Glory, wine, and dice: the emotions of a negative hero in Plutarch's *Life of Demetrius*[*]

Virgilio Costa

Abstract: This article deals with the complex portrait of Demetrius Poliorcetes in Plutarch's homonymous *Life*. Demetrius is portrayed as a brave and daring hero, but emotional and unable to withstand the reverses of fortune: and yet these very characteristics, beyond the harsh words expressed in the σύγκρισις of the *Lives of Demetrius and Antony*, make the biography of the former one of Plutarch's most interesting works.

Keywords: Demetrius Poliorcetes – Plutarch – *Parallel Lives* – emotions – ancient Greek historiography

1. A negative hero?

In the σύγκρισις of the *Lives of Demetrius and Antony* Plutarch states that the death of the former was more censurable (ψεκτός), since «he tolerated being captured, and, as a prisoner, was glad to gain three more years to get drunk and satisfy his belly, letting himself be tamed like an animal». It is a severe judgement, which clashes with the biographer's evident sympathy for Demetrius and his weaknesses, almost always commented on with humorous remarks and a certain indulgence. The *comparatio*, in other words, would seem to have been composed by a writer who, after having portrayed a negative but courageous and, at times, even noble personality, then developed a harsher opinion.

Compared to Plutarch's other biographies, that of Demetrius[1] pays greater attention to the value of emotions: those most intimate and sincere of the hero, but also those that are exhibited and used as a means of propaganda; and, symmetrically, those of the crowd, which measures the stature of the powerful also by the credibility of their outward manifestations. Moreover, there is Plutarch himself, who rereading the biographical traditions on Demetrius Poliorcetes specifically identifies emotions as the cause of his rise and fall. Particularly interesting, finally, is that the author of the *Parallel Lives* defines Poliorcetes as a man capable of κακίαι μεγάλαι, but without attributing to him a corrupt soul, even when with his insistent attempts at seduction he involuntarily drives an

costa@lettere.uniroma2.it, Università degli Studi di Roma 'Tor Vergata', Italia.

* This short study is dedicated to the memory of Federicomaria Muccioli, an eminent scholar and, for me, an invaluable friend. I am also very grateful to Prof. Thomas R. Martin for his scientific advice.

[1] For the text of the *Life of Demetrius* cf. Manni 1953; Lindskog, Ziegler 1971.

Athenian boy to suicide (24.2-5). On the contrary, the biographer insists on Demetrius' affection for his father Antigonus Monophthalmus (3.1-2), whom he nevertheless dares to disobey to save his friend Mithridates (4.1-4), and recounts his strength of character after the first battle he loses (5.5-6), as well as his generosity[2] towards defeated enemies and conquered cities (6.4-5; 9.8; 17.1).

Antigonus, for his part, tenderly reciprocates Demetrius' love, sometimes shielding himself with a joke:

> λέγεται δὲ τῆς Λαμίας ἀναφανδὸν ἤδη κρατούσης τὸν Ἀντίγονον ὑπὸ τοῦ Δημητρίου καταφιλούμενον ἥκοντος ἀπὸ ξένης εἰπεῖν ἅμα γελῶντα· 'δοκεῖς Λάμιαν ὦ παῖ καταφιλεῖν' (*Demetr.* 19.6).
>
> They say that, when it was now known that Lamia exercised dominion over him, Antigonus, receiving a kiss from Demetrius who was returning from abroad, said to him laughing: «O my son, you seem to be kissing Lamia!».

Plutarch's sympathetic disposition towards Demetrius Poliorcetes already emerges in the introductory chapter of the *Life*, in which the biographer, after stating that men are more willing to imitate the best men if they also know the lives of evil (φαυλοῖ) and blameworthy (ψεγόμενοι) characters, declares:

> περιέξει δὴ τοῦτο τὸ βιβλίον Δημητρίου τοῦ Πολιορκητοῦ βίον καὶ τὸν Ἀντωνίου τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος, ἀνδρῶν μάλιστα δὴ τῷ Πλάτωνι μαρτυρησάντων, ὅτι καὶ κακίας μεγάλας ὥσπερ ἀρετὰς αἱ μεγάλαι φύσεις ἐκφέρουσι. γενόμενοι δ' ὁμοίως ἐρωτικοὶ ποτικοὶ στρατιωτικοὶ μεγαλλόδωροι πολυτελεῖς ὑβρισταί, καὶ τὰς κατὰ τύχην ὁμοιότητας ἀκολούθους ἔσχον. [8] οὐ γὰρ μόνον ἐν τῷ λοιπῷ βίῳ μεγάλα μὲν κατορθοῦντες, μεγάλα δὲ σφαλλόμενοι, πλείστων δ' ἐπικρατοῦντες, πλεῖστα δ' ἀποβάλλοντες, ἀπροσδοκήτως δὲ πταίοντες, ἀνελπίστως δὲ πάλιν ἀναφέροντες διετέλεσαν, ἀλλὰ καὶ κατέστρεψεν ὁ μὲν ἁλοὺς ὑπὸ τῶν πολεμίων, ὁ δ' ἔγγιστα τοῦ παθεῖν τοῦτο γενόμενος (*Demetr.* 1.7-8).
>
> This book will contain the lives of Demetrius Poliorcetes and the emperor Antony, men who, more than any others, gave Plato testimony to the fact that great natures produce both great evils and great virtues. And being likewise lovers, drinkers, fighters, munificent, prodigal, and violent, they consequently also had similar fates. [8] For not only they achieved great successes and great defeats in the rest of their lives, made great conquests and suffered great losses, fell suddenly and rose again against all odds, but they also ended up one captured by enemies, the other very close to suffering this fate.

