

Ritual gone wrong in *Demetrius–Antony*: Or, ‘you’re not a deity, you’re a very naughty boy’^{*}

Christopher PELLING

MY SUB-TITLE is drawn from Monty Python’s *Life of Brian*. The crowd has got the idea that Brian, hapless Brian, is the Messiah. His mother tries to ward them off—‘he’s not the Messiah, he’s a very naughty boy’—but it doesn’t work. Brian has to appear himself, and tries to persuade the crowd not just that he isn’t the Messiah but that they don’t need a Messiah at all: ‘you’re all individuals.’ ‘Yes’, they all cry back in unison: ‘we’re all individuals’—which seems rather to miss the point. So crowd and principal are not really functioning together properly; and that notion of the need for harmony, for everyone to get the idea and know what part to play if ‘ritual’ is to work properly, is going to be quite relevant here. So, unsurprisingly in this pair, will the notion of ‘naughty boys’: here the proem to *Demetrius* leaves the reader in no doubt about what to expect (*Dtr.* 1.5–8).

It will already be clear that I am interpreting ‘ritual’ quite loosely: I shall simply be focusing on a series of scenes where the principals are centre-stage and conducting some sort of performance, crowds or other observers are reacting to them, and questions of divinity and of human–divine interaction are central. ‘Centre-stage’—I have also already drifted into theatrical imagery, and that too may not be coincidental in this pair where hints of the theatre are so recurrent.¹ That is how the transition from one *Life* to the other is managed: ‘Now that the Macedonian drama is complete, it is time to bring on the Roman one’ (*Dtr.* 53.10). The last words of the pair are similar: Antony ‘took himself off’, ἐαυτὸν ἐξήγαγεν (*Ant.* 93[6].4). Perhaps it is not too much of a jump from ‘ritual’ to ‘the-

^{*} This is a mildly expanded version of a paper given at the conference on ‘Ritual and politics, individual and community’ at Rethymnon, 28–30 April 2017. My thanks to Lucia Athanassaki both for a memorable conference and stay and for her very helpful comments on the paper.

¹ DE LACY 1952; PELLING 1988, 21–22; DUFF 1999, 125 and 2004, 283–85.

atre' anyway, given the festival context of Greek drama, but in fact it is more the aspects of role-playing that will be relevant here: these too are a link between 'ritual' and theatricality, one that has sometimes been foregrounded in ritual scholarship.² Whether this points to a deeper 'tragic' texture in Plutarch's narrative, and if so what we might mean by that, are further questions, and important enough to require separate treatment elsewhere.³

DEMETRIUS

As far as it goes, *Demetrius* fits a Pythonesque approach quite well, if we substitute 'not a deity' for 'not the Messiah': there is indeed a contrast between the man's divine acclamation, and his very un-divine reality, with a suggestion that it is really rather naughty to think of someone, especially oneself, in those terms. There are many suggestions of divine role-playing and, unlike poor Brian, Demetrius seems only too willing to go along with it. We need to remember too that Alexander is in the background of *Demetrius* as a sort of absent presence, a model for Demetrius to emulate and against which he will be gauged⁴ just as Caesar lurks behind Antony—and Plutarch's audience will doubtless be aware that contestable divinity was a large issue for both Caesar and Alexander. The knowledge of Roman imperial cult will be part of that audience awareness too, together with the need for subject peoples to play along: certainly the notion of mighty humans receiving divine honours will not be strange, nor—importantly—will the knowledge that those mighty individuals can wear that mantle more or less deftly and considerately. And, most certainly, deft considerateness is not Demetrius' strength. He enjoys the dressing up: he has that marvellous cloak, 'a magnificently pretentious work, with a representation of the *kosmos* and the heavenly bodies' (*Dtr.* 41.7). Judith Mossman has recently written very well about that.⁵ But even that misfires: the robe was left half-finished when Demetrius' power was overthrown, and no later king presumed to wear it despite all their pretensions to magnificence (*Dtr.* 41.8). There is more to him than just a fake or a flop—Mossman has shown that—but he is still not doing it right.

² Especially in the work of Victor Turner with its emphasis on 'social dramas', e.g. TURNER 1974.

³ PELLING 2016, with references to further scholarship.

⁴ MOSSMAN 1992.

⁵ MOSSMAN 2015.

It is particularly at Athens that he is very naughty indeed. Not immediately, it must be said: they had quite a lot to thank him for.

He not merely drove Cassander out of Attica ... but also liberated the Greeks south of Thermopylae and made Boeotians their allies and took Cenchreae; he took Phyle and Panactum, fortresses of Attica that Cassander had garrisoned, and gave them back to Athens. (*Demetrius* 23.2–3)

The Athenians duly responded with flatteries (κολακεῖαι) that even outdid those of earlier (and there had been plenty, 10–13): now the *opisthodomos* of the Parthenon was to be his residence, and Athena, so it was said, was welcoming him as her guest (23.4–5).

