Plutarch’s *Pyrrhus-Marius* offers a self-contained, consistent portrait of Roman decline, a penetrating critique of the late Republic, which is elaborately prepared in *Pyrrhus*, then consummated in *Marius*. By concentrating upon one half of the pair in isolation, however, scholars have failed to appreciate the significance of Plutarch’s comparative method.\(^1\) It is only by interpreting each *Life* as part of an integrated whole that the political program of *Pyrrhus-Marius* may be understood.\(^2\)

Plutarch’s analysis of Roman decline is presented largely within *Pyrrhus*, in that *Life*’s depiction of the idealized middle Republic, of Tarquintum, and of the Sicilian Greek cities. This concentration of material in the earlier *Life* is reasonable within the scheme of the pair. The patterns for healthy and decadent states are established in *Pyrrhus*; once the reader reaches *Marius*, the framework for understanding the dys-

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1 Other aspects of the combined pair have been noted: the study of greedy ambition (πλεονεξία) in *Pyrrhus-Marius* by Duff (1999) 101–130 is quite extensive; the examination of fate and chance in the pair by Swain (1990) 135 is brief, but insightful. For political themes elsewhere in Plutarch see Wardman (1974) 154–195. Aalders (1982), Pelling (1986), Stadter (1989) xlv–li and lviii–lxxxv, Pelling (1992), De Blois (1992), De Blois (1997), and Hershbell (1997). Studies of the historical Pyrrhus and Marius have focused much of their attention upon Plutarch’s *Pyrrhus* and *Marius*, which are the main sources for the careers of the two men: there are historical commentaries for each *Life*, Nederlof (1940) for *Pyrrhus*, Valggilio (1967) for *Marius*, and biographies for each man; see Nenci (1953), Lévéque (1957), Nederlof (1978), Garoufalias (1979), and Zodda (1997) on *Pyrrhus*; see Van Ooteghem (1964), Carney (1970), and Evans (1994) on *Marius*. Also important are the studies of Pyrrhus’ Sicilian campaign by Vartsos (1970) and La Bua (1980), and the work on Marian Rome by Badian (1958, 1964 and 1984), Lintott (1994), and Seager (1994). The recent commentary on the pair by Marasco (1994) is cursory, but his bibliography and introductions are more extensive. See Buszard (2002) 3–7 and 181–195 for the most recent survey of the relevant bibliography. I would like to thank Professor P.A. Stadter for his generous assistance in developing this article.

2 The treatment of Roman decline I examine in this paper is peculiar to *Pyrrhus-Marius*, the only extant pair in which each *Life* is intimately concerned with a different period of Roman history. *Philopoemen* and *Flamininus* both depict Roman statesmen, but that pair nonetheless falls short on two counts: each *Life* is set in the early second century B.C., so there is no chronological progression, and neither depicts the political operation of the Republic itself.
functional late Republic is already in place. My analysis will mirror the organization of the text: all but one of the passages around which my argument will be organized are from Pyrrhus. The first and second passages depict the primary foil for Rome, Tarentum; the third describes the Sicilian Greeks; the fourth, fifth and sixth reveal the political character of third-century Rome itself. I will conclude by discussing the oath imposed by Saturninus upon the members of the senate in Marius 29.3

Tarentum

The first twelve chapters of Pyrrhus are entirely concerned with the affairs of the Hellenistic east. They are, moreover, primarily focused upon the deeds and motives of the individual diadochoi. Hints of larger political forces in Epirus and Macedon do appear: Epirote stasis is mentioned in 2.1, the Epirotes rise in rebellion in 4.2, their favorable attitude towards Pyrrhus is noted in 5.2, a faction of the Epirotes (described only as “the strongest”) is mentioned in 5.14, the favorable Macedonian view of Pyrrhus is described in 8.1–2, and that view influences events in 10.2, 11.7–14, and 12.1. Yet the role of the people in these instances is never described; the presentation is always cursory, sometimes oblique. These early chapters are not sufficiently detailed to expound any particular theory or provide any great insight into the workings of bodies politic. They serve instead to foreshadow the more elaborate treatment of such themes that will commence once the scene has shifted to the Italian peninsula.

The transition occurs abruptly at Pyrrhus 13.4, where Tarentum and Rome are simultaneously introduced: “The Romans were at war with the Tarentines”.4 The reader might well expect this phrase to preface a digression on the origins of this war, but since the political motives of the Romans are never at issue in this Life, no such digression is

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3 Though the decadence of the late Republic is a prevalent theme in Marius, it is not typically the main focus of Plutarch’s narrative. The account of Marius’ tribunate in Marius 4 and the description of Saturninus’ oath in Marius 29 are the two exceptions to that rule. While Marius 29 focuses upon the Republican senate and people, however, Marius 4 describes primarily the actions of Marius himself. I have therefore excluded Marius 4 from my analysis.

4 Translations of the quoted passages are my own. I have retained occasional Greek words and phrases where it seemed most important to preserve the connotations of Plutarch’s vocabulary.