[2] On this aspect of Demetrius' politics cf. Martin 2013, 685: «As often pointed out, his [*scil.* Demetrius'] history clearly demonstrates how victory in war and large-scale gestures of generosity to followers and allies could elevate a commander [...] to the status of an acknowledged king [...]. Most remarkably, Demetrius's career brought to culmination the process by which a living human being could be acclaimed as a god on earth».

There is something apparently incoherent in these words: if in fact Demetrius and Antony were two «great natures» (μεγάλαι φύσεις), and although they committed crimes, they were also intrepid in battle, munificent, lovers, drinkers etc., where does their non-exemplarity lie? Did they not, after all, have the same vices as so many other protagonists of Greek history, including Philip and Alexander? Or was their fault merely that they ended life as losers? A little further on, among other things, Plutarch points out that while in private Demetrius was the most dissolute of kings, when he had to act, he nevertheless showed energy and tenacity, and for this reason he had always endeavoured to imitate Dionysus, who had been skilful in war but also ready to enjoy the pleasures of peace (2.3). But to emulate Dionysus, the god who had conquered Asia before Alexander, meant, in reality, to accredit himself as Alexander's legitimate successor, the man who, more than anyone else in recent history, had claimed to be an *alter Dionysus*.[3] Poliorcetes, moreover, is not the only one of Plutarch's characters who strives to imitate a heroic model, to the point of identifying with it; in the *Life of Theseus* (6.2-3 and 7-9), for example, the protagonist's first public act after discovering his real father is to travel overland from the Peloponnese to Athens, since this allowed him to repeat the deeds of Heracles, who years earlier had slaughtered the marauders who infested it.

It is possible that Plutarch's fluctuation in his judgement on Demetrius stems simply from the objective difficulty of interpreting such a complex and contradictory character, and some scholars have even observed that the writer from Chaeronea often gives credit to his villains for the good deeds they perform.[4] But Plutarch's supposed 'incoherence' may simply be part of a precise narrative scheme; the biographies of Demetrius and Antony, in fact, are openly structured in the form of tragedy, so much so that Plutarch, passing from one to the other, declares: «Having performed the Macedonian drama, it is time to present the Roman one». Now, as Aristotle explains in the *Poetics*, in a tragedy one must distinguish the knot (δέσις) from the dissolution (λύσις):

> λέγω δὲ δέσιν μὲν εἶναι τὴν ἀπ' ἀρχῆς μέχρι τούτου τοῦ μέρους ὃ ἔσχατόν ἐστιν ἐξ οὗ μεταβαίνει εἰς εὐτυχίαν ἢ εἰς ἀτυχίαν, λύσιν δὲ τὴν ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς τῆς μεταβάσεως μέχρι τέλους (Arist. *Poet.* 1455b26-29).
>
> I call 'knot' the series of events from what is taken as the beginning of the story to the point where the mutation from a state of unhappiness to a state of happiness or vice versa begins; and I call 'dénouement' what goes from the beginning of that mutation to the conclusion.

[3] Cf. e.g. Arr. *An.* 5.1.5-5.2.1; 7.20.1; Plut. *Mor.* 332a-b. Of this imitation of Dionysus by Alexander there is perhaps also a trace, as has been speculated, in the coins minted by Seleucus immediately after Ipsos: cf. Hadley 1974, 12.

[4] Cf. e.g. Nikolaidis 2008, xvi.

2. Demetrius and the Ghost of Alexander at Ipsos

In the case of Poliorcetes, the point of transition from δέσις to λύσις, that is, the point at which «the events and actions of the man whose life we are narrating transfer the narrative, so to speak, from a comic scene to a tragic one» (28.1), is the battle of Ipsos (28-29).[5] From this moment on, the daring hero, always helped by fortune, begins to be tormented by premonitions and visions. The night before the clash, for example, Alexander appears to him, asking him for the password, and when Demetrius answers Δία καὶ Νίκην, «Zeus and Victory»,[6] the Macedonian replies: «When it is so, I go away to your enemies: they, indeed, receive me» (29.2). This anecdote, evidently fabricated «with the intention of showing that they were 'supported' by Alexander, and that their victory was divinely sanctioned by their patron and predecessor»,[7] recalls another nocturnal apparition, that of Alexander to Pyrrhus during the campaign for control of the city of Beroia in Macedonia:

> ἐκείνης δὲ τῆς νυκτὸς ἔδοξε κατὰ τοὺς ὕπνους ὑπ' Ἀλεξάνδρου καλεῖσθαι τοῦ μεγάλου, καὶ παραγενόμενος κλινήρη μὲν αὐτὸν ἰδεῖν, λόγων δὲ χρηστῶν τυχεῖν καὶ φιλοφροσύνης, ἐπαγγελλομένου προθύμως βοηθήσειν. [5] αὐτοῦ δὲ τολμήσαντος εἰπεῖν 'καὶ πῶς ἂν ὦ βασιλεῦ νοσῶν δυνατὸς εἶης ἐμοὶ βοηθεῖν;' 'αὐτῷ' φάναι 'τῷ ὀνόματι', καὶ περιβάντα Νισαῖον ἵππον ἡγεῖσθαι (Plut. *Pyrrh.* 11.4-5).
>
> That night, during his sleep, he thought he was called by Alexander the Great, and approaching him he saw that he was sick in bed, but he received kind words and friendship from him, and promised that he would gladly come to his aid. [5] And when he dared to ask him «and in what way, O king, though I am sick, will you come to my aid?» he replied: «By my own name», and mounted on a Nisean horse he led the way.

The opponent whom Pyrrhus is contesting at Beroia, when Alexander appears to him, is Demetrius Poliorcetes himself. At Ipsos the very young Epirot king had fought on the side of Antigonus and Demetrius, who had married his sister Deidamia (*Pyrrh.* 4.3-4) in his first marriage, and had remained faithful to the latter even after the Antigonids' defeat; but then relations had broken down, and under the gates of Beroia Pyrrhus had forced Demetrius to flee without a fight, simply winning the favour of the Macedonians as more 'Macedonian' –

[5] Chapters 28-30 of Plutarch's *Demetrius* (probably based on Hieronymus of Cardia's account) are our most extensive source on the battle of Ipsos, having been lost the narrative of the same episode at the beginning of Book XXI of Diodorus' *Historical Library*, which almost certainly followed Hieronymus even more literally. However, as Bar-Kochva 1976, 105, notes, Plutarch's inexperience in military matters and his tendency to manipulate documentation, in order to make certain features of his characters stand out better, should be kept in mind when evaluating his interpretations.

[6] Which incidentally is identical to the one chosen by Clearchus in Cunaxa: see Xen. *An.* 1.18.17.

[7] Cf. Wheatley, Dunn 2020, 250-251.

he, a foreigner! – than the adversary himself: that is, as the dream had predicted, as more deserving of Alexander's name. This is all the more significant since, as will be seen, Demetrius and Pyrrhus had very similar characters, but were perceived, according to Plutarch, as two opposite ways of embodying heroic kingship.

Plutarch adds that at Ipsos Antigonus himself was seized by his son's anxiety: up until this point, he had been sure he could rout the enemy coalition as one would a swarm of birds, with a single stone and a single cry (*Demetr.* 28.5); but that day, when he presented Demetrius to the deployed army, designating him as his successor, he was thoughtful and silent, he who usually «was fierce and proud, spoke with a loud voice, and made haughty speeches» (28.8). Then, while the phalanx was already lining up, «in going out he stumbled, fell face down and hurt himself, but he got up and raising his hands to heaven asked the gods for victory or sudden death before defeat» (29.3).

3. The illusions of hope

Despite the grim omen, until the last moment the old king does not stop believing in a turn of fate:

> φερομένων δὲ πολλῶν ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀντίγονον, καί τινος τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν εἰπόντος· 'ἐπὶ σὲ οὗτοι βασιλεῦ', 'τίνα γάρ' εἶπε '<πλὴν> ἐμοῦ σκοπὸν ἔχουσιν; ἀλλὰ Δημήτριος ἀφίξεται βοηθῶν'. [8] καὶ τοῦτο μέχρι παντὸς ἐλπίζων καὶ περισκοπῶν τὸν υἱόν, ἅμα πολλῶν ἀκοντισμάτων εἰς αὐτὸν ἀφεθέντων ἔπεσε, καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπολιπόντων ὀπαδῶν καὶ φίλων μόνος παρέμεινε τῷ νεκρῷ Θώραξ ὁ Λαρισσαῖος (*Demetr.* 29.7-8).
>
> Many enemies advanced against Antigonus, and one of his retinues said to him: «These are coming against you, O king». He replied: «Indeed, what target can they have if not me? But Demetrius will come to my rescue». [8] He held on to that hope to the last, and as he looked around for his son he fell pierced by a swarm of arrows shot at him. His other companions and friends abandoned him; only Thorax of Larissa remained beside the corpse.