It did not go well. As Plutarch primly says, ‘he did not conduct himself well, nor was he the sort of gentle guest appropriate to a virgin’ (23.5); he might at least have shown her some respect as his big sister, ‘for this is how he wanted her to be styled’ (24.1). One familiar literary theme was that of theoxeny, when a mortal unwittingly acts as host to a visiting god; the point is normally that the mortal behaves extremely well and is rewarded for it—Philemon and Baucis in Ovid, Hecale and Molorchus in Callimachus, and Abraham and Sarah in the Old Testament.⁶ Now we have a sort of theoxeny in reverse, with a god acting as host to a mortal, and one that goes badly wrong. It was not just that Demetrius turned it into his own personal brothel, with all the famous prostitutes of the day, Chrysis and Lamia and Demo and Anticyra: no, that was the better part. There were all the outrages too against free-born boys and citizen wives, most of which ‘it is not appropriate to recount out of respect for the city’ (24.2), though Plutarch does include one scandal involving a pretty boy driven to a nasty suicide (24.4–5). The *Parthenon*, of all venues, is not the right place for such extremely unvirginal behaviour, and Athena is the least appropriate of deities.⁷

What of rapport with the Athenians as a whole? Admittedly, they started it, with all those ‘flatteries’; it was they, as proxies for Athena herself, who invited him in. Earlier the excessiveness of their fawning

⁶ Philemon and Baucis: Ovid, *Met.* 8.616–724. Hecale and Molorchus: Call., *Hec.* Abraham and Sarah: *Genesis* 18.1–16.

⁷ The stories grew to be more lurid even than those in Plutarch’s versions: Clement of Alexandria says that the Athenians even offered him Athena as a bride, but he did not fancy marrying a statue and preferred Lamia (*Protr.* 4.54.2–6, with O’SULLIVAN 2007/8 and MÜLLER 2010, 569–70).

played its own part in turning Demetrius to the bad (13.3, cf. 18). But they clearly do not like what is happening now. The demagogue Stratoles introduces a decree to define whatever Demetrius might do as ‘holy in the eyes of the gods and righteous in the eyes of humans’. One of the better sort (*kaloï kagathoi*) said he must be mad; the response was ‘no—he’d be mad not to be mad’ (24.9–12). Things do not get any better. A few chapters later, Demetrius is demanding to be initiated into the Mysteries, even though it is the wrong month, and the Athenians have to rename the month to accommodate him (26.1–3). All this is clearly not going to end well, largely for human reasons⁸—but it may be that the gods will be playing a part as well.⁹ They had already shown their displeasure when the sacred *peplos*, now with images sacrilegiously added of Demetrius and Antigonos alongside Zeus and Athena, was struck by a storm in mid-procession and rent apart, and hemlock sprouted next to Demetrius’ altar (there were other portents too, 12.3–6); then there will be further bad omens before the battle of Ipsus (29).

In *Demetrius*, then, it is skilfully done, but it is still a version of the pattern from which we started. Demetrius is playing god; he is behaving very badly; and there is eventually a failure of rapport with those around him, even if the Athenians themselves have to take some of the blame for nudging him in that direction.

This notion of ‘rapport’ is important for Plutarch’s presentation, and probably for the real history of Demetrius too.¹⁰ Principal and onlookers need to work together if a ritual or a festival is to go well. This has been an important theme in the work of Catherine Bell, for instance, with a firm insistence on the way that ritual must be seen in its social context and, like other ideologies, ‘is in dialogue with, and thus shaped and constrained by the voices it is suppressing, manipulating, echoing’: it is a matter of ‘negotiated appropriation of the dominant values’ rather than simply social control, and the negotiation has to take into account

⁸ His later ups-and-downs at Athens are described in human terms: *Dtr.* 34, 46.

⁹ So, very plausibly, KUHN 2006, 275–77 (‘Failed ritual communication through “divine intervention”’).

¹⁰ On the historical truth of all this see KUHN 2006, esp. 272–75 on the *opisthodomos* residence and 266–69 on the shifting of the Mysteries; WHEATLEY 2003 on the role of Lamia; and esp. MÜLLER 2010, who explores Demetrius’ flaunting of his sexual behaviour as a deliberate policy, advertising himself as a favourite of Aphrodite. This, Müller emphasises, was unwelcome to the Athenian public, and their reluctance to respond sympathetically helps to explain the policy’s collapse.

the dominated as well as the powerful, with a response from below that is typically a 'patchwork' of 'consent' and 'resistance'.¹¹ The consent may also only be provisional, a hope and an encouragement for the future as much as a confident statement of current reality.¹²

In a classical context W. R. Connor developed a similar insight in an outstanding paper a generation ago.¹³ His primary focus was the story about Peisistratus that prompted Herodotus' bewilderment that the Athenians, so famous for their sophistication, could be so taken in. It was the dressing—costume again!—of a particularly tall and handsome young woman as Athena, and the proclamation that she was bringing Peisistratus home in triumph (Herodotus 1.60).¹⁴ Connor focused, with parallels from the Middle Ages and Renaissance, on the way that particular rituals were deeply embedded in the cultural expectations of a community and were a two-way thing, with the community sending messages to the great individuals as well as being subject to their propaganda.¹⁵ In a festival everyone has a part to play, onlookers as well as central players: Athenians need not have been so gullible as Herodotus thought, and their playing along with Peisistratus' pretence need not mean that they were deceived (any more than a British festival with a local woman playing a role on horseback need have viewers thinking they were seeing a real Lady Godiver), only that they were entering into the spirit of the occasion and signalling a readiness to go along with Peisistratus at least for the moment.¹⁶ The right parallel for such willing role-playing might be with carnival or Mardi Gras, with again the

¹¹ BELL 1992, esp. Part III ('Ritual and Power'): quotations from, respectively, pp. 191, 182, and 208.

