Folly and Dark Humor in the *Life of Demetrius* *

by

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Abstract

Despite Plutarch’s claim that his aim is not the amusement of his reader, the *Life of Demetrius* is full of humor in a variety of forms. Just as the narrative splits into a comic half and a tragic half, Plutarch adapts his use of humor to suit the tone of the narrative context. In the comic half, the humor makes light of Demetrius’ vices, while the humor of the tragic half is predominantly gallows-humor, and the characters are reduced to laughing at the death and ruin which Demetrius’ reckless ambition has brought to pass. In both halves, Plutarch uses humor not only to entertain his reader, but also as a didactic tool with which he draws attention to Demetrius’ moral failings.


In the preface to the *Demetrius-Antony* pair, Plutarch seeks his readers’ indulgence for including a pair or two of rogues, and claims that he is doing so not merely for the sake of variety or amusement, but as lessons of how not to act (1.5):

…τῶν δὲ κεχρημένων ἀσκεπτότερον αὑτοῖς καὶ γεγονότων ἐν

* This paper is a revised version of a presentation first delivered at “Irony and Humour as Imperial Greek Literary Strategies: The Playful Plutarch”, 13 July 2011, in Oxford. It also forms the basis for a collaborative article on the use of humor in the *Demetrius-Antony* pair which M. Beck and I are preparing for publication in the edited volume arising from the Playful Plutarch conference. I would like to thank Eran Almagor, Katerina Oikonomopoulou, and Christopher Pelling for organizing this conference, and special thanks to Eran Almagor, David Kaufman, and Christopher Caterine for their helpful comments.

1 All Greek texts are from the edition of K. Ziegler; English translations of the *Lives* are modified version of B. Perrin, and the *Moralia* are modified from H. Fowler.