In the account of Antigonus' death, all the themes of the second part of Plutarch's biography are already present. The first is the vanity of hope: the old general, in fact, does not try to thwart by fleeing the assault evidently directed against him, but dies μέχρι παντὸς ἐλπίζων, «hoping to the last». It has been keenly observed that in the *Parallel Lives* «the heroes [...] who do not tend to feel hope fall into the category of those generally agreed to be Plutarch's favourites, and [...] ἐλπίς tends to concentrate in the lives generally agreed to be negative»;[8] this is because «hope can be deceptive or redemptive, can show culpable *naïveté* or a

[8] So Fulkerson 2015, 72.

properly placed confidence in one's own plans. Precisely because of its resistance to control, the virtuous hero will eschew it whenever possible».[9]

This is particularly true for Poliorcetes' biography (and for that of Antony): when Antigonus is killed, Demetrius, who desperately struggles to prevent the victorious kings from dividing up his father's kingdom ὥσπερ μέγα σῶμα (30.1), stubbornly relies on hope, not least since he had retained, despite everything, a substantial part of his own forces, five thousand hoplites and four thousand horsemen. Having reached Ephesus by forced march, to prevent his men from plundering the sanctuary of Artemis he sets sail for Attica, «since he had left his wife Deidamia there with ships and money and believed that the safest refuge for his fortunes was the Athenians' love» (30.3). Of course, the Athenians, unlike in the past, are careful not to help him, and when he comes within sight of the Cyclades, they send a delegation to warn him not to approach any further, the demos having decided not to welcome any king (30.4). Demetrius returns to hope for a reversal of fortune when Seleucus asks him to marry his daughter Stratonice, and the meeting between the two goes well, so much so that Poliorcetes also reconciles with Ptolemy and gives consent to the wedding. Shortly afterwards, however, Seleucus unexpectedly orders him to give up Cilicia. Demetrius, then, starts fighting again: he takes Eleusis and Rhamnous, then reduces Athens by starvation, invades Laconia, and is almost on the verge of seizing Sparta, but then learns that Lysimachus has taken his possessions in Asia and Ptolemy the island of Cyprus except Salamis.

Plutarch comments that no other king ever suffered such great and sudden reversals of fortune (35.3). Despite this, Demetrius still strives to behave with the ancient generosity, as when, after conquering Athens and forcing Lachares to flee, he gathers the Athenians in the theatre, reproaches them «in a light and friendly manner» (ἐλαφρῶς δὲ καὶ φιλικῶς, 34.5) and relieves the starving city with a hundred thousand *medimnoi* of grain. The same scene is repeated at Thebes: having entered the city at the end of a hard siege, in which he himself is seriously wounded in the neck (40.5), he is content to execute thirteen people and exile a few others, pardoning the rest of the population (40.6). Quite different, in short, is his behaviour from that of the 'great' Alexander, who had shown no mercy to Thebes, Tyre and the many Asian cities that had dared to resist him.[10]

4. Demetrius the actor

During the siege of Thebes, however, Plutarch relates a significant anecdote. The Thebans, who have again risen up after having been forced to open their gates to Demetrius and welcome one of his garrisons, led by the historian Hieronymus (39.3-4), are putting up fierce resistance, and in order to tame

[9] *Ibid*., 84.

[10] On Alexander's crimes and the negative impact of his conquests of Asia on Macedonia itself cf. Bosworth 1986, 1-12; on Alexander's wrath in Diod. XVII see also Costa 2005.

them, Poliorcetes exposes his men to great risks. Then his son Antigonus (Gonatas) asks him: «Why, o father, do we tolerate these men being wasted unnecessarily?». Demetrius replies: «Why do you grieve? Perhaps you owe them a ration?». Neither one nor the other, on closer inspection, cares about the fate of their men: neither does the father, who treats them as mercenaries, nor the son, who only regrets wasting them without necessity.[11] All things considered, then, Demetrius' clemency appears to us in a different light. It is not a motion of the soul, nor, as Plutarch seems to suggest, a political gesture: it is a theatrical performance.[12]

We are thus approaching, in this strange and contradictory 'lexicon of emotions' that is the *Life of Demetrius*, the essential point: why is Poliorcetes a negative character? In another passage (41.3-4) Plutarch recounts the defeat inflicted in Macedonia by Pyrrhus on Demetrius' lieutenant, Pantauchus. That clash, in which Poliorcetes does not participate for he is busy plundering Epirus, constitutes an irreparable blow to his image:

> καὶ πολλοῖς ἐπῆει λέγειν τῶν Μακεδόνων, ὡς ἐν μόνῳ τούτῳ τῶν βασιλέων εἴδωλον ἐνορῷτο τῆς Ἀλεξάνδρου τόλμης, οἱ δ' ἄλλοι, καὶ μάλιστα Δημήτριος, ὡς ἐπὶ σκηνῆς τὸ βάρος ὑποκρίνοιντο καὶ τὸν ὄγκον τοῦ ἀνδρός. [4] ἦν δ' ὡς ἀληθῶς τραγῳδία μεγάλη περὶ τὸν Δημήτριον, οὐ μόνον ἀμπεχόμενον καὶ διαδούμενον περιττῶς καυσίαις διμίτροις καὶ χρυσοπαρύφοις ἁλουργίσιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ περὶ τοῖς ποσὶν ἐκ πορφύρας ἀκράτου συμπεπιλημένης χρυσοβαφεῖς πεποιημένον ἐμβάδας.
>
> It was said by many among the Macedonians that he [*scil.* Pyrrhus] was the only one, among the kings, in whom one could see an image of Alexander's audacity, while the others, and especially Demetrius, tried to portray his majesty and pomp as if they were on stage. [4] To tell the truth, there was much theatricality in Demetrius' behaviour: not only did he wear fancy robes and headgear, hats with double mitres and purple robes with gold hems, but he also had shoes made of pure purple and felt, embroidered in gold.

