

PLUTARCH'S
ORIGINALITY IN THE
AMATORIOUS

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PREFACE
AND
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This will be the final version of a thesis whose completion has been delayed by various problems, technical and otherwise. It is my hope that firstly readers will at least find some useful information and new insights into Plutarch's Amatorius in this study. Secondly I pray mercy for any errors that still haven't been proofread out. Amongst other problems my backup files and printer drives had to be persuaded not to divorce each other.

My special thanks to the following individuals in particular, my supervisor, G. R. Stanton for assistance with proofreading and editing, my mother who doesn't understand why I'm doing this but helped anyway, the library staff at UNE for doing their best to find various obscure books despite their limited availability in Australia, the computer help desk for uncovering the backup "knot" on my disc that was mixing older and newer versions of my files, and several members of the Classics-L listserv for providing helpful suggestions and intelligent conversation by e-mail. Anyone omitted here I have hopefully already thanked in person!

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not been already submitted for any degree and is not being currently submitted for any other degree.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

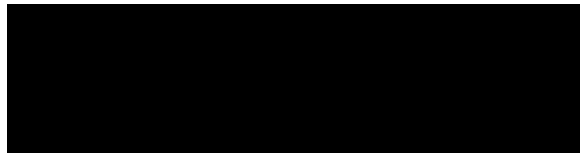


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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Plutarch's Amatorius has previously been the focus of relatively few articles (Brenk 1988, Martin 1984, and 1978 in Betz pp. 442 ff.) and translations into English (Helmbold 1961, Russell 1993) or other modern European languages such as Flacelière's translation into French (1987). Perhaps this is because the Lives generally have received more critical attention than the Moralia and both the Lives and the Moralia have tended to be used more as a reference source for ancient historians than been studied for their own merits as works of literature or philosophy. Consequently several significant aspects of the Amatorius have been overlooked or under-estimated previously. I hope that this work will bring more detailed critical attention to the Amatorius.

One of the most extravagant praises sung of the Amatorius was that of C. Bigg who described its value in superlative terms (1895, p. 85)

“the Amatorius is worth all other heathen writings on morality put together.”

A more moderate recommendation was that of Brenk (1977, p. 17) who described it as being one of Plutarch's finest and most interesting treatises. Certainly the Amatorius is worthy of deeper study than it has so far received and for more reasons than Bigg's valuation of moral excellence. It is also a work of original philosophy and critical scholarship and yet a work of literature as well with elements of humour and drama.

There are several reasons for a closer look at the Amatorius. As a work of philosophy, it is one of the few "Platonic dialogues" surviving, not

by Plato¹. It is also the only one by a Hellenic writer in the Imperial period reflecting the ideas of Middle Platonism in a format more complex than a simple Question and Answer manual or a commentary on an earlier work. Finally it presents to us a survey of theories about Eros held by Plutarch and other non-Platonist philosophers in the first century A. D. and Plutarch's critical response to them.

Apart from the Amatorius' role as an example of Middle Platonic polemics, a careful analysis of Plutarch's response to other philosophies in this work can be used to refute allegations of eclecticism against Plutarch, a critical tradition started by Zeller (1886) and summarised by Betz (1978, p. 4). Donini (in Dillon and Long 1988, pp. 30 - 32) has concluded that eclecticism in regard to philosophy, particularly Middle Platonism, should be defined either as an uncritical composite doctrine or a use by authors of compatible elements from other schools to defend their own doctrines. Eclecticism in Middle Platonism seems to be a technique as well as an aspect of theory.

This second alternative, of eclecticism as a methodology, is one Plutarch appears to have made use of in the Amatorius. Ideas derived from traditional beliefs or other philosophies, when compatible with Plutarch's own Platonism, were used as part of Plutarch's defence of Eros.

Dillon (1977, p. xiv) has also commented that he considers eclecticism to be an unfair term to apply to Middle Platonism, and (op. cit., p. 185) has taken the position that while Plutarch, in his view, was by no

¹ There are dialogues extant by Cicero and Lucian but compared to the lists of dialogues found in Diogenes Laertius' Lives what has survived is minimal, compared to what has been lost.

means "a great original philosopher", Plutarch's works were an important link in the development of Middle Platonism and also "not quite devoid of originality" either.

Another reason for studying the Amatorius is Plutarch's defence of Eros' divinity. He defended his theology of Eros by drawing examples from several areas, traditional religion, poetry, history, to form an alliance in support of his own, Platonic philosophy. In the course of doing so Plutarch expressed several original developments not just about Eros, who is both the central "character" and subject of the Amatorius, but also about women and marriage and relationships.

Plutarch's style and use of structure is also of interest and the focus of discussion in Section Three of this study. Both are Platonic yet Plutarchean, for Plutarch, like Plato, uses elements from other genres, but in a manner that seems in some aspects to forecast Lucian's blended style. The structure reflects aspects of both the Symposium and the Phaedrus but is not a copy of either work. Also a comparison with a sophistic writer like Maximus of Tyre who dealt with similar subject-matter, and a satiric work with sexual themes, attributed to Lucian but probably by a later writer, called the Amores, emphasises Plutarch's originality and greater, richer, complexity of style and structure.

One particularly notable feature of the structure of the Amatorius, that will be explored in the third section of this study, devoted to the literary aspects of the Amatorius, is the inverted drama. The structure of the dialogue seems to be an inverted or reversed image of a play. Most of the action, which often resembles incidents and themes from New Comedy, takes place offstage, and what would be an offstage discussion

in a comedy becomes the focus of action. There are plays within plays and the whole work can be viewed as a celebration of Eros, a literary parallel to the Erotidea festival at Thespieae. The Amatorius becomes more than dialogue. It is Plutarch's philosophical comedy in celebration of Eros.