¹² Cf. KOWALZIG 2007, 38, with particular reference to archaic and classical Greece: 'Ritual invents a social reality and hopes that this proposal may appeal. It claims a truth but it defies any means of verification of this truth. The ceremonial invocation of *communitas* is therefore a tool in the creation, maintenance and transformation of social relations between participants.'

¹³ CONNOR 1987.

¹⁴ OGDEN 1999, 263 and 2011, 229–30 suggested that Peisistratus' parading of 'Athena' served as a model for Demetrius now: cf. MÜLLER 2010, 569.

¹⁵ For this emphasis on ritual as communication see also the papers in STAVRIANOPOULOU 2006, esp. the editor's introduction (7–22).

¹⁶ 'The populace joins in a shared drama, not foolishly, duped by some manipulator, but participating in a cultural pattern they all share' (CONNOR 1987, 44, on a similar procession featuring Anthia in Xenophon of Ephesus 1.2); 48, 'The citizens are not naïve bumpkins taken in by the leader's manipulation, but participants in a theatricality whose rules and roles they understand and enjoy.'

crowds bonding with the principals and generating an atmosphere of mutual goodwill and bonhomie. This analogy only goes so far, and need not imply that the Athenians were either wholly accepting or wholly sceptical about any ‘divinity’ of Demetrius—doubtless some ‘believed’, some did not, and some believed but in a different way from normal belief¹⁷—but they will all have appreciated what role they were expected, for the moment, to play. They will also have known that this was only part of the way that the king should treat and be treated by his people, and would have hoped that Demetrius would know that too.

The communication failed; the rapport was not there. One way of putting it would be that Demetrius did not play the divine role properly. ‘If Demetrius was a true god ... he should behave as such. If he had divine powers, he should use them. ... If Demetrius did not listen to the prayer of the Athenians, he could not expect continuation of his godlike honors.’¹⁸ Another possibility is that Demetrius was simply refusing to play: such ostentatious misbehaviour ‘was above all a way for the king to convey that he had no intention of fulfilling the expectations of the city which, by housing him there [in the Parthenon], was trying to persuade him to be a protector as attentive as the poliadic goddess herself.’¹⁹ Or—and this may be closer to Plutarch’s own reading—it may be more a matter of his misunderstanding the ritual’s framing, for another aspect of carnival, as of other forms of ritual, is that it is time-limited and marked off as different and special. People play roles for a day, then put them aside and return to everyday life. You might be seen as a god today, just as in another sort of carnival you may be a lord of misrule, playing a part in a world turned upside down; part of the point of the ritual might even be an edginess that the role-playing may blur over the

¹⁷ This last category reflects one of the answers to the question ‘did the Greeks believe in their myths?’ considered by VEYNE 1988; cf. PRICE 1984, 9 on the ‘symbolic’ belief that he thought typified imperial cult. Nor should we neglect the godly suggestions that might impress even those most sceptical of Demetrius’ status: ‘what makes a god a true god is his ability to communicate with mortals and listen to their prayers, as opposed to mute images. Demetrius is “true” because of his visible and effectual presence, in the same way as all other gods who are present and make manifestations of their power are true gods’ (CHANOTIS 2011, 180). Chaniotis is discussing the ithyphallic hymn to Demetrius of 291 or 290 BC (Duris of Samos *FGrH* 76 F 13 = Athen. 6.253d–f), which contrasts Demetrius’ active presence with mere statues of wood and stone.

¹⁸ CHANOTIS 2011, 186–87: cf. previous note.

¹⁹ AZOULAY 2017, 132.

drunken evening and endanger normal life in the hungover morning after; but when it goes well the world will turn itself the right way up again. Bakhtin (1968) wrote brilliantly about this in his work on Rabelais, and classicists have exploited those insights when writing on Aristophanes and Old Comedy.²⁰ One particularly interesting application to real history was developed in le Roy Ladurie's *Carnival in Romans* (1979), a sixteenth-century case where it all went wrong in that city of southern France, when the edginess turned very nasty, the roles played in the carnival were not laid aside, and the Mardi Gras festivities ended in a massacre for the community. So the collective role-playing—that rapport and harmony, that communication, that ‘negotiation’—is most important if ritual, festival, carnival is to work. But it can go wrong, especially when the time comes for the roles to be laid aside and for normality to resume.

That is one of the things that went wrong with Demetrius, and in Plutarch's view he was not the only one: the Hellenistic kings as a whole went astray when they responded to being hailed as kings and started wearing the diadem.²¹ This made them behave

... in the same way as tragic actors, when they put on royal robes, alter their gait, their voice, their deportment and their mode of address. (*Demetrius* 18.5)²²

The kings too changed the way they treated their subjects, becoming more casual and violent. Tragic actors know when to switch roles; the kings did not—did not even understand that they *were* role-playing—and thus badly misjudged their audience.²³ Demetrius for one was

²⁰ E.g. HENDERSON 1990; GOLDHILL 1991, 176–88. For some reservations, PELLING 2000, 125–26.

²¹ This is not the only sideswipe at other Hellenistic kings, especially Seleucus (32.7–8 and he comes out badly from 47) and Lysimachus (31.3, 51.3–4, and in the earlier bad-tempered exchanges at 20.8 and 25.8–9). For the way that Demetrius sets the pattern for Hellenistic monarchy see WEBER 1995, 299–399 and TATUM 1996, 142: ‘the biography of Demetrius could scarcely escape becoming a commentary on Hellenistic kingship’. Tatum similarly emphasises the theatrical role-playing and Demetrius’ failure to produce a reality to match the semblance.