To sum up, in the eyes of the Macedonians Demetrius is posing as a hero, while Pyrrhus is a hero.[13] The search at all costs for the *coup de théâtre*, the lack of human authenticity even in the good deeds performed by Poliorcetes is the fault Plutarch never neglects to point out,[14] as when the Athenians gath-

[11] The verb used is παραναλίσκω, which means «to spend badly», «to squander», and only in the passive, «to be killed»: cf. *LSJ*[9], *s.v.*

[12] For a list of passages from the *Life of Demetrius* on the theatricality of the events narrated cf. Mastrocinque 1979, 270, which is full of insights and perceptive observations.

[13] Remember also the famous judgement reported by Plutarch (*Pyrrh.* 8.5) and attributed to Hannibal, according to which Pyrrhus had been the greatest general by experience and skill, Scipio the second and Hannibal himself the third.

[14] On this point see especially Monaco 2017, 409-414.

ered in the theatre wait terrified to know their fate and Demetrius, willing to forgive them, descends among them ὥσπερ οἱ τραγῳδοὶ διὰ τῶν ἄνω παρόδων (34.4).

The *Life of Demetrius* narrates for another ten or so chapters – which are not worth analysing in detail here – the protagonist's repeated attempts to assemble armies, conquer new territories, and face by any means the coalition between Seleucus, Ptolemy, and Lysimachus. «By now he had taken hope», Plutarch suggestively writes, «as a royal path and had condensed around himself the body and form of power» (46.1: ἅπαξ ὥσπερ εἰς ὁδὸν βασιλικὴν τὴν ἐλπίδα κατέστη, καὶ συνίστατο πάλιν σῶμα καὶ σχῆμα περὶ αὐτὸν ἀρχῆς). However, when Seleucus bribes his mercenaries (49.1-4) and leaves him no choice but to surrender or take his own life, he, at the insistence of his friends, chooses the former option (49.9). Everyone already foresaw that he would become very powerful in his son-in-law's court, but the final disillusionment promptly arrives. An emissary of Seleucus leads him not to court, but to the Chersonesus in Syria, where, as Plutarch reports,

> θεραπεία μὲν ἦκεν ἱκανὴ παρὰ Σελεύκου, καὶ χρήματα καὶ δίαιτα παρεσκευάζετο καθ' ἡμέραν οὐ μεμπτή, δρόμοι δὲ καὶ περίπατοι βασιλικοὶ καὶ παράδεισοι θήρας ἔχοντες ἀπεδείχθησαν· [6] ἦν δὲ καὶ τῶν φίλων τῶν συμφυγόντων τῷ βουλομένῳ συνεῖναι, καὶ παρ' αὐτοῦ τινες ὅμως ἐπιφοιτῶντες [ἀπὸ τοῦ Σελεύκου] ἦκον, κομίζοντες ἐπιεικεῖς λόγους καὶ θαρρεῖν παρακαλοῦντες, ὡς ὅταν πρῶτον Ἀντίοχος ἀφίκηται σὺν Στρατονίκῃ διεθησόμενον (*Demetr.* 50.5-6).
>
> Seleucus offered him adequate servitude and money and he was provided with a decent daily standard of living; he was given places to run and walk as a king and parks full of game. [6] The friends who had accompanied him in his flight were also allowed to stay with him if they wished, and often came to see him the envoys of Seleucus, who spoke kind words to him and urged him to cheer up, for he would be released as soon as Antiochus arrived with Stratonice.

5. Wine and dice

Chapters 52-53 of the *Life of Demetrius*, one of the artistic peaks of Plutarch's work, also constitute an astonishing repudiation of the negative judgement expressed in the σύγκρισις on Poliorcetes, since the prisoner who in the golden exile of Chersonesus discovers a truth about himself that the pursuit of glory had hitherto prevented him from recognizing, is certainly not «an animal that has allowed himself to be tamed»:

> ὁ δὲ Δημήτριος ὡς ἐν ἀρχῇ τὴν τύχην προσπεσοῦσαν ὑπέμεινε καὶ ῥᾷον ἤδη φέρειν εἰθίζετο τὰ παρόντα, πρῶτον μὲν ἁμῶς γέ πως ἐκίνει τὸ σῶμα, θήρας ἐφ' ὅσον ἦν καὶ δρόμων ἁπτόμενος· ἔπειτα κατὰ μικρὸν ὄκνου πρὸς αὐτὰ καὶ νωθείας ἐπίμπλατο, καὶ φέρων ἑαυτὸν εἰς πότους καὶ κύβους κατέβαλε, καὶ τοῦ χρόνου τὸν πλεῖστον ἐν τούτοις διῆγεν, [2] εἴτε τοὺς ἐν τῷ νήφειν ἀναλογισμοὺς τῶν

παρόντων ἀποδιδράσκων καὶ παρακαλυπτόμενος τῇ μέθῃ τὴν διάνοιαν, εἴτε συγγνοὺς ἑαυτῷ τοῦτον εἶναι τὸν βίον, ὃν ἔκπαλαι ποθῶν καὶ διώκων ἄλλως ὑπ' ἀνοίας καὶ κενῆς δόξης ἐπλάζετο καὶ πολλὰ μὲν ἑαυτῷ, πολλὰ δ' ἑτέροις πράγματα παρεῖχεν, ἐν ὅπλοις καὶ στόλοις καὶ στρατοπέδοις τὸ ἀγαθὸν ζητῶν, ὃ νῦν ἐν ἀπραγμοσύνῃ καὶ σχολῇ καὶ ἀναπαύσει μὴ προσδοκήσας ἀνεύρηκε (*Demetr.* 52.1–2).

