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Nepos and Plutarch: From Latin to Greek Political Biography[1]

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It is now almost a hundred years since the publication of Soltau's article on Nepos and Plutarch[2]—the only study, as far as I am aware, that deals exclusively with the two biographers. It will come as no surprise that Soltau's paper was devoted solely to Plutarchean *Quellenforschung*, written, as it was, in the heyday of that genre. (As a matter of fact it was well above par for the course). The present study aims at putting the relationship between the two writers in a broader context. While there is no need to discuss again[3] those Plutarchean biographies where Nepos was used as a source it may well be worth the while to try and reconstruct the circumstances in which Plutarch came to rely on Nepos as well as the extent of that reliance; a better understanding of Plutarch's dependence on Nepos will help us to assess the extent of his innovation and achievement.

I

The assassination of Domitian on September 18th, 96 not only started a new era in the political history of the Roman world, en era "during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous,"[4] but also was the commencement of a new period in the literature of the Empire, *ubi sentire quae velis et quae sentias dicere licet* (Tac. *H.* 1. 1). Tacitus was not alone: at the same time that he turned to denouncing the tyranny and to exalting the newly found *rara temporum felicitas* in the Life of his father-in-law Agricola, his Greek contemporary Plutarch engaged in his first work of historical relevance, the Lives of the Roman Emperors from Augustus to

[1] I wish to thank Dr. Deborah Levine Gera for her advice and criticism of this paper. Needless to say, the remaining faults are my own.

[2] W. Soltau, "Nepos und Plutarchos," *Jbb. cl. Phil.* 153 (1896) 123–31.

[3] I have dealt with the issue in a different context in "Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*: The Choice of Heroes," *Hermes* 109 (1981) 95–99.

[4] Gibbon, *Decline and Fall* ch. 3 (I. 70 Modern Libr. ed.).

Vitellius.[5] In this choice Plutarch displayed both his preoccupation with biography, the chief source of his later fame, and his interest in Roman history.[6] In fact the remarkable parallel between Plutarch and Tacitus goes beyond the coincidence that both started to work on historical material during the short reign of Nerva. Tacitus, after his first major work treating the Year of the Four Emperors and the Flavian dynasty, decided to cover the earlier part of the Principate in the *Annales*; in the event, while composing that masterpiece he may have felt compunction for not starting earlier than the accession of Tiberius.[7] That Plutarch's acquaintance with Roman history was superficial and commonplace I have endeavoured to show in an analysis of his references to figures from Republican history in the *Moralia*.[8] Thus it is not possible to know what gave him the impetus to write biographies of Republican personages: but it must have occurred if not during, at least very briefly after his work on the Emperors. Moreover, even in the series of the Parallel Lives the composition of biographies of persons from the remote past came at a late stage (*Thes.* 1):[9] it is clear that Plutarch's historical interests were only gradually awakened.[10]

One should not exaggerate Plutarch's achievement in the series of Imperial biographies: on the one hand these Lives hardly merit their description as biographies[11] and on the other hand Plutarch was acquainted with histories of countries that took the form of biographical series.[12] Moreover, Plutarch may have had some prior experience with biographical writing. The single Lives composed perhaps early in Plutarch's life and known to us by title or a few fragments only were apparently not political biographies, though he may have toyed with the idea of the Parallel Lives or a related concept for some time.[13]

[5] J. Geiger, "Zum Bild Julius Caesars in der römischen Kaiserzeit," *Historia* 24 (1975) 444 ff.; R. Syme, "Biographers of the Caesars," *MH* 37 (1980) 104 ff. = *RP* III 1251 ff.

[6] On this see the valuable contribution of R. Flacelière, "Rome et ses Empereurs vus par Plutarque," *AC* 32 (1963) 28 ff.

[7] *Ann.* 3. 24. 3; in the magisterial words of his most eminent commentator: "Before Tacitus had gone very far with the *Annales* he became conscious of his predicament—if not his mistake" (R. Syme, *Tacitus* [Oxford 1958] 370).

[8] *Hermes* 109 (1981) 98 f.

[9] Plutarch's relatively late interest in the figures of Hellenistic history (cf. *Hermes* 109 [1981] 88 ff.) provides another instance that demonstrates his progressing from better-known periods to relatively grey areas.

[10] He could be influenced by such factors as the success of the series or his pleasure in it: see *Aem. Paul.* 1.

[11] Cf. Syme, *MH* 37 (1980) 104 = *RP* III 1251.