²² Translations from *Demetrius* and *Antony* are taken, with rare adaptations, from the Penguin translations of Scott-Kilvert, as revised for *Demetrius* by Duff (SCOTT-KILVERT and DUFF 2011) and for *Antony* by myself (SCOTT-KILVERT and PELLING 2010).

²³ Such misreadings have parallels elsewhere: ‘Ritualization both implies and demonstrates a relatively unified corporate body, often leading participants to assume that

shocked to discover that what he had been taking as genuine goodwill from the Athenians was in fact pure pretence, something to abandon at the first opportunity (30.5). He had taken the role-playing for the reality. Later he makes a similar misjudgement with the Macedonians and they belie his expectations by going over to Pyrrhus (44.7–8). The image-system recurs:

He went to his tent (σκηνή), and just as if he were an actor rather than a real king, he put on a dark cloak instead of that tragic (or ‘theatrical’, τραγικῆς) one, and slipped away unnoticed.

(*Demetrius* 44.9)

He has a bounce-back or so still to come, but he does now recognise that the role has to be put aside. In his new humbled state he is glimpsed by an observer in Thebes, who quoted from the proem to the *Bacchae*:

Changing his godhead into mortal form,
He comes to Ismene’s waters and to Dirce’s stream.

(*Demetrius* 45.5 = Eur. *Bacch.* 4–5)

Yet for Dionysus in the *Bacchae* that was just a disguise for the genuine divinity beneath. For Demetrius the ‘mortal form’ is the reality, newly acknowledging the truth that has always been there.²⁴

In the last chapter of the *Life* the themes of theatre and ritual meet up, with Demetrius’ elaborate and extravagant funeral rites described as ‘tragic and theatrical’ (τραγικὴν ... καὶ θεατρικὴν, 53.1), and crowds in every city throwing garlands on to the barge-borne cortège as it passes. It is a dark sort of rapport with the onlookers that he finally achieves.

there is more consensus than there actually is. It leads all to mistake the minimal consent of its participants for an underlying consensus or lack of conflict...’ (BELL 1992, 210: the example she has there been discussing is drawn from post-colonisation South Africa, where a tribal ritual both acknowledged white power and afforded strategies for psychological resistance).

²⁴ The observer’s tone is hard to judge. Plutarch says the quotation was delivered wittily, literally ‘not unpleasantly’ (οὐκ ἀηδῶς), but it is unclear if the wit was sympathetic or mocking. Even if we take it as meant well (cf. MOSSMAN 2015, 157, ‘a rejection of the idea that Demetrius is just an actor shorn of his costume; he is a god in disguise’), the narrative may suggest that the observer is in that case over-generous. MONACO 2011/12, 52 takes it as mocking, an instance of the ‘dark humor’ she identifies as a feature even of the second, more ‘tragic’ half of the *Life* (cf. 28.1): such passages ‘serve to undermine Demetrius’ self-perception’ (MONACO 2011/12, 56). The mirroring tragic quotation at the end of the next chapter (46.10) is certainly sardonic.

ANTONY

One of the most famous scenes in *Antony* echoes that funeral barge of Demetrius, but it is now so much lighter.

She came sailing up the river Cydnus in a barge with a poop of gold, its purple sails billowing in the wind: the oars were silver, and the rowers kept time to the music of flute, pipe, and lyre. Cleopatra herself reclined beneath a canopy of cloth of gold, dressed up as Aphrodite, as we see her in paintings, while on either side to complete the picture stood boys costumed as Cupids, who cooled her with their fans. Instead of a crew the barge was lined with the most beautiful of her waiting-women attired as Nereids and Graces, some at the rudders, others at the tackle of the sails, and all the while an indescribably rich perfume, exhaled from innumerable censers, was wafted from the vessel to the river-banks. Great multitudes accompanied this royal progress, some of them escorting the queen on both sides all the way from the river, while others hurried down from the city to gaze at the sight. Gradually the crowds drifted away from the market-place until eventually Antony was left sitting quite alone on his tribunal, and the word spread on every side that Aphrodite was coming to revel with Dionysus for the happiness of Asia. (*Antony* 26.1–5)

There is so much one can say about that wonderful passage—how the various senses are involved, with music (there were flute-players and sacred music in the *Demetrius* scene too) and perfume as well as the gold, silver and purple, then the queen's own portrayal 'as we see it in paintings'; whether it is all *true* (I believe more of it than many would); whether perhaps it at least captures what a great ritual procession at Alexandria might have been like.²⁵ It certainly scores high on that scale of rapport and harmony. It is not only Cleopatra; her attendants are role-playing too, those Cupids and Nereids and Graces; and the whole crowd is inspired to join in the spirit of the occasion. Nor is it a scene to enrapture Antony alone—indeed he is the one person who is not there, left alone (as Shakespeare puts it²⁶) to whistle to the air in the market-

²⁵ On these aspects see PELLING 1988, 186–88.