Demetrius, just as from the beginning he had borne the fate that had befallen him, later became easily accustomed to tolerating his condition, and at first he exercised his body as much as he could, devoting himself as much as possible to hunting and running; then, little by little, he allowed himself to be filled with reluctance and sloth towards such things, and turning himself to wine and dice he indulged in them and spent most of his time in them, [2] either since he wished to escape from the reasonings of the present which seized him when he was sober, or since he had realized that this was the life he had so long desired and pursued, and having been led astray by a foolish and empty glory he had caused much pain to himself and much grief to others, seeking in arms, fleets and camps the good he had now unexpectedly discovered in inaction, quiet, and rest.

The way in which Plutarch reverses in this passage his own reading of Poliorcetes is extraordinary. Up to this point he has insisted that Demetrius often succumbed to lust, but when called to battle he could be tenacious and courageous: «The Scythians», he writes e.g. at 19.2, «when they drink and get drunk, they make the strings of their bows resound, as if to summon their courage weakened by pleasure; Demetrius, on the other hand, gave himself over entirely now to pleasure, now to serious business (σπουδῇ), and since he kept the two separate, he was no less expert in war preparations». In other words: the private disorder of the Macedonian warlord was redeemed by his attraction to weapons and military life. Once he falls into captivity, however, the terms are reversed: it is his new awareness of the vacuity of glory that redeems a life that πολλὰ μὲν ἑαυτῷ, πολλὰ δ' ἑτέροις πράγματα παρεῖχεν.[15]

This reversal of perspective is all the more remarkable since in ancient imagery, both Greek and Roman, the pair wine/dice is almost always associated with an attitude of indolence and sloth. In the thirteenth *Philippic*, for example, Cicero, apostrophising Antony, asks him rhetorically what would have become of him if he had not met Caesar: *in lustris, popinis, alea, vino tempus aetatis omne consumpsisses* («you would have spent all the time of your life in brothels, dives, dice and wine», *Phil.* 7.24); and Ovid in the *Remedia*: *languor, et inmodici sub nullo vindice somni, / aleaque, et multo tempora quassa mero / eripiunt omnes animo sine vulnere nervos* («relaxation, long sleeps without anyone interrupting them, / dice and a head clouded by abundant wine / take all energy from the mind, even without hurting it», *Rem. am.* 145–147).

[15] Quite surprisingly, this passage of the *Life of Demetrius* is not included among the examples of character change in Plutarch listed by Gill 1983 and Swain 1989.

We would therefore expect Demetrius' newfound passion for wine and dice, no longer tempered by physical activity, to cause a kind of inner numbness in him, but instead Plutarch describes this last phase of his hero's life as a discovery of the good, τὸ ἀγαθόν, which he had always sacrificed to a «foolish and empty» glory, ὑπ' ἀνοίας καὶ κενῆς δόξης.

Another famous Plutarchian anecdote, the conversation between Pyrrhus and Cineas the Thessalian (*Pyrrh.* 14), has rightly been linked to this passage. The latter asks Pyrrhus: «what shall we do when we have conquered Italy?». «We will take Sicily». «And after we have conquered Sicily?». «We will take Africa and Carthage». «And after that?». «We will take Macedonia and Greece». «And after we have subdued them all, what shall we do?». «We will rest a long time, my dear, and every day, with cup in hand, we will rejoice in conversation among ourselves». «Well», replies Cineas again, «what is there to prevent us now, if we wish, from taking a cup and resting together, since we already have the opportunity and have at our disposal, without giving ourselves pause, all that we are about to obtain at the price of blood, great toil and danger, after having inflicted great evils on others and suffered great evils ourselves?».