[12] For such series see Geiger, *Hermes* 109 (1981) 86 n. 5; for Plutarch's acquaintance with at least one such series see *Pomp.* 49 = *FGrH* 88 F 9 and Jacoby II C p. 221 on the nature of Timagenes' work.

[13] We have no clues to the dates of the single Lives, but perhaps those at least that seem to reflect Plutarch's local interests may have been written at an early date. Possibly the *Scipio Africanus* was also undertaken shortly before the *Parallel Lives*: cf. Geiger, *Hermes* 109 (1981) 87.

The dawn of the new era was perhaps not quite as glorious and quite as immediately felt in distant Chaeronea as at the seat of the tyrant, still it must have been perceptible enough if it was to occasion now, at a relatively advanced age, the composition of the first major work of historical interest of our author. It is not my aim here to resume the controversy surrounding Plutarch's sources in the two extant Lives of Galba and Otho[14] and even less so to speculate about the presumably non-extant sources of the non-extant Lives; yet certain conclusions as to the availability of material and Plutarch's manner and rate of work present themselves from our dating of the biographical series. It was perhaps completed by the end of the short reign of Nerva, but even so it must have been almost immediately afterwards that he started work on the great project of the Parallel Lives.

It has been suggested[15] that the dedication to Sosius Senecio coincided with the latter's consulate in 99, leaving very short time indeed to plan and start work on the series. Whatever it was that gave Plutarch his first impetus towards a composition on such a grand scale we may assume that he must have formed a general idea and a plan of the work before he started its execution.

In all probability such a general plan would have included at least three ingredients: it must have been based on the cardinal idea of the Parallel Lives, viz. the juxtaposition of Greek and Roman statesmen and generals; it must have contained at least a preliminary list of the heroes whose lives were to be the subjects of the biographies; and it must have surmised a certain literary format of the biographies.

No doubt the synkrisis of individual Greek and Roman statesmen and generals on a more or less equal footing is the most impressive single feature of the series. These comparisons supply much of the characteristic flavour of the work and are certainly one of the important reasons for their great literary success.[16] Of course Plutarch employed this literary technique also often in the *Moralia*,[17] yet it never became, either in the other writings of Plutarch or in those of any other author of Antiquity, such a predominant literary feature as in the Parallel Lives. The question as to Plutarch's goals in these comparisons has been debated with some vigour;[18] it seems to me that for our present purpose this question should be subordinated to the one concerning the process by which Plutarch arrived at his plan. In other

[14] See B. Scardigli, *Die Römerbiographien Plutarchs. Ein Forschungsbericht* (München 1979) 152 ff. and eadem, "Scritti recenti sulle *Vite* di Plutarco," *Miscellanea Plutarchea (Quaderni del Giornale Filologico Ferrarese* 8 [Ferrara 1986]) 48 f., 53 f.

[15] C. P. Jones, "Towards a Chronology of Plutarch's Works," *JRS* 56 (1966) 70.

[16] For the latest contribution on this subject see C.B.R. Pelling, "Synkrisis in Plutarch's Lives," *Miscellanea Plutarchea (Quaderni del Giornale Filologico Ferrarese* 8 [Ferrara 1986]) 84 ff.

[17] J. Barthelmess, "Recent Work on the *Moralia*," ibid. 61, has recently reminded us all of the basic unity of the *Lives* and the *Moralia*.

[18] C. P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford 1971) 103 ff.; cf. J. Geiger, *SCI* 1 (1974) 142 f.

words, I do not believe that Plutarch first defined his goals, whether literary, moralistic or political, and then sought the ways and means to execute them, but rather that only after the idea of the comparisons had occurred to him did he guide it in the direction most appropriate to his outlook. Now it has been suggested[19] that Plutarch may have derived his idea from Nepos' juxtaposition of series of Greek (later Foreign) and Roman generals, a feature that must have been present also in the other books of the *De viris illustribus*.[20] Though this contention cannot be proven it is greatly enhanced by the facts that Nepos is the only writer who is known to have based a long series of Lives on synkrisis and that Plutarch must have become acquainted with Nepos' writings at a relatively early date.

It has been shown[21] that North Italians predominated among Plutarch's Roman friends. Yet the link with Nepos was perhaps provided by a man whose own acquaintance with Plutarch is not directly attested. Four of Plutarch's friends were also friends of Pliny the Younger: Arulenus Rusticus and Avidius Quietus, remnants of the circle of Thrasea Paetus, who may have provided him with the latter's biography of Cato the Younger; C. Minicius