CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

PLUTARCH

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The biographer at work

In the writing of history a selection process is necessarily operative which stresses events deemed ‘important’, while giving only cursory attention to what is considered insignificant detail.^{1,2} This mindset allows the historian to ‘dwell for ten pages on one day and pass over ten years in two lines’.³ Among the ancients Plutarch was more aware than most of this selection process and its consequences for the representation of the past. His awareness includes the perception that his is a different form of historical writing—one that comprises and explores preferentially the lived experience of the individual. In the prologue to the *Alexander* and *Caesar* he articulates this quintessential distinction between historiography and its *genus proximum* political biography:⁴

I am not writing history but biography, and the most outstanding exploits do not always have the property of revealing the goodness or badness of the agent; often, in fact, a casual action, the odd phrase, or a jest reveals character better than battles involving the loss of thousands upon thousands of lives, huge troop movements, and whole cities besieged.⁵

(*Alex.* 1.2)

Even though he is chronicling the lives of individuals who distinguished themselves primarily in the politico-military sphere, the supreme province of ancient historiography, his primary concern as a biographer

¹ Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives* are cited according to the Teubner edition of Ziegler. All translations unless otherwise indicated follow the Loeb edition of Perrin 1914–1926.

² On the major characteristics of the genre of ancient historiography see Marincola 1997.

³ Veyne [1971] 1984: 17–18.

⁴ Cf. Geiger 1985: 22; Burridge 1992; and Burridge 1997.

⁵ Translation by Waterfield 1998.

is the delineation of character that arises from a judicious selection and presentation of material conducive to this aim.⁶ This aspect of Plutarch's methodological approach is of extreme importance for understanding his representation of time in his biographical narratives. The time span for biography comprises an individual's lifetime experiences beginning sequentially at birth and ending with the inevitability of death.⁷ The temporal framework of biography is therefore more circumscribed than that of Herodotus' *Histories*, for example. Plutarch follows primarily chronological sequence, as is generally the case in ancient historiography.⁸ Chronologically disparate events, however, representative of central themes or characteristics are frequently grouped together in the narrative not unlike Suetonius' *per species* method of categorization, a technique that exerts a significant influence on the rhythm and temporal structure of the *Lives*.⁹

Finally it seems apparent that Plutarch composed some of his *Lives* simultaneously.¹⁰ The six *Lives* for which this compositional strategy is evident are those of *Pompey*, *Crassus*, *Caesar*, *Cato Minor*, *Brutus*, and *Antony*. The *Cicero* and *Lucullus* appear to belong to an earlier phase of compositional activity. Simultaneous composition, especially since the *Lives* are regarded as a single collective project by Plutarch,¹¹ results in the abbreviation of some overlapping accounts in several *Lives*. The Conspiracy of Catiline, for example, is narrated at length with great attention to detail in the *Cicero* (10–22), while extremely abbreviated accounts are presented in the *Crassus* (13.3–5), the *Cato Minor* (22–24.3), and the *Caesar* (7.5–8).

⁶ Cf. also *Cat.Mi.* 7.3; *Pomp.* 8.6–7; *Dem.* 11.7; *Cim.* 2.2; and *Nic.* 1.5 for the emphasis on character portrayal.

⁷ Momigliano 1993: 11: 'An account of the life of a man from birth to death is what I call biography'. Cf. Geiger 1985: 14–29 and Pelling 2002a: 365–386.

⁸ Plutarch regularly displays concern for chronologic accuracy (e.g. *Them.* 2.5), but chronology is not the most important organizational principle of the *Lives*; cf. next n.

⁹ Moles 1988: 9 and Stadter 1989: lii: 'Considerations of chronology are secondary to those of character and subject'.

¹⁰ On this see Pelling 2002a: 1–44.

¹¹ Cf. Beck 2002: 167.