²⁶ *Antony & Cleopatra* 2.2.221.

place—but to enrapture everyone. And do they think she is really Aphrodite? For Plutarch, probably not, even though in genuine Egyptian tradition Cleopatra might have been regarded as a goddess incarnate; she is just ‘dressed up’, κεκοσμημένη, ‘as in paintings’, γραφικῶς, ‘as Aphrodite’. The crowd are themselves turning the *aduentus* of Cleopatra into a ceremony, even a ritual, and that final ‘for the happiness of Asia’ has a mix about it of statement and of optimistic prayer—the crowd, perhaps, sending a message to Cleopatra? Ideas of a sacred marriage, a ἱερὸς γάμος like that of Zeus and Hera in *Iliad* 14, are not far away:²⁷ Plutarch has made sure of that in the previous chapter when Q. Dellius had first invited Cleopatra to ‘come to Cilicia, decked in all her splendour’ (25.3), quoting exactly that line from the *Iliad* when Hera first conceives the idea of travelling to Ida to seduce Zeus (*Il.* 14.162). A ἱερὸς γάμος should indeed promote the prosperity of the land: in the *Iliad* the earth sends up foliage, clover and saffron and thick soft hyacinthos beneath the couple as they make love (*Il.* 14.346–52). That prayer for the prosperity of Asia is as one might expect.

Except that it does not happen (any more than the lovemaking of Zeus and Hera was very good for anyone in the *Iliad*). Cleopatra/Aphrodite is ‘coming in revel *with Dionysus*’, for this passage is one of a pair. A few chapters earlier we had Antony in Ephesus:

When Antony made his entry into Ephesus, women dressed as Bacchantes and men and boys as satyrs and Pans marched in procession before him. The city was filled with wreaths of ivy and thyrsus wands, the air resounded with the music of harps, pipes, and oboes, and the people hailed him as Dionysus the Benefactor and the Bringer of Joy. (*Antony* 24.4)

That apparently again scores high on the participation scale, and again a message is sent upwards to the principal himself. But the way it goes on shows the emptiness of that ‘for the happiness of Asia’:

Certainly this was how some people saw him, but to the majority he came as Dionysus of Savagery and Wildness, for he

²⁷ Sacred marriage ideas have also been thought relevant in the cases of Peisistratus (BERVE 1967, 545; CONNOR 1987, 42–3 is doubtful) and Demetrius (OGDEN 1999, 263–64 and 2011, 229), though in those cases the marriage would be a more paradoxical one with virginal Athena: Ogden suggested that for Demetrius Lamia might be a symbolic stand-in for the goddess. MÜLLER 2010, 569 preferred to think of a sacred marriage of Demetrius with Aphrodite.

stripped many noble families of their property and gave it away
to rogues and flatterers.... (Antony 24.4)

... and more, a lot more, on all the sufferings of Asia as Antony squeezes the province dry. Here too there are smells of incense; but the music is not just of those acclaiming harps, pipes, and oboes, but a 'mixture of paeans and of groans of despair'. It is not that Antony has got Dionysus wholly wrong, the way Demetrius got Athena wrong: the first part of the chapter has dwelt on him as party-giver and reveller, and he is good at that. But Dionysus is a complex figure, 'most dreadful and most gentle to mortals' (Eur. *Bacch.* 861), and for the Ephesians the savagery is what now matters. This 'carnival' atmosphere is going almost as badly wrong as it did in le Roy Ladurie's *Romans*.

How similar is this to *Demetrius*, and to the simple model from which we started? Antony is certainly being 'naughty'. But it is already more complex, as so often second *Lives* provide an intricate variation on the pattern introduced by the first.²⁸ One reason is that complexity of Dionysus. Another, as Plutarch hastens to explain, is that this was not *just* a case of a man behaving badly; it was more a matter of Antony's simplicity, his ἀπλότης, which meant that he did not realise much of what was going on (24.9–12). And of course that ἀπλότης left Antony terribly vulnerable to the flatterers—a continuous theme from *Demetrius*—and especially to that most skilful flatterer of all, Cleopatra (29): the mistress of many-sidedness, ποικιλία, so that a man of 'singleness', ἀπλότης, is wholly out of his league.

Not that Antony is as simple, or single, as all that. At Alexandria he is in his element, boisterous and rumbustious, dressing up along with Cleopatra as ordinary folk—dressing up again—and cheerfully going out on the streets at night, beating up the odd passer-by; and the Alexandrians loved it, 'saying that he wore his tragic mask for the Romans and the comic one for them' (29.4). At Athens he is contrastingly unpretentious and restrained, joining in learned discussions and being initiated in the *Mysteries*, and doing so in the right way (22.2–3): Demetrius' initiation, we remember, was very different (*Dtr.* 26.1–3, p. 44). Antony's dressing up is different too, for he would put on Athenian dress and go out in public with the rods of an Athenian gymnasiarch rather than his Roman *fascēs*, then go wrestling in an egalitarian way with the young

²⁸ PELLING 1986 and 1988, 18–26. The present paper expands those remarks in a further direction.

men (33.3–4). In real history it seems to have been around now that he started to encourage his identification with Dionysus at Athens, and there may even have been talk of another sort of sacred marriage, that with Athena,²⁹ but that emerges from other sources; Plutarch leaves those divine suggestions for later, and—significantly—for Alexandria rather than Athens or Rome (54.9). Even then it is a question of Antony being *hailed* as a new Dionysus, *προσαγορευόμενος* (60.5), rather than presenting himself as one: such self-identification is more in the style of Cleopatra (54.9). At Athens it is certainly a case of rapport and understanding, with the principal role-playing in a way that chimes with the locals and encourages communication in both directions. And it chimes all the more because such role-playing is *not* confined to festivals or special occasions, but is everyday.