Although Pyrrhus realises how much happiness (εὐδαιμονία) he is abandoning, he is unable to free himself from the curse of his ἐλπίς, and so, passing from hope to hope, meets his horrible fate. During a fight in the streets of Argos (272 BC), he is hit by a tile, and slipping from his horse:

> αὐτὸς δὲ [...] παρὰ τὸν τοῦ Λικυμνίου σηκὸν ἔπεσεν, ὑπὸ τῶν πολλῶν ἀγνοούμενος. [3] Ζώπυρος δέ τις τῶν παρ' Ἀντιγόνῳ στρατευομένων καὶ δύο ἢ τρεῖς ἕτεροι [...] εἵς τινα θυρῶνα παρείλκυσαν αὐτόν [...] σπασαμένου δὲ τοῦ Ζωπύρου μάχαιραν Ἰλλυρικὴν ὡς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀποτεμοῦντος, ἐνέβλεψε δεινόν, ὥστε τὸν Ζώπυρον περίφοβον γενόμενον καὶ τὰ μὲν τρέμοντα ταῖς χερσί, τὰ δ' ἐπιχειροῦντα, θορύβου δὲ καὶ ταραχῆς μεστὸν ὄντα, μὴ κατ' ὀρθόν, ἀλλὰ παρὰ τὸ στόμα καὶ τὸ γένειον ἀποτέμνοντα βραδέως [4] καὶ μόλις ἀποσπάσαι τὴν κεφαλήν. ἤδη δὲ σύνδηλον ἦν τὸ γεγονὸς πλείοσι, καὶ προσδραμὼν ὁ Ἀλκυονεὺς ᾔτησε τὴν κεφαλὴν ὡς κατανοήσων. λαβὼν δ' ἀφίππευσε πρὸς τὸν πατέρα καὶ καθεζομένῳ μετὰ τῶν φίλων προσέβαλε. θεασάμενος δὲ καὶ γνοὺς ὁ Ἀντίγονος, [...] αὐτὸς δὲ τὴν χλαμύδα προθέμενος τοῖς ὄμμασιν ἐδάκρυσεν, Ἀντιγόνου τοῦ πάππου μνησθεὶς καὶ Δημητρίου τοῦ πατρός, οἰκείων παραδειγμάτων εἰς τύχης μεταβολήν (*Pyrrh.* 34.2-4).

> He fell [...] near the sacred precinct of Lycimnion, without being recognized by most. [3] And a certain Zopyrus, who fought in the ranks of Antigonus [Gonatas], and two or three others [...] dragged him to an atrium [...]. When Zopirus drew his Illyrian dagger to cut off his head, Pyrrhus gave him a terrible look, so that he, frightened and with trembling hands, set to work and, full of fear and turmoil, did not make a straight cut, but severed at the level of the mouth and chin, and only slowly [4] and with difficulty did he succeed in severing the head. The incident was already known to several people, when Alcyonaeus ran up and asked for the head so as to recognize it. Taking it, he ran on horseback to his father [*scil.* Antigonus

> Gonatas] and threw it before him, who was sitting with his friends. Antigonus looked at it and recognized it [...] then he covered his eyes with his chlamys and wept, remembering his grandfather Antigonus and his father Demetrius, examples in his family of the fickleness of fate.

Here again, the theme of hope introduces an element of contradiction into the 'parallel' lives of Demetrius and Pyrrhus. Plutarch counts the former among the negative characters, the latter among the positive ones; however, Pyrrhus allows himself to be entangled by ἐλπίς – «hope», but also «ambition» – to the point of dying of it; Demetrius redeems himself when he accepts the good possible in his own condition.

The *Life of Demetrius*, however, does not end with the death of the protagonist, «at the age of fifty-four, from an illness caused by inertia, overeating and wine», nor with Seleucus' belated repentance. The last chapter is devoted to the public funeral of the hero, once more organized like a show:

> ἔσχε μέντοι καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν ταφὴν αὐτοῦ τραγικήν τινα καὶ θεατρικὴν διάθεσιν. ὁ γὰρ υἱὸς Ἀντίγονος ὡς ἤσθετο τὰ λείψανα κομιζόμενα, πάσαις ἀναχθεὶς ταῖς ναυσὶν ἐπὶ νήσων ἀπήντησε· καὶ δεξάμενος εἰς τὴν μεγίστην τῶν ναυαρχίδων ἔθετο τὴν ὑδρίαν χρυσήλατον οὖσαν. [2] αἱ δὲ πόλεις, αἷς προσεῖχον, τοῦτο μὲν στεφάνους ἐπέφερον τῇ ὑδρίᾳ, τοῦτο δ' ἄνδρας ἐν σχήματι πενθίμῳ συνθάψοντας καὶ συμπαραπέμψοντας ἀπέστελλον. εἰς δὲ Κόρινθον τοῦ στόλου καταπλέοντος, ἥ τε κάλπις ἐκ πρύμνης περιφανὴς ἐωρᾶτο πορφύρᾳ βασιλικῇ καὶ διαδήματι κεκοσμημένη, καὶ παρειστήκεισαν ἐν ὅπλοις νεανίσκοι δορυφοροῦντες. ὁ δὲ τῶν τότ' αὐλητῶν ἐλλογιμώτατος Ξενόφαντος ἐγγὺς καθεζόμενος προσηύλει τῶν μελῶν τὸ ἱερώτατον· [3] καὶ πρὸς τοῦτο τῆς εἰρεσίας ἀναφερομένης μετὰ ῥυθμοῦ τινος, ἀπήντα ψόφος ὥσπερ ἐν κοπετῷ ταῖς τῶν αὐλημάτων περιόδοις. τὸν δὲ πλεῖστον οἶκτον καὶ ὀλοφυρμὸν αὐτὸς Ἀντίγονος τοῖς ἠθροισμένοις ἐπὶ τὴν θάλασσαν ὀφθεὶς ταπεινὸς καὶ δεδακρυμένος παρέσχεν (*Demetr.* 53.1-3).