Narrative slowing down I: the grand scenes

The significance of Plutarch's compositional methodology is readily apparent in the *Alexander* and *Caesar*, a key pair. The main themes include ambition (*philotimia*) and the control over one's self and others. In a psychologically revealing anecdote that prefigures many of Alexander's most notable traits, Plutarch recounts the breaking of Bucephalas.¹² This type of narrative slowing down in the service of greater representative significance gives rise to what Françoise Frazier has termed 'grand scenes' (*grandes scènes*).¹³ In these scenes Plutarch tends to interweave the representational modes of speech and narrative. This particular scene showcases Alexander's resoluteness, acute powers of observation, daring, and courage. Alexander is able to get a far more powerful animal to submit to his control, just as he will subjugate a far greater (and presumably more powerful) empire to make it his own. The implied proleptic significance of the anecdote is alluded to by the final statement placed in the mouth of Philip: 'My boy, seek a kingdom to match you. Macedonia is not large enough to hold you' (*Alex.* 6.8).¹⁴ Similarly a well-known anecdote depicting Caesar's involuntary captivity by pirates subtly apprises us of the hidden attributes Sulla previously divined in the *Life* (*Caes.* 1.8–2.7). Plutarch employs this anecdote to render a psychologically much more complex portrait of Caesar. He is a deceptive man, capable of disarming humor that cloaks his true feelings and intentions. Alexander's domination of Bucephalas is analogous to Caesar's psychological domination of the pirates. Both of these key anecdotes exemplify Plutarch's use of narrative retardation to showcase traits associated with brilliant leadership ability.¹⁵

¹² Cf. Stadter 1996 and Whitmarsh 2002.

¹³ Frazier 1992. Briefer, less dramatic versions of these grand scenes are termed by her 'micro-scenes'. Cf. e.g. the story of Timocleia (*Alex.* 12).

¹⁴ Cf. Stadter 1996: 292–294.

¹⁵ Other notable grand scenes include, for example, *Alex.* 30 (Darius and the eunuch); 50–51 (murder of Cleitus); 60 (Alexander and Porus); *Caes.* 32 (Caesar at the Rubicon); 61 (Caesar at the Lupercalia); 66 (assassination of Caesar); *Sol.* 27 (meeting with Croesus); *Cor.* 33 (Valeria and Volumnia); *Ant.* 77 (the death of Antony and Cleopatra) and 83 (Octavian and Cleopatra); *Agis* 17 (Chilonis); *Brut.* 23 (Brutus and Porcia); *Aem.* 36 (Aemilius on *Fortuna*); *Dem.* 29 (death of Demosthenes); *Pomp.* 78–79 (murder of Pompey); *Crass.* 31 (death of Crassus); *Them.* 11 (council of war prior to Salamis); *Cat.Mi.* 68–70 (suicide at Utica); *Fab.* 13 (recognition of Fabius' prudence by Minucius); *Pyrroh.* 2–3.5 (childhood episode).

*Narrative slowing down II:
extensive narration of significant historical events*

In addition to these grand scenes, which rarely exceed two chapters in length, another type of extended narrative slowing down is very prevalent in the *Lives*.¹⁶ Usually Plutarch's heroes were at one time or another involved in significant historical events of a political or military nature. Plutarch usually adapts narratives of these events from historical sources such as Herodotus, Thucydides, Theopompus, Ephorus, Timaeus, Polybius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Sallust, and Livy by including or emphasizing only those events which are tangential to the actions and character of his protagonist, very often supplementing them with additional information and material he has gleaned from his research (cf. *Nic.* 1.5).

These events which may take up a very large part of the biography may reflect anywhere from only a few months to several years of the subject's life. In the *Nicias*, for example, this major event is the Sicilian expedition. Of the thirty chapters of the *Life* this event is treated in chapters 12–30, or in other words it takes up 63 percent of the biography (story-time, as usual measured in amount of text), but the event itself occupies only approximately two years of Nicias' 57 year lifetime¹⁷ (fabula-time). The paired *Crassus* has a correspondingly long narrative of the equally disastrous and brief Parthian expedition (16–33). Other examples of this type of narrative slowing down include the account of Themistocles' role in the second Persian War against Xerxes (*Them.* 7–18)¹⁸ and Aristides' involvement in the war against Xerxes' forces (Salamis and Plataea, *Arist.* 8–21).¹⁹ Many more examples of this type could be adduced.²⁰ It is important to note that Plutarch varies

¹⁶ Occasionally grand scenes are embedded in the extended narrative of historical events. Cf. e.g. *Brut.* 23 (revealing the relationship between Porcia and Brutus).