Where Antony's touch is less certain is, paradoxically, at home with the Romans. Not all of it goes wrong. In the early chapters there was already a fair amount of dressing up, with mixed results. There was the scene when he arrived at dead of night, dressed as a servant, and mightily scared his long-suffering wife Fulvia (10.9–10); his flight from Rome, again dressed as a servant, was the trigger for the civil war (5.9), even though there was more to Caesar's motivation than that (6); that scene is then recalled when he fled once more in servant's dress from the senate on the Ides of March (14.1), but there he swiftly redeemed himself with a day or so of consummate statesmanship (14.4). One thing that certainly went well was his mimicking of Heracles. When Antony walked out in public, he would dress in such a way as to suggest Heracles with a great sword and a coarse cloak: that went with the heavy drinking and the sharing of food and jokes with his soldiers, especially jokes at the expense of his own love affairs (*Ant.* 4). It is again not a question of pretending *to be* Heracles: it was a matter of descent, as he claimed Heracleian ancestry through Heracles' son Antony. Here Antony is chiming in very well, and his troops' devotion will continue to be a major theme throughout the *Life*—or at least till Actium, for by then he is sharing his jokes and his life not with them but with Cleopatra. So it is once again more complicated than in the first *Life*, where Demetrius was simply misjudging his audience when he assumed that their goodwill was a matter of truth rather than semblance.

One ritual that Antony clearly gets wrong is that of the Lupercalia (February 44 BCE). Several times Antony tries to crown Caesar with a

²⁹ See my commentary on *Ant.* 33.6–34.1, PELLING 1988, 208–9 and 1996, 22–23.

diadem wrapped in laurel; several times Caesar fends him off. Every time Antony tries, the crowd show their displeasure; every time Caesar refuses, they cheer. What Caesar was in fact playing at here is a well-known historical crux, but the interesting thing for the moment is the differing emphasis in Plutarch's two treatments. In *Caesar* (61) he makes it clearer that everything is prearranged, presumably by Caesar himself; in *Antony* (12) Plutarch blames Antony's irresponsibility for everything.³⁰ It is one of several cases in the first part of the *Life* where Antony's stupid or self-indulgent behaviour imperils Caesar, and does so because he is so out of tune with public opinion at Rome (also 6, 9). So there is a mismatch between his chiming in with the troops and his failure to chime in with the crowd.

Then, if we jump ten years forward, there are various ceremonies in Alexandria: Plutarch divides them into two (50.3–7 and 54.4–9), but leaves open the possibility that they were the same, and that is probably the case.³¹ Plutarch first describes the celebration of the victory over Artavasdes of Armenia:

Antony captured him, brought him in chains to Alexandria, and led him in his triumph (ἔθριάμβευσεν). This was what particularly distressed those at Rome, who thought he was throwing away to the Egyptians the honourable and sacred rites of his own country as a gift on Cleopatra's account.

(*Antony* 50.6–7)

Then we have the Donations of Alexandria a few chapters later, with all the parade of his and Cleopatra's children in the national dress of the countries they were, presumably, one day to rule—Alexander with a Median tiara and headdress, Ptolemy with a Macedonian cloak and cap and diadem, and Cleopatra Selene marked out as future Queen of Egypt. Dressing-up again, one notices, this time of the children rather than himself. Unsurprisingly, this did not go down well at Rome: it seemed 'tragic' (or 'theatrical', τραγικήν) 'and arrogant and Rome-hating' (54.5)—μισοῤῥώμιον, an interesting word that seems a calque on the φιλοῤῥώμιος title that had been adopted by several eastern monarchs. Antony may be well in tune with the public of Alexandria, but he is not with the public at Rome, and Octavian—spin-doctor *extraordinaire*—is

³⁰ PELLING 1988, 144–45; 2011, 450–51.

³¹ PELLING 1988, 241 and esp. 249–50.

exactly the man to exploit all this (55, etc). So these ritual occasions are deftly used to make a point, not or not yet about the gods, but about the different peoples and cities—Alexandria, Athens, Rome—and the different national characteristics. Alcibiades, we recall, was Plutarch's great case of the chameleon, the man who was so gifted at adapting his personality to the needs of whatever society or city he found himself in, Athens or Sparta or Persia (*Alc.* 23). Antony, so similar to Alcibiades in some ways, has something of the same—Antony at Athens is not the same as at Alexandria—but could have done with a little more.

Triumphs are going to be relevant again, with Cleopatra's determination not to be led in triumph at Rome (84)—but this is discussed by Judith Mossman in a paper to appear elsewhere,³² and I will concentrate on other aspects of those final scenes. They are heralded by that marvelously eerie moment when 'the God abandons Antony', the inspiration for an equally marvellous poem by Cavafy, with an uncanny sound of night-time music as Dionysus leaves the city of Alexandria and leaves Antony to his fate (75). That is a sort of reverse κῶμος, as the θίασος (that is the word that is used) leaves rather than arrives at the party. We have seen that Antony's relation to the gods, first Heracles and then Dionysus, is altogether more complicated than that of Demetrius to Athena; but it does not save him. More complex though he is, he falls into the same fate as Demetrius, rather as the more nimble Alcibiades eventually suffers the same destiny as the simpler and blunter Coriolanus.

And then there is Cleopatra. Frederick Brenk once argued that the whole *Life* is shot through with allusions to the cult of Isis and Osiris.³³ One part of the argument that works well is the reference to the end. In Isis' case, it was a matter of reuniting the scattered bones of Osiris, restoring him to life, and ruling along with him in the underworld. Posthumous rule was not a possibility for the mortal couple, but their determination to be 'partners in death' was real enough: that was the title of the dining club which they set up in these final months, the Συναποθανούμενοι (71.4), to take the place of the 'Inimitable Livers' (28.2). That determination underpins Cleopatra's lament at Antony's tomb:

In our lives nothing could part us, yet it seems that death will
force us to change places. You, the Roman, have found a grave
in Egypt, and I, unhappy woman, will receive just enough of

³² MOSSMAN, forthcoming.

³³ BRENK 1992. MOLES 1993, 31–2 is unconvinced.

your country to give me room to lie in Italy. But if there is any help or power in the gods that dwell there, for those here have betrayed us, do not abandon your wife while she lives, and do not let yourself be triumphed over in my person. Hide me and let me be buried here with you, for I know now that the thousand griefs I have suffered are as nothing beside the few days that I have lived without you. (Antony 84.6–7)

And she wins: she has her own triumph over Octavian by manufacturing her own death. It ought to feel all wrong. The snake, rearing up on the royal headband, should symbolically be striking down the enemies of the Egyptian throne, not the queen herself.³⁴ But by now her own body, doomed by Octavian to survival and to the Roman triumph, has become hostile to her. Using the royal snake against the Queen herself is not a travesty after all. It feels right.

There is more too, more even to that lament. There is no refrain: that is unusual,³⁵ and all the odder as her two maidservants are with her and could echo her grief. But again it feels right. Cleopatra is like Antigone, who has nobody to echo her *kommos* as she goes to her death because the chorus prefers remarks like ‘it’s your own fault’ and ‘just like her father!’ (Soph. *Ant.* 806–82). The queen then bathes herself, then puts on her robe and her crown—she who was lying lowly on a mat in just a tunic to receive Octavian (83). Bathing the body; dressing it—dressing up again—in best clothes: she is holding her own funeral before she is dead. It again ought to feel dreadfully wrong, just as it does when Clytemnestra kills Agamemnon in a bath and embroils him in a wrap of kingly magnificence.³⁶ But it does not.

The gods may be guiding Rome towards empire, and there is more than a hint of that in the *Antony* (56.6). Yet Antony and Cleopatra have their own magnificence—losers, but marvellous losers. One thing that Shakespeare teased out of Plutarch’s narrative was that Cleopatra was a mistress of paradox: she ‘did make defect perfection’; she ‘makes hungry where most she satisfies’ (*A. & C.* 2.2.241–7); the winds that cooled her made her cheeks glow and ‘what they undid, did’ (2.1.209–10). There had earlier been talk of her bewitching charms (*Ant.* 25.6), and there is

³⁴ PELLING 1988, 319–20.

³⁵ PELLING 1988, 317, quoting ALEXIOU 1974.

³⁶ SEAFORD 1984; PELLING 1988, 320.

magic about her still. This is not ritual gone wrong after all, but ritual that—for her—she has contrived to be supremely right.

It is well done, and fitting for a princess
 Descended of so many royal kings.
 (Charmian at Shakespeare, *Antony and Cleopatra* 5.2.325–6)

Christopher Pelling
 Emeritus Regius Professor of Greek
 Christ Church, Oxford
chris.pelling@chch.ox.ac.uk



BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- ALEXIOU, M. 1974. *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Oxford.
- AZOULAY, A. 2017. *The Tyrant-slayers of Ancient Athens: A Tale of Two Statues* (transl. J. Lloyd: French original 2014). Oxford.
- BAKHTIN, M. 1968. *Rabelais and his World* (transl. H. Iswolsky: Russian original 1965). Cambridge, Mass.
- BELL, C. 1992. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. Oxford.
- BERVE, H. 1967. *Die Tyrannis bei den Griechen*. München.
- BRECK, F. E. 1992. Antony–Osiris, Cleopatra–Isis: the end of Plutarch’s *Antony*. In: STADTER (ed.) 1992, 159–82.
- CHANIOTIS, A. 2011. The ithyphallic hymn to Demetrios Poliorketes and Hellenistic religious mentality. In: P. P. IOSSIF, A. S. CHANKOWSKI, and C. C. LORBER (eds), *More than Men, Less than Gods: Studies on Royal Cult and Imperial Worship*. (Studia Hellenistica 51.) Leuven; Paris; Walpole, Mass., 157–95.
- CONNOR, W. R. 1987. Tribes, festivals, and processions; civic ceremonial and political manipulation in archaic Greece. *JHS* 107: 40–50.
- DE LACY, P. 1952. Biography and tragedy in Plutarch. *AJP* 73: 159–71.
- DUFF, T. 1999. *Plutarch’s Lives: Exploring Virtue and Vice*. Oxford.
- _____, 2004. Plato, tragedy, the ideal reader and Plutarch’s *Demetrios and Antony*. *Hermes* 132: 271–91.
- GOLDHILL, S. 1991. *The Poet’s Voice*. Cambridge.
- HENDERSON, J. 1990. The Demos and the comic competition. In: J. J. WINKLER and F. I. ZEITLIN (eds), *Nothing to do with Dionysos? Athenian drama in its social context*. Princeton, 271–313.

- KARANIKA, A. 2008. Greek comedy's parody of lament. In: A. SUTER (ed.), *Lament*. Oxford, 181–99.
- KOWALZIG, B. 2007. *Singing for the Gods: Performances of Myth and Ritual in Archaic and Classical Greece*. Oxford.
- KUHN, A. B. 2006. Ritual change during the reign of Demetrius Poliorcetes. In: STAVRIANOPOULOU (ed.) 2006, 265–81.
- LE ROY LADURIE, E. 1979. *Carnival in Romans* (transl. G. Braziller: French original 1979). Paris.
- MOLES, J. L. 1993. Review of Stadter (ed.) 1992. *CR* 43: 29–32.
- MONACO, M. 2011/12. Folly and dark humor in the *Life of Demetrius*. *Plutarchos* n.s. 9: 49–59.
- MOSSMAN, J. 1992. Plutarch, Pyrrhus, and Alexander. In: STADTER (ed.) 1992, 90–108.
- _____, 2015. Dressed for success? Clothing in Plutarch's *Demetrius*. In: R. ASH, J. MOSSMAN, and F. TITCHENER (eds), *Fame and Infamy: Essays for Christopher Pelling on Characterization in Greek and Roman Biography and Historiography*. Oxford, 149–60.
- _____, forthcoming. Plutarch and the Roman triumph. *Hermathena*.
- MÜLLER, S. 2010. Demetrios Poliorketes, Aphrodite und Athen. *Gymn.* 117: 559–75.
- OGDEN, D. 1999. *Polygamy, Prostitutes and Death: the Hellenistic Dynasties*. Swansea.
- _____, 2011. How to marry a courtesan in the Macedonian courts. In: A. ERSKINE and LL. LLEWELLYN-JONES (eds), *Creating a Hellenistic World*. Swansea, 221–46.
- O'SULLIVAN, L. 2007/08. Marrying Athena: a note on Clement *Protrepticus* 4.54. *CJ* 103: 295–300.
- PELLING, C. 1986. *Synkrisis* in Plutarch's *Lives*. In: F. BRENK and I. GALLO (eds), *Miscellanea Plutarchea*. (Quaderni del Giornale Filologico Ferrarese 8.) Ferrara, 83–96. Repr. in: C. PELLING, *Plutarch and History: Eighteen Studies*. London, 2002, 349–64 (ch. 16).
- _____, 1988. *Plutarch: Life of Antony*. Cambridge.
- _____, 1996. The triumphant period. In: A. K. BOWMAN, E. CHAMPLIN, and A. LINTOTT (eds), *The Cambridge Ancient History*, x.2: *the Augustan Empire, 43 B.C.–A.D. 69*. Cambridge, 1–69.
- _____, 2000. *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian*. London.
- _____, 2011. *Plutarch: Caesar*. (Clarendon Ancient History.) Oxford; New York.
- _____, 2016. Tragic colouring in Plutarch. In: G. ROSKAM, J. OPSOMER, and F. TITCHENER (eds), *A Versatile Gentleman: Consistency in Plutarch's Writings*. (Festschrift for Luc van der Stockt.) Leuven, 113–33.
- PRICE, S. R. F. 1984. *Rituals and Power: the Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor*. Cambridge.

- SCOTT-KILVERT, I. and DUFF, T. 2011. *Plutarch: the Age of Alexander*. London.
- SCOTT-KILVERT, I. and PELLING, C. 2010. *Plutarch: Rome in Crisis*. London.
- SEAFORD, R. 1984. The last bath of Agamemnon. *CQ* 34: 247–54.
- STADTER, P. A. (ed.) 1992. *Plutarch and the Historical Tradition*. London.
- STAVRIANOPOULOU, E. (ed.) 2006. *Ritual and Communication in the Graeco-Roman World*. Liège.
- TATUM, W. J. 1996. The regal image in Plutarch's *Lives*. *JHS* 116: 135–51.
- TURNER, V. W. 1974. *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors; Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca, NY.
- VEYNE, P. 1988. *Did the Greeks believe in their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination* (transl. P. Wissing; French original 1983). Chicago and London.
- WEBER, G. 1995. Herrscher, Hof und Dichter. Aspekte der Legitimierung und Repräsentation hellenistischer Könige am Beispiel der ersten drei Antigoniden. *Hist.* 44: 283–316.
- WHEATLEY, P. V. 2003. Lamia and the Besieger: an Athenian hetaera and a Macedonian king. In: O. PALAGIA and S. V. TRACY (eds), *The Macedonians in Athens 322–229 B.C.* Oxford and Oakville (CT), 30–36.



Ritual gone wrong in *Demetrius–Antony*: Or,
'you're not a deity, you're a very naughty boy'

Christopher PELLING

Abstract

RAPPORT and mutual understanding are important to ritual: signals are sent out, and it is important that they are received in the right way. In *Demetrius and Antony* Plutarch traces the way in which ritual goes wrong and mutual understanding breaks down. Demetrius is greeted with divine honours, but misunderstands the terms on which the honours are paid: like other Hellenistic monarchs, he mistakes the show for reality, and does not know when it is time to lay the role-playing aside. In *Antony* the themes are juggled and re-sorted. At times Antony does achieve real rapport, with his men, with the Athenian public, at Alexandria; but he misjudges ritual at the Lupercalia, and much of his role-playing misfires badly at Rome. The pair ends with other ritual echoes as Cleopatra dies, echoes that might be expected to suggest a travesty of propriety but for her, paradoxically, seem exactly right.