Because of this complexity of structure in which many themes have been woven together the analysis of and commentary on Plutarch's Amatorius in this work has been divided into three sections. The first is devoted to Plutarch as a Platonist, giving an introduction and brief overview of Middle Platonism and Plutarch's place in it, the historical and theoretical background from which Plutarch's theories of Eros developed. A survey of Plutarch's usage of certain sections of Plato's dialogues and response to extant Platonic doctrines follows with the third part of Section One focusing on Eros and Plutarch's doctrine.

The second section describes Plutarch's responses to differing views of Eros, such as those of the Stoics, and some negative responses, like those of the Epicurean school. As Plutarch's teachings about Eros are related in the Amatorius to his views on marriage and women, the ideas of the Peripatetics and Neopythagoreans are also reviewed. Plutarch used a methodology of criticism related to the structure of the Amatorius², in which the writings of several Stoics are compared with those of Plato and then likewise to those of the Epicureans so that the writings of all three schools are continuously being compared and contrasted with each other.

The final section starts with a review of the questions of what dialogue is and how Plutarch's style and structure in the Amatorius relates to that of other writers, with a comparison having been made with two other writers in particular, Maximus

² See the diagram at the end of this introduction.

of Tyre and Lucian, sophist and satirist, and a third writer using a Lucianic style, who created the Amores. Then comes an analysis of the use of parody in the Amatorius, and other techniques such as Plutarch's mosaic of allusions which are compared with the Lucianic method of writing, and this is followed by a look at the dramatic aspects of the Amatorius' structure.

This has been placed at the end because the structure and style is the support for Plutarch's philosophy and it seemed important to place the primary emphasis onto the philosophy and Plutarch's evolution of a doctrine dealing with Eros, in response to earlier Platonism and the differing views of his contemporaries. Plutarch's response as a Platonist and critical response to other philosophies is woven together in a complex braided manner into the unusual structure which has resonances of drama apparently drawn from New Comedy.

For the Greek text of the Amatorius the Loeb edition by Helmbold (1961) was most frequently consulted. Use was also made of the editions of Hubert (1938) and Flacelière (1987). I would like to recommend Russell's 1993 translation (Plutarch: Selected Essays and Dialogues), not simply because it is the only recent translation available but also for its excellent notes and introduction. My thanks to all those scholars whose works have given me guidance and insight and to the Nine Ladies of Helicon, daughters of Memory, for moments of inspiration.

A SUMMARY OF THE STRUCTURE OF THE AMATORIIUS.

showing the arrangement of some of the major arguments and themes

ONE: The PROLOGUE - Chapters One to Two, 748 E - 750 A.

The Introduction is appropriate to a Platonic dialogue yet also to a play, for it presents us to the "Chorus" of philosophers, includes a history of the feud of lovers and harpists, 749 C - D, and sketches the dual setting - a rural retreat near the temple of the Muses, and the narrated action in the city.

TWO: The FIRST ACT and DEBATE - Chapters Three to Nine, 750 A - 754 E.

STOICS (and Misanthropes) versus PLATONISTS in two parts:

1) Daphnaeus vs. Protogenes

Protogenes argues that marriage is only for procreation, Eros a special kind of friendship for males, involving a hunt for virtue and beauty, and heterosexual relations merely for pleasure. Daphnaeus cites poets and Plato's doctrines in defence of heterosexual love, claiming "paederastic" Eros is a thief.

2) Pusias and Protogenes speak against marriage and Ismenodora, condemning the wealth and status that would be honourable in a male lover. Plutarch then replies as a Platonist in defence of Ismenodora and marriage, depicting Ismenodora as a heroine, similar to the ideal wife in Stoic writings.

THREE: First Interlude - Chapters Ten to Thirteen, 754 E - 756 A

A messenger brings news of the comedy "offstage" down in the city, leading to a change of action and subjects under discussion when three characters, Pusias, Protogenes and Anthemion, leave for the city.

FOUR: The SECOND ACT Plutarch's Platonic Defence of Eros' Divinity.

Chapters Thirteen to Eighteen, 756 A - 763 F.

Note the intertwined themes: Eros a cause of heroic actions, hunting, Eros a guide for lovers, digression on madness and enthusiasm, the power and benefits of Eros and his ability to improve character.

FIVE: Chapters Nineteen to Twenty, 764 A - 766 B.

Plutarch's Egyptian Digression, leads into the theme of Eros and the Sun and their similarities, and Eros' role in the ascent of the soul.

SIX: Plutarch on Eros the Avenger and the Great Lacuna, 766 C - D.

Themes appearing before and after the lacuna suggest the missing section centred on a discussion of negative views of Eros, particularly those of Epicureans. There may have been a second messenger in the lacuna, for when the dialogue resumes the "chorus" are returning to the city.

SEVEN: The THIRD ACT: Plutarch defends married lovers.

Chapters Twenty One to Twenty Five, 776 D - 771 C.

In response to remarks unknown made by Zeuxippus, Plutarch defends conjugal philia with examples drawn from "science", like the mutual krasis theme and history, finishing with examples of heroic wives, two Celtic women.

EIGHT: The EPILOGUE: Chapter Twenty Six, 771 D - E.

The third messenger arrives from the city. The two threads of discussion and action, on and off-stage, are joined together with a wedding, and the opponents reconciled by Eros. In relationships, romantic and philosophical, Eros has triumphed.