¹⁷ ca. 470–413 BCE.

¹⁸ 480 BCE. The story of Themistocles' ostracism and life in the Persian Empire might also be included in this category (*Them.* 23–31).

¹⁹ His actions at Marathon receive only one chapter (*Arist.* 5).

²⁰ Cf. e.g. also *Luc.* 7–36 (war against Mithridates); *Fab.* 2–27 (Second Punic War against Hannibal); *Cim.* 6–14 (leadership role in allied activities); *Cam.* 15–30 (repulsion of Gauls under Brennus); *Cat.Ma.* 12–14 (war against Antiochus); *Lys.* 3–21 (final phase of Peloponnesian War and postwar activities); *Sull.* 11–24 (Mithridatic War); *Cic.* 10–22 (conspiracy of Catiline); *Ages.* 6–19 (campaigns in Asia Minor and Greece), 27–35 (Agesilaus versus Epaminondas, including Leuctra and Mantinea), 36–40 (service in Egypt); *Pomp.* 24–29 (*bellum piraticum*), 30–42 (war against Mithridates), 59–79 (Civil War,

the pace and mode of the narrative continuously within these sections as he develops some scenes and employs both singulative and iterative narrative modes. In the *Agesilaus*, for example, the pace of the narration of his campaign in Greece and Asia Minor (*Ages.* 6–19) is slowed down considerably in several long scenes describing encounters between the Spartan king, Lysander, Pharnabazus, and Megabates (*Ages.* 7–8, 11–13), while the habitual problems confronting him in his dealings with Lysander are narrated in the iterative mode. Very often these episodes of narrative slowing down approach the grand scenes in terms of their density and dramatic portraiture.

Narrative acceleration

Just as Plutarch selects some themes or topics for narrative elaboration (slowing down), he also consciously restricts his narration of some events which he judges to be inconsequential to his main purpose of depicting character and moral attributes. This renders the rhythm of his narrative much faster-paced in some places, especially when compared to more historically oriented sources. His narratives of some of the great battles in his biography of Alexander provide excellent examples of this. For example, the account of the actual battle of Issus is very brief, only one sentence (*Alex.* 20.8).²¹ Instead he focuses on relatively minor incidents that display *inter alia* the trust Alexander placed in Philip (*Alex.* 19.4–9), Alexander's cool response to the amenities of Darius' captured camp (*Alex.* 20.11–13), and his treatment of the captured Persian women, a demonstration of his great restraint (*Alex.* 21.1–11). It is not surprising that he transports into this narrative sequence, in the form of an internal prolepsis, the story of Barsine, the widow of Memnon, whom Alexander takes as his mistress and who is 'the only woman he was intimate with prior to his marriage' (*Alex.* 21.7–9).²²

Sometimes this narrative acceleration takes the form of ellipsis.²³ Due to lack of information Plutarch tends to have very abbreviated accounts

including flight and death of Pompey); *Per.* 25–28.3 (war against the Samians); *Ant.* 33–52 (Parthian expedition); and *Brut.* 8–53 (the assassination of Caesar and Philippi).

²¹ Observed by Stadter 1996: 296–297.

²² The battle of Issus took place in November of 333 BCE, the capture of Damascus, at which time Barsine fell into Parmenio's hands, occurred in December of that year.

²³ Genette [1972] 1980: 43: '... ellipsis or leap forward without any return is, obviously, not an anachrony but a simple acceleration of the narrative ...'.

of his subjects' childhood and youth. In some cases he provides no real information at all. In the *Crassus*, for example, we first hear a report about his father Publius Licinius Crassus, who was accused of corrupting a Vestal virgin out of avarice (*Crass.* 1). The theme of avarice is then continued proleptically in the account of Crassus' acquisitiveness in adulthood and the questionable ways in which he accumulated his enormous fortune (*Crass.* 2). This section, which contains some rough temporal indicators, is followed by a chronologically indefinite passage in the iterative mode that relates his habitual behaviors and pursuits of adulthood (*Crass.* 3). When Plutarch then returns to a chronologically dateable event, the seizure of power by Cinna and Marius in 87 BCE, we encounter a Crassus who is now nearly twenty years old (*Crass.* 4.1). In other words, Plutarch has ushered us through nearly two decades of his subject's lifetime in three chapters without having told us really anything that Crassus said or did before the age of nineteen. Such cursory or lacunate treatments of childhood and youth in which the narrator accelerates through the first third or half of his subject's life abound in the *Lives*.²⁴

Later on in the *Life*, when narrating the events of Crassus' and Pompey's joint consulship, Plutarch is compelled to admit that 'their contentiousness rendered their consulship barren politically and without achievement', thereby absolving himself of the need to narrate at length the events of the year 70 BCE (*Crass.* 12.3). From Crassus' consulship Plutarch immediately turns to the censorship (an implicit ellipsis of four years), which he 'discards' with an explicit ellipsis: it 'passed without any results or achievements whatever' (*Crass.* 13.1). Another implicit ellipsis of one year brings us to the eventful narrative of the Conspiracy of Catiline (63–62 BCE: *Crass.* 13.3). The next event mentioned, Caesar's return to Rome to canvass for the consulship, occurs in 60 BCE (*Crass.* 14.1). This technique of hastening through uneventful periods of his subjects' lives by mentioning only notable offices or a few major acts, while silently skipping over years at a time, is a very common one in the biographies and lends them their episodic quality.²⁵

²⁴ Cf. e.g. the *Lives* of Solon, Publicola, Lycurgus, Numa, Camillus, Aristides, Cato the Elder, Cimon, Lucullus, Fabius Maximus, Nicias, Coriolanus, Lysander, Sulla, Agesilaus, Pompey, Pelopidas, Marcellus, Dion, Timoleon, Aemilius Paulus, Sertorius, Eumenes, Phocion, Demetrius, Antony, Marius, Agis, Cleomenes, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, Philopoemen, and Flamininus.

²⁵ Cf. e.g. Moles 1988: 33 on this technique in the *Cicero*.

Plutarch also avoids including any long speeches that are so much of part of ancient historiography. This results in a much faster paced narrative style. In a groundbreaking study of Plutarch's literary technique in the *Coriolanus* Donald Russell²⁶ was clearly able to show the modifications the biographer made to his primary source's account, Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Roman Antiquities*. Whereas Dionysius revels in the presentation of long and detailed speeches, Plutarch's corresponding narrative proceeds at a much faster pace primarily by omitting the speeches altogether.²⁷ As we would expect, Plutarch's characterization of Coriolanus is deepened vis-à-vis Dionysius' portrait (8.61–62), especially in its emphasis of the dominating passions (*pathē*) of *philotimia* and *orgē*.²⁸

Sometimes Plutarch conflates similar events in the narrative to avoid tedium or to focus more strongly on the main protagonist's actions.²⁹ In the *Caesar*, for example, he does not distinguish between the three final senatorial debates on the fate of Catiline's co-conspirators (*Caes.* 7.7). In the *Cicero* and *Crassus* he indicates his awareness that there were in fact three separate debates on December 3rd, 4th, and 5th.³⁰

Foreshadowing

Plutarch often inserts in the proems or early sections of the *Lives* instances of foreshadowing. The *Alexander* provides some excellent examples of this technique.³¹ Plutarch's narrative begins with an account of the strange story of Olympias' and Philip's courtship, an example of an external analepsis that contains several instances of foreshadowing which presage future greatness and precede and accompany his birth (*Alex.* 2.2–3.9). One story recounts the cohabitation of Olympias with a great snake, seen stretched out beside her body as she slept (*Alex.* 2.6). In response to Philip's query the Delphic oracle informed the king that he needed to honor Ammon with more sacrifices than any other god

²⁶ Russell 1963: 21–28 = 1995: 357–372. Cf. also Duff 1999: 205–240.

²⁷ This type of narrative abridgement or compression as it occurs in the *Crassus*, *Pompey*, *Caesar*, *Cato Minor*, *Brutus* and *Antony* is discussed in great detail by Pelling 2002a: 91–115.

²⁸ Russell [1963] 1995: 369–370.

²⁹ Cf. Pelling 2002a: 91–92.

³⁰ Cf. *Cic.* 19.1–4 and 20.4–21.5; and *Crass.* 13.3.

³¹ Cf. Stadter 1996 and Whitmarsh 2002.

and that he would lose the eye he had used to peer through the chink in the door to glimpse the god in the form of a snake sleeping with Olympias (*Alex.* 3.1–2). Philip later did in fact lose his eye at Methone in 354 BCE.³²

The destruction of the temple of Artemis at Ephesus in a conflagration, as it coincides with the birth of Alexander, elicits another foreshadowing (*Alex.* 3.6–7). This time some magi who happen to be in Ephesus run about the city striking their faces and shrieking that a great ruin and disaster had been born unto Asia on that day. This chapter concludes with Philip's receipt of the news of his son's birth, which fortuitously coincides with three victories, the defeat of the Illyrians by Parmenio, the capture of Potidaea, and his victory at the Olympic Games in a horse race (*Alex.* 3.8–9). His delight was only increased when he heard the seers proclaim that his son, born under such circumstances, would be invincible (*anikēton*), as Alexander in fact later proves to be.³³ Numerous other *Lives* exhibit this structural feature to some degree.³⁴

Very often Plutarch incorporates early in the *Life* information drawn from a chronologically later period to explain or illuminate physical appearance, education, and other attributes that become fully manifest in adulthood. The *Pericles* incorporates citations of comic poets to describe humorously the physical anomaly of the mature Pericles' elongated head shape (*Per.* 3.3–7).³⁵ The account of Pericles' education contains numerous such chronologic dislocations (*Per.* 4–6). Plutarch first discusses his early education with Damon in music (*Per.* 4.1–4). Thereafter we learn about Zeno the Eleatic and Anaxagoras, who fall into Pericles' young adulthood and maturity (*Per.* 4.5–6). The earliest of these teachers, Anaxagoras, arrived in Athens during the mid or late 470s when Pericles (born ca. 495 BCE) was about twenty years of age, Zeno's arrival on the scene in Athens is dated to ca. 450, and Damon's

³² An event not recounted by Plutarch. Cf. *Alex.* 26.11–27.11, 50.11, for allusions to Alexander's divine paternity.

³³ Alexander's future conquests are also portended in his encounter with the Persian envoys and his despondency at his father's achievements (*Alex.* 5.1–6), and in the Bucephalas anecdote (*Alex.* 6).

³⁴ Cf. e.g. *Cat.Mi.* 2–3; *Caes.* 1.4; *Alc.* 1–16; *Cic.* 2; *Per.* 1–2 (building program); *Pomp.* 2.5–10.

³⁵ The descriptions of Alcibiades (*Alc.* 1.3–8), Alexander (*Alex.* 4.1–4) and Pompey (*Pomp.* 2.1–4) fall into this category.

association with Pericles occurs in the 440s and 430s.³⁶ The long anecdote (*Per.* 6) illustrating the benefits Pericles derived from Anaxagoras' instruction recounts events that took place sometime shortly before Thucydides son of Melesias' ostracism (ca. 443 or 436/437 BCE), that is, when Pericles was in his early 50s (or around 60 if we accept Krentz's alternate date).³⁷ The next chapter of the *Life* resumes with the narration of Pericles' youth, early military service, prior to his involvement in politics, and his political ascent that is causally related to the death of Aristides (ca. 467 BCE) and Cimon's removal from Athens due to his foreign campaigns (476–463 BCE, *Per.* 7.1–5).

The *Crassus*, as noted above, incorporates information deriving from later periods in the statesman's life and transfers it to the beginning sections in discussing Crassus' avaricious behavior (*Crass.* 2–3).³⁸ Similarly the proem of the *Cicero* contains two anecdotes referring to the time of his entry into politics and his quaestorship on Sicily (*Cic.* 1.5–6). The prologue of the *Aristides* begins with a striking statement which cites sources who claim that the statesman was of modest means, during his lifetime, and his daughters after his death (external prolepsis) could not marry for a very long time because of their indigence (*Arist.* 1.1). In the ensuing discussion Plutarch examines the credibility of this assertion in light of the known details of Aristides' adult life. The proem of the *Cato Maior* launches into a description of the Censor's appearance and behavior that is clearly taken from his adulthood, since it contains references to his military service and oratorical ability. The proem of the *Sulla* contains an anecdote that refers to a time period after the war with Jugurtha and flashes forward from there to another anecdote concerning a freedman, and former fellow lodger, whom he had executed during the proscriptions, when he 'had at last become absolute in power' (*Sull.* 1). Finally Pompey's restraint in his dealings with women and his modest diet are thematized early in the *Life*, before the narrative returns to his youth (*Pomp.* 2.5–12).³⁹

Sometimes Plutarch openly acknowledges chronologic displacements. For example, he concludes his discussion of the Younger Cato's divorce

³⁶ Cf. Stadter 1989: 68–69, ad loc.

³⁷ On the probable date see Stadter 1989: 131–132 and 183–184 (citing Krentz 1984).

³⁸ The return to a more chronologically oriented narrative is signaled by *alla tauta men husteron*.

³⁹ Plutarch signals at the end of this chapter that he will expand on these things later: *tauta men oun husteron* (*Pomp.* 2.12). The next chapter indicates the approximate chronology by identifying Pompey as 'still being a *meirakion*' (*Pomp.* 3.1).

of Marcia, in a section devoted to Cato's relationship with women, with the remark: 'This incident occurred at a later time, it is true, but since I had taken up the topic of the women of Cato's household I decided to anticipate it' (*Cat.Mi.* 25.11–13).⁴⁰ Sometimes he simply flashes forward to complete a topic, as in the narration of Agesilaus' future aid to the exiled Megabates (*Ages.* 13.3–4). Both of these examples as well as the example of Barsine in the *Alexander* cited above display Plutarch's tendency to bring related information together thematically, even if this disrupts the chronological framework of the *Life*.

He also does not hesitate to employ external prolepses. At the end of some *Lives*, for example, Plutarch traces the fate of the subject's descendants (e.g. *Cat.Mi.* 73; *Cat.Ma.* 27.7; *Ant.* 87). The *Aristides* contains an external prolepsis that recounts how Alexander the Great, many years later when he was King of Asia, rewarded the valor and munificence of the Plataeans (who had voluntarily ceded a portion of their territory to the Athenians so that they might defend Greece on their own soil) by building the walls of Plataea (*Arist.* 11.9). In the *Cato Maior* Plutarch rebukes the Censor's anti-Hellenic remark that 'Rome would lose her empire when she became infected with Greek letters' with the terse observation that 'time has certainly shown the emptiness of this ill-boding speech of his, for while the city was at the zenith of its empire, she made every form of Greek learning and culture her own' (*Cat.Ma.* 23.2–3). In the *Lycurgus* he follows the stability of Lycurgus' laws for five hundred years after the statesman's death until their eventual abrogation during the reign of Agis (*Lyc.* 29.6–30.2).

Omnitemporal narration of habitual or characterizing behaviors

When describing the general characteristics of an individual's behavior Plutarch abandons a strictly chronological presentation in favor of iteratively recounting habitual behaviors occurring in various stages of life (childhood, adolescence, adulthood, senescence). The *Themistocles*, for example, contains long sections of iterative narrative usually composed with the imperfect tense. The section recounting Themistocles' childhood contains several instances of foreshadowing presented iteratively in the context of his early education that serve to adumbrate the

⁴⁰ Cf. also *Cat.Mi.* 30.9–31.1.

statesman's future rhetorical ability and pragmatic intelligence (*Them.* 2.1–7).⁴¹ The personal qualities of Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus are compared at length in the beginning of their double *Life* (*TG and CG* 2–3). Agesilaus' habitual behavior as king, especially the way he dealt with the Ephors, is discussed at length by Plutarch (*Ages.* 4.2–5.4). Plutarch, in his account of Pericles' early political successes, frequently discusses in a timeless iterative way his powerful oratorical ability, unflappable nature, and other tactics he employs to consolidate his power (*Per.* 5.1, 7.5–8.6, 9.2–5, 11.2–12.3).⁴²

Achronic narration

Plutarch employs another technique in which he strings together various anecdotes without supplying clear temporal indicators. The *Alcibiades* is one such case in which presumably the relative opaqueness of the chronology in the first half of the *Life* directly follows from the biographer's desire to accentuate his portrayal of Alcibiades' complex character (*Alc.* 1–16).⁴³ In this section of the *Life* Plutarch oscillates back and forth between anecdotes from Alcibiades' childhood, youth (*eti meirakion ōn*), and adulthood without maintaining the chronological sequence of the events he narrates. The *Cato Maior* also posed some challenges for Plutarch, which he resolves by selectively grouping his discussion of the statesman's career and private life. In particular it is the Censor's famous sayings which attract his attention due to their characterization potential. These he presents randomly without, in the majority of cases, any temporal reference points, and some, it should be noted, he presents as habitual statements (iterative mode), introducing them with the imperfect *elege* (*Cat.Ma.* 8–9).⁴⁴

⁴¹ Frost 1980: 65, ad loc. sees Themistocles' later qualities of *sunesis* and *philotimia* as being projected back to his youth in this section.

⁴² Habitual activities ushered in by powerful statesmen such as Romulus, Lycurgus (Spartan *agōgē*) and Numa also fall under this timeless iterative category.

⁴³ Cf. Russell [1966] 1995 and Duff 2003.

⁴⁴ The exceptions being the reference to King Eumenes' visit to Rome and Scipio's solicitation of aid for exiles from Achaia at the instance of Polybius.

Analepsis

Several *Lives* begin with an analeptic account of events leading up to the birth of the protagonist. These events usually add a supernatural quality to the individual's *Life* and mark him out from among his peers as one destined for greatness. The *Alexander*, as we have seen, exemplifies this technique.⁴⁵ Several other *Lives* employ this narrative strategy.

The *Theseus* begins its account of the protagonist's life with the analeptic story of Pittheus, Aegeus, Aethra, and the oracle (*Thes.* 3). The *Lycurgus* traces initially the illustrious doings of the statesman's forebears. The proem of the *Aemilius Paulus* briefly presents the vicissitudes of the Aemilii, including Lucius Paulus' misfortune at Cannae (*Aem.* 2). The *Cicero* traces the origins of the family back to Tullus Attius, 'an illustrious king of the Volscians who waged war upon the Romans with great ability' (*Cic.* 1.2). In the *Agis* the king's lineage is traced back six generations to Agesilaus, 'who crossed into Asia and became the most powerful Greek of his time' (*Agis* 3).

The episode of Pompey's dealings with Metellus on Crete, which reflects negatively on Pompey and tarnishes somewhat his triumph over the pirates, analeptically concludes the narrative of the *bellum piraticum* (*Pomp.* 29). This is a typical example of the use of an internal completing analepsis to set off for thematic purposes an event from a prior sequence. A notable example of an external heterodiegetic analepsis which serves the same purpose is contained in the *Cato Maior*. In this *Life* Plutarch is particularly concerned with Cato's ostensible rejection of Hellenic *paideia*. In a section of the *Life* critical of Cato's habit of selling off old and infirm slaves rather than supporting them in their old age after years of service, Plutarch cites several fifth-century Athenian examples of the generous treatment of various animals that were maintained beyond their years of usefulness (*Cat.Ma.* 5).⁴⁶

Most examples of analepsis are less intrusive than this however. Usually analepses serve to introduce past events that have been suppressed (paralipsis) into a context later in the narrative which enhances their significance. We are encouraged to assess in a different light Agesilaus'

⁴⁵ Cf. Stadter 1996 and Whitmarsh 2002.

⁴⁶ On this section of the *Cato Maior* see Beck 2000: 20–25. Plutarch explicitly assails Cato's anti-Hellenic stance later in the *Life* (*Cat.Ma.* 23.2–3).

desire to gratify his son's wishes in the Sphodrias affair when we learn that he was exceedingly fond of children and used to join in his children's play when they were very young and was seen riding 'about on a stick at home pretending that it was a horse' (*Ages.* 25.11). Sometimes the analepsis is an external one as in the case of Lycurgus' prudent warning in one of his three laws not to undertake frequent campaigns against the same enemy to prevent them from developing their military capability (*Ages.* 26.5). This analepsis supports Antalcidas' reproach of Agesilaus' frequent campaigning against the Thebans.⁴⁷

The analeptic sunkrisis

The comparative structure of the *Parallel Lives* is underscored in the analytical postscript or *sunkrisis* appended to all but four⁴⁸ of the 22 pairs of *Lives*. In these brief analeptic essays Plutarch weighs the positive and negative sides to the two protagonists' conduct and reiterates the deeds (repeating internal analepses) that are significant in this evaluative process, occasionally in a more critical way.⁴⁹ The emphasis is placed sharply on moral instruction in the *sunkriseis*.