> Demetrius' funeral, however, also had a tragic and theatrical character. As soon as his son Antigonus heard that his father's remains were being brought to him, he set sail with all his ships and went to meet them at the islands; having received the golden urn, he placed it on the largest of his flagships. [2] The cities they approached either laid wreaths on the urn, or sent men dressed in mourning to take part in the funeral and to escort him. When the fleet entered the port of Corinth, the urn, adorned with the royal purple and diadem and surrounded by young men at arms mounting guard, was distinctly seen on the stern. Xenophantus, the most famous flutist of the time, seated nearby was playing the most religious music, [3] with which the rhythmic movement of the oars was in tune, and their noise matched the cadences of the flute tunes, as when one beats one's chest in mourning. But what aroused most compassion and lamentation among those gathered on the seashore was the sight of Antigonus himself, distraught and in tears.

There has been some debate about the source of this final page of the *Life of Demetrius*, which could be Hieronymus, for the mention of Antigonus Gonatas' filial piety,[16] or Duris.[17] In any case, it seems to me that Plutarch wished to close his biography by matching the clemency of Poliorcetes, who on several occasions had renounced revenge for the disappointments he had suffered (e.g. from the Athenians), with the gratitude of the cities that had loved him in peacetime and admired him when he went to war, since, as the biographer writes in the σύγκρισις itself, «his spear was not adorned with ivy, his helmet did not exhale perfume, nor did he come out of the gynaeceum shining and radiant, but he made the θίασοι rest and the bacchic orgies cease [...] and he never suffered a setback from pleasures or indolence» (*Demetr. et Ant. comp.* 3.3).

Bibliography

Bar-Kochva B. (1976), *The Seleucid Army. Organization and Tactics in the Great Campaigns*, Cambridge.

Bosworth A.B. (1986), *Alexander the Great and the Decline of Macedon*, «JHS» 106, 1-12.

Costa V. (2005), *La paura e la collera di Alessandro*, in *Epitomati ed epitomatori: il crocevia di Diodoro Siculo* (Atti del convegno. Pavia, 21-22 aprile 2004), a cura di D. Ambaglio, Como, 165-174.

Fulkerson L. (2015), *Plutarch and the Ambiguities of* Ἐλπίς, in *Emotions Between Greece and Rome*, ed. by D. Cairns, L. Fulkerson, London, 67-84.

Gill C. (1983), *The Question of Character-Development: Plutarch and Tacitus*, «CQ» 33, 469-487.

Hadley R.A. (1974), *Seleucus, Dionysus, or Alexander?*, «NC» s. XVII, 14, 9-13.

Lindskog C., Ziegler K. (1971), *Plutarchi Vitae Parallelae*, III 1, Leipzig.

Manni E. (1953), *Plutarchi Vita Demetri Poliorcetis*, Firenze.

Marasco G. (1981), *Introduzione alla biografia plutarchea di Demetrio*, I-II, «Sileno» 7, 35-70.

Martin T.R. (2013), *Demetrius "the Besieger" and Hellenistic Warfare*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Warfare in the Classical World*, ed. by B. Campbell, L. A. Tritle, Oxford, 671-687.

Mastrocinque A. (1979), Δημήτριος τραγῳδούμενος. *Propaganda e lettura al tempo di Demetrio Poliorcete*, «Athenaeum» 57, 260-276.

Monaco C.M. (2017), *Alexander-Imitators in the Age of Trajan: Plutarch's* Demetrius *and* Pyrrhus, «CJ» 112, 406-430.

[16] Cf. Marasco 1981, 53.

[17] Sweet 1951, 179-181, also for the presence, among Duris' fragments, of four passages concerning drunkenness: Ath. 10, 434e-f (= *FGrHist* 76 F 5); Ath. 4, 155c (F 12); Ath. 12, 546c-d (F 15); *Et. M.*, *s.v.* Τὸ Θωρήσσω (F 27). However, only one of them relates to the so-called 'age of the Diadochi' (F 12, on Polyperchon), and equally unconvincing is the proposal to include Philochorus among the sources of Plutarch's *Demetrius* on the basis of very weak clues (cf. e.g. p. 178: «For example, the phrase "Demetrius appeared off the Peiraeus on the twenty-sixth of Thargelion" (*Demetr.* 8, 5) is the statement of one whose interest lay with the watchers on shore rather than with the Macedonian fleet»).

Nikolaidis A.G. (2008), *Introduction*, in *The Unity of Plutarch's Work.* Moralia *Themes in the* Lives*, Features of the* Lives *in the* Moralia, ed. by A.G. Nikolaidis, Berlin - New York, xiii-xviii.
Swain S. (1989), *Character Change in Plutarch*, «Phoenix» 43, 62-68.
Sweet H. (1951), *Sources of Plutarch's Demetrius*, «CW» 44, 177-181.
Wheatley P., Dunn C. (2020), *Demetrius the Besieger*, Oxford.