection between the two suggested (*Pyrrh.* 1.2, 1.6). Pyrrhus engages in a daring solo combat with Pauntachus, because he wishes to lay claim to the glory of Achilles by deed as well as birth (*Pyrrh.* 7.4-5). However, he is only partially successful as his victory leads the Macedonians to view him as the true heir to Alexander in arms and deed (*Pyrrh.* 8.1). I argue that the association between Achilles and Pyrrhus reaches its height at 13.1, with their shared discontent. Not only does Pyrrhus represent the martial and valorous aspects of Achilles’ character, but also his discontent and dissatisfaction.

Pyrrhus can be stated with confidence to be experiencing an affective state almost identical to complex boredom. In his restlessness, inconstancy, sorrow in leisure, dissatisfaction, and constant stimulus-seeking in valorised activities, there is a clear indication of the existence of this affect.

Marius

There are many similarities, and a few striking differences, between the *Life of Marius* and that of *Pyrrhus*. Marius is not as explicitly associated with boredom as Pyrrhus is in his life, although his life is also defined by a restless dissatisfaction. The flaws of both characters are described in similar ways, although Marius’ dissatisfaction stems from an inability to be satisfied with the honours or victories he has, whereas Pyrrhus is unable to endure leisure.

The two figures are both characterised as being men of warfare, who are not well adjusted to peace. Marius is described as “naturally fond of war” (*Mar.* 2.1, Perrin) and “having no natural aptitude for peace or civil life” (*Mar.* 31.2, Perrin).

For most of his life, Marius does excel in war, and is beloved of his soldiers. Interestingly, it is stated that his introduction of regimen and banishment of luxury endeared him to his men (*Mar.* 3.2).

In the twilight of his career, he is disturbed by the sense of his reputation slipping away in his inactivity and so he seeks to incite war with Mithridates. Unlike Pyrrhus, who engages in more warfare because he cannot stand the thought of peace, Marius' desire for further war comes from obsession with reputation and his desire for glory. I would argue that the seminal moral message of the *Marius* is about this rampant ambition, but I see elements of the incurable dissatisfaction of *ἄλυσ* in his *φιλοτιμία*. Marius expresses these key themes of *ἄλυσ* in his old age. He slips into luxury and is reviled for it (34.1). With the reversal of his fortune he falls into *ἀπορία* and distress (36.4), and succumbs to moments of weakness and weariness of spirit (45.2), which he attempts to cure with drunkenness (45.3). On hearing of the approach of Sulla, Marius falls into a sickness because "he [was so] wearied by satiety of the present" (*Mar.* 45.4, Perrin). The dissatisfaction inherent in his nature is expressed on his deathbed when he cries out for all he has not achieved (45.6).

I argue that, in *Marius*, it is possible to see many of the same themes that are expressed in *Pyrrhus*. However, I do not suggest that it can be argued that his life is defined by boredom, complex or otherwise. It is perhaps important to note that not all dissatisfaction is boredom.

In these four *Lives*, I contend that it is possible to see a detailed and nuanced depiction of the experience of insatiability, dissatisfaction, and indulgence. These depictions share many similarities with Plutarch's conceptualisation of boredom. However, I would argue that the nuances of dissatisfaction and indulgence in leisure displayed in these *Lives* suggest the true position of *ἄλυσ* in Plutarch's conceptualisation. While it is certainly possible to identify boredom, and even complex boredom, in this concept, this is only clearly identifiable in a fraction of its occurrences. In other contexts, it expresses different aspects of restlessness, lethargy, and dissatisfaction. Similarly, in these *Lives* the sense of boredom that is identifiable to a modern reader is part of a broader spectrum of dissatisfaction and negative stimulus seeking. Alfred Winterstein says on those prone to boredom:

Two types may be distinguished here: the blasé, who becomes callous through overstimulation, who craves for pleasure but is unable to enjoy it (such boredom may have a physiological foundation); and the one who escapes painful boredom by working, because he finds everything boring which is not the fulfilment of a duty.²⁰⁴

I would argue that the characterisation of dissatisfaction, and of *ἄλυσ*, of the four discussed characters can be assigned to these classes. Pyrrhus devotes huge energy to escaping his malady through warfare and conquest. Antonius revels in the overstimulation of his luxury and intoxication. Demetrius swings between the two, before sinking into the former category at the end of his life. The implicit criticism behind Plutarch's description of these imperfect escapes from a flaw of character is that they fail to do so in a proper manner. Unlike Diogenes of Sinope, or the sensible man resigning himself to a replete and comfortable exile, they fail to cure the malady with philosophical harmony.

²⁰⁴ Winterstein 774 (from Fenichel 1951, 361).

III.ii

Moralia

On Tranquility

If Plutarch's conception of boredom centres on restless dissatisfaction, then tranquility is surely its antithesis. In this essay on *εὐθυμία*, Plutarch lays out his practical advice on how to achieve a more contented existence. Although *ἄλυσ* does not appear anywhere in the text there are several associations with this concept.

The purpose of this essay is practical; it aims to advise Paccius and the audience on how to live better (*On Tranquility* 464f). The thrust of Plutarch's argument is that all forms of discontent and grief originate from within. The aim of life is to reconcile oneself to reversals in fortune and to harmonise the forces acting upon one. Tranquility is essentially internal, and not brought by outside factors, such as influence, fame, or power (465b). True tranquility is achieved through the process of *μετριοπάθεια*, using *λόγος* (reason) to pacify the *παθητικός* (passionate) and *ἄλόγος* (irrational) parts of the *ψυχή* (465b). One should not wait for destructive passions to present themselves, but rather heed them before the need arises. Thus, tranquility requires constant and habitual control of the passions (465c).

Much of the first section of the essay focusses on whether occupation or inactivity are causes or cures of discontent (465c-466d). Plutarch opens his argument on inactivity's correlation to tranquility with an example of *ἀνασκευή*, the rhetorical technique of quotation and refutation.²⁰⁵ Plutarch quotes Democritus' opinion that the tranquil should not engage in many activities (465c). The topic of this essay had a long philosophical tradition prior to Plutarch, and major works had been written on it by Democritus, Panaetius, and Seneca.²⁰⁶ Seneca, in his *De Tranquillitate*, argues that Democritus' prohibition refers only to

²⁰⁵ Whitmarsh 2001, 277.

²⁰⁶ van Hoof 2010, 86.

trivial activities (Sen. *De Tranq.* 13.1).²⁰⁷ Indeed, much of his argument for the dissipation of discontent rests on engagement with public life (Sen. *De Tranq.* 4.1-6.8).

Plutarch refutes the argument that inactivity is an avenue to achieve contentment. Plutarch states that “tranquility [is] very expensive if it is bought at the price of inactivity (*ἀπραξία*)” (465c, Helmbold). He suggests that the injunction to do nothing in moments of discontent is akin to a doctor advising all patients to remain still and bed-bound. He states that, just as stupor is a bad cure for insanity, idleness is a bad cure for the distress of the soul (465d).

Furthermore, Plutarch states that the very idea that the idle are tranquil is demonstrably false. He provides the example of women, who, despite being less occupied than men, are beset by innumerable pains, jealousies, and despondencies (465d). A Homeric example is also provided in Laertes, the father of Odysseus. Plutarch states that Laertes, in his Ithacan exile, had “grief (*λύπη*) as an ever-constant companion of his inactivity (*ἀπραξία*) and dejection (*κατηφεία*)” (*On Tranquility* 465e, Helmbold).

Plutarch then suggests that *ἀπραξία* can, for a certain type of character, be an actual cause of *ἀθυμία* (discontent). He suggests that Achilles is one such personality.

And for some persons, even inactivity itself often leads to discontent,
as in this instance:

The swift Achilles, Peleus' noble son,
Continued in his wrath beside the ships;
Nor would he ever go to council that
Ennobles men, nor ever go to war,
But wasted away his heart, remaining there,
And always longed for tumult and for war. (Hom *Il.* 1.488-92)

And he himself is greatly disturbed and distressed at this and says:

But here I sit beside my ships,

²⁰⁷ van Hoof 2010, 91.

A useless burden to the earth. (Hom. *Il.* 18.104)

(Plut. *On Tranquility* 465e6-f3, trans. Helmbold)

I argue that this passage explicitly connects Plutarch's conception of *ἄλυσ* and his arguments on *εὐθυμία* and *ἀθυμία*. Here Plutarch quotes the same passage (Hom *Il.* 1.488-92) that he uses in his discussion of Pyrrhus' *ἄλυσ* (*Pyrrh.* 13.1). In the latter passage, Plutarch directly compares Pyrrhus' affective state to that of Achilles in the first book of the *Iliad*. We can therefore read *ἄλυσ* in Plutarch's conception of inactivity leading to discontent in *On Tranquility*. I would argue that Plutarch displays an awareness that there is a certain type of personality for whom inactivity is a particularly distressing experience. I suggest that he conceives of both Achilles and Pyrrhus as such characters. Achilles experiences sorrow, yearning for activity, and estrangement from enjoyment in his experience of a life without warfare. I argue that Plutarch also actively encourages a sense of meaninglessness with the phrase "a useless burden" (*ἐτῶσιον ἄχθος*) from the second *Iliad* passage. I contend that these elements suggest a conception of complex boredom, and that this strengthens the argument that Plutarch considers that this problem is not limited to Pyrrhus or Achilles. This can be seen as Plutarch's identification of a personality type beset by boredom proneness. Interestingly, Seneca also identifies Achilles with the experience of complex boredom, quoting *Iliad* 24.9 (Sen. *De tranq.* 2.12) as an example of an attempt to escape from this affect.

Plutarch states that even Epicurus, who is portrayed as generally advising a rejection of public life, does not advise that those who have *φιλοδοξία* (desire for renown) and *φιλοτιμία* (desire for glory) should refrain from public life (465f-466a). Plutarch rejects this suggestion by Epicurus, and, by extension, many other philosophers (466a).²⁰⁸ He states that public life should not be urged on those who cannot endure it, or on those who cannot endure a life without it. He argues that *εὐθυμία* and *ἀθυμία* should not be defined by the quantity of one's actions, but by their quality (466a).

At this point in the essay, Plutarch launches into his argument that

²⁰⁸ van Hoof 2010, 90.

discontent is an internal matter, and must be addressed internally. Plutarch suggests that no life is free of pain, and that this grief is carried around by individuals (466a-c). The causes of this grief are “inexperience in affairs, unreasonableness, the want of ability or knowledge to make the right use of present circumstances” (5-466c7, Helmbold). He suggest that this grief manifests itself like sea-sickness, and that sufferers think that they can alleviate it by moving to a larger vessel (466b-c). In a clear parallel with Latin expressions of complex boredom (Hor. *Ep.* 1.11, Lucr. *D.R.M.* 3.1068-9), he states that “they accomplish nothing by the changes, since they carry their nausea and cowardice along with them” (466c1-3, Helmbold).

The connection between sea-sickness, the Senecan sense of *nausia*, and Plutarch’s ἄλυσ has been repeatedly stressed. I would argue that the association of boredom and sea-sickness can be strengthened still further by consideration of a passage from *Concerning Talkativeness*, in which Plutarch describes the experience of the garrulous man. These victims, when they do not manage to escape in time are described as conscripts, reflecting the sense of entrapment often associated with simple boredom. Those who do not escape this tiresome character “will be tossed about and sea-sic (ναυτία), [until] they rise up and go out” (*Concerning Talkativeness* 503a, Helmbold).

The grief caused by the defects listed above is like “a storm at sea” and torments the rich and the poor, the married and the unmarried. Due to these causes:

διὰ ταῦτα φεύγουσι τὴν ἀγορὰν, εἴτα
τὴν ἡσυχίαν οὐ φέρουσι, διὰ ταῦτα προαγωγὰς ἐν
αὐλαῖς διώκουσι καὶ παρελθόντες εὐθὺς βαρύνονται.

...because of these men avoid public life, then find their life of quiet unbearable; because of these men seek advancement at court, by which, when they have gained it, they are immediately bored.

(Plut. *On Tranquility* 466c9-12, trans. Helmbold)

The sufferer is defined by vexation at all which surrounds him, until health returns and all is once again agreeable. This contentment can only be achieved through reason (466d). Plutarch suggests that this grief is caused by dissatisfaction. It clearly expresses itself as a sense of dissatisfaction and alienation from the enjoyment of life.

Having established the existence and types of discontent, Plutarch uses the rest of the essay to give advice on how to moderate such negative affects and experience tranquility. The answer is portrayed as being internal, and dependent on the acceptance of the irrelevance of many of the externalities of the experience of life.

I argue that, in this essay, Plutarch illustrates the awareness that inactivity can be a heavy burden, and that those who are inactive are not necessarily tranquil. He suggests that for a section of people, referring directly and indirectly to Achilles and Pyrrhus, inactivity can be a destructive and negative experience. I argue that, taken with the *Pyrrhus*, this is evidence that Plutarch had a concept of a type of personality that had a specific proneness to experiencing destructive boredom, a widespread negative affect caused by dissatisfaction.

This essay also displays Plutarch's illustration of a form of complex boredom, defined by the inability to find solace in location or occupation. Furthermore, the language and conceptualisation of this affect shows a high degree of intertextuality with previous Latin descriptions of complex boredom.

On Exile

I argue that how Plutarch conceives of *ἄλυσ* and its remedy can be understood in *On Exile*. This work largely seeks to establish that the evils of exile are largely matters of perception, and that satisfaction in exile can be found internally.

I argue that Plutarch's advice in this essay can be understood as a corollary to his argument regarding dissatisfaction in *On Tranquility*. In that essay, he argues that the dissatisfied roam the earth carrying their ills with them, and that they

assume a change of location will cure them (*On Tranquility* 466c1-3). In this essay, he presents the view that the satisfied can hold tranquility within themselves despite exile, as the route to satisfaction is internal. He says:

And yet for a plant one region is more favourable than another for thriving and growth, but from a man no place can take away happiness, as none can take away virtue or wisdom.

(Plut. *On Exile* 607e, trans. De Lacy and Einarson)

Just as the dissatisfied need not roam, but must address the issues within their own conceptions, those who are forced to remain static need not experience dissatisfaction if they are able to address the underlying causes of dissatisfaction. Plutarch states that “the soul often adds the heaviness to circumstance from itself” (599c-d, De Lacy and Einarson).

I would argue that in this essay Plutarch provides a conception of the true leisure to be found in philosophical tranquility and application of reason to the *παθή* and external circumstances. He suggests that the common view of exile is so intent upon the removal of the exile from public life that it causes society to “overlook its lack of politics, its leisure, and its freedom” (604c6-8, De Lacy and Einarson). Plutarch insists that:

...a man not wholly infatuated or mad for the mob would not, I think, on being confined to an island, reproach Fortune, but would commend her for taking away from him all his restlessness (*ἄλυσ*) and aimless roving, wanderings in foreign lands and perils at sea and tumults in the market place, and giving him a life that was settled, leisurely, undistracted, and truly his own.

(Plut. *On Exile* 603e, trans. Einarson)

He further suggests that the exile is free to travel to festivals and games and has “at his command leisure, walking, reading, undisturbed sleep” (604d1-2, De Lacy and Einarson).

I have argued that *ἄλυσ*, and Plutarch’s conception of boredom, refers to a

type of restless, dissatisfied, agitated movement, and is connected to a misunderstanding of leisure. In his *On Exile*, Plutarch illustrates the true leisure that comes from the satisfaction of simple leisure.

Conclusion

Soon he felt rising in his soul a desire for desires - boredom.

(Leo Tolstoy *Anna Karenina*, 418)

This thesis sought to identify to what extent a complex form of boredom can be distinguished in the works of Plutarch. I argue that it is possible to identify an affective state similar to boredom, in both its complex and simple forms, in the works of Plutarch. I argue that this is expressed in Plutarch's use of the word *ἄλυσ*.

The relevant psychological and literary models necessary for discussing emotion in a cross-cultural context have been established in this thesis. This has been extended to a specific discussion of what constitutes the affects of simple and complex boredom, according to the most recent psychological research. This methodological background was then applied to the subjects of studying emotion in an ancient context, and to the reception, identification, and analysis of simple and complex boredom in the ancient world. A survey of the apposite primary and secondary sources relating to the establishment of a timeline for the appearance of a Greek concept of boredom in antiquity was illustrated.

Working from terms identified in the work of previous scholars as connected to ancient Greek conceptions of boredom, a review of all occurrences of these terms in Plutarch was conducted and described. The review of these terms sought to provide a context for the intriguing, but little researched, appearance of a concept of boredom in the works of Plutarch. The discussion of these terms identified them in their contexts, compared their meanings and usages, and tried to determine a full semantic field for these concepts.

The history of the *ἄλυσ/άλύω* word cluster was discussed in detail, providing evidence for this word cluster's semantic evolution into a descriptor of an ancient form of Greek boredom. The semantic field of this word was identified as relating to physical movement, mental agitation, aimless idling, and the appearance of an increasingly complexified view of agitation in leisure. To the best

of my knowledge, such a detailed discussion, description, and definition of this word has not been attempted.

The usages and meanings of *ἄλυσ* and *ἀλύω* were discussed across Plutarch's entire corpus, with special reference to conceptions of boredom. A nexus of associations was identified as relating to these terms, including leisure and *σχολή*, the problematised leisure of indulgence and luxury, warfare and effeminacy, exile and retirement, inconstancy and irresolution, and the theme of philosophical tranquility. The multiple situations where these terms could be identified with ancient forms of simple and complex boredom were discussed and analysed in context. The identification of boredom in these terms was established to relate to associations of restlessness, aimlessness, meaninglessness, dissatisfaction, and lethargy.

The terms *κόρος*, *πλησμονή*, *ἀπληστία*, and *ἄχθομαι* were discussed in the context of Plutarch. An identification between *κόρος* and the simple boredom of the audience was identified. The other terms proved to have less interesting results for a discussion of boredom, but the discussion of this lack of association helps to exclude them from other studies on the subject. In a detailed and descriptive survey of this nature, negative results were expected and can be considered to have value for the purposes of a narrower and more detailed definition.

The *Lives* of *Demetrius*, *Antonius*, *Pyrrhus*, and *Marius* were discussed in order to contextualise the discussion of Greek boredom terms, and to avoid the limitations of a solely lexical approach. In this discussion of Plutarch's illustration of the complex and negative characters portrayed in these uniquely negative *Lives*, a complex and nuanced depiction of the experience of insatiability, dissatisfaction, and indulgence is expressed. Plutarch's conception of boredom is part of a serious of personality traits and destructive desires, which are untrammelled by virtue, reason, or restraint. This is most fully expressed in the *Life of Pyrrhus*.

Plutarch's philosophical purpose in his description of *ἄλυσ*, dissatisfaction, and boredom was discussed in the context of *On Exile* and *On Tranquility*. In these essays, Plutarch portrays complex boredom as a misunderstanding of leisure, and

of the path to tranquility. The factors that define Plutarch's view of a virtuous and satisfied life are held in opposition to the qualities that define his conceptions of boredom, *ἄλυσ*, and dissatisfaction.

While the scholarship on boredom in antiquity and boredom in Plutarch is notably minimal, this study attempts to broaden its scope and to contextualise previously described phenomena. The intention of this survey was to systematise and contextualise the approach to boredom in Plutarch. I posit that this thesis has suggested several interesting new avenues for the discussion of boredom in Plutarch and boredom in antiquity. This study attempted to understand a complex affect in context, in its entirety, and in its own terms of reference. This attempt at metacognition, to understand an experiential state as described by a culture separated in time and space, is undoubtedly limited, but no less valuable in terms of understanding the conceptualisations of the inhabitants of the ancient world.

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Appendix

Figure 1

The Wheel of Emotion (Plutchik 2001, 349).