Occasionally Plutarch inserts in the *sunkrisis* important information that he has omitted in the *Life* proper (completing internal analepses). He acknowledges, for example, his neglect to mention that Crassus struck Lucius Annalius in the face with his fist and 'drove him bleeding from the forum' (*Crass.* 35 (2).3). His reference to Crassus' maltreatment of women in the *sunkrisis* (*Crass.* 34 (1).2) is also not supported in the *Life*, even though the story of his father's corruption of the Vestal virgin Licinia in the proem (*Crass.* 1.4–5) appears to foreshadow this theme (along with avarice).

⁴⁷ Agesilaus' obsession with Thebes and its negative consequences is alluded to in the *sunkrisis* (*Pomp.* 83 (3).2).

⁴⁸ *Phocion/Cato Minor, Alexander/Caesar, Themistocles/Camillus, Pyrrhus/Marius*. On the *sunkrisis* in general see Duff 1999: 243–286.

⁴⁹ Cf. Duff 1999: 259.

Motif of reference to the narrator's own time

Not infrequently Plutarch makes reference to his own time in the *Lives*. This occurs, for example, in those situations when he refers to what he has seen with his own eyes (autopsy). Plutarch has witnessed the whipping to death of the Spartan youths at the altar of Artemis Orthia (*Lyc.* 18.2). He has seen Agesilaus' spear still on display in his own day in Sparta (*Ages.* 19.11) and the statue of Lysander on display at Delphi (*Lys.* 1). Plutarch apparently visited the sanctuary of the Nymphs at Mieza, 'where even now people point out the stone seats and shady walks Aristotle used to frequent'⁵⁰ (*Alex.* 7.4) and, in Chaeronea, he has seen 'Alexander's Oak', located near the communal grave of the Macedonian dead, which Alexander pitched his tent against (*Alex.* 9.2). When tracing the descendants of Antony, Plutarch has harsh things to say about Nero, who came to the throne in his time (*Ant.* 87.9).

Sometimes the reference to the narrator's own time reflects the impact of a past action on present circumstances. This includes for instance aetiological explanations of customs, laws, names, etc., that are still in use in Plutarch's day, such as the origin of the military term 'maniple' (*Rom.* 8.7–8) and the wedding salutation *Talasio* (*Rom.* 15.1–4), for example. These references all mark the interpenetration of the historical past in the narrator's present.

Conclusion

From our examination of Plutarch's literary technique in the *Parallel Lives* it is evident that they are symmetrical compositions with unifying themes that serve to modulate the narrative representation and referencing of time. Plutarch generally signals his major concerns quite early in the proem or early chapters of the first *Life* in the form of anecdotes, for example, which prognosticate future greatness, abilities, traits, persistent behavioral patterns, problems, etc. These themes are most vividly emergent in the 'grand scenes' of the *Lives*, sections in which the narrative is greatly slowed down. Longer episodes of narrative slowing down often showcase the main protagonist's specific involvement in major historical events. Plutarch tends to accelerate the narrative

⁵⁰ Translation by Waterfield 1998.

through, or omit from it altogether, long presentations of battles. He rarely presents speeches of any length. Plutarch often clusters chronologically disparate events for thematic purposes or he presents such information omnitemporally, by employing the iterative mode of narration, to facilitate characterization. Another technique involves the retrojection or displacement of information derived from adulthood into the narrative of childhood and youth to supplement the lack of information on these phases of his biographical subject's life. External and internal prolepses and analepses are often used to highlight behavior by re-contextualizing it or clustering similar instances thematically. Plutarch concludes most of the pairs analeptically with a brief retrospective essay (*sunkrisis*) in which the major accomplishments and characteristics of the two heroes are recalled and evaluated instructively in an impartial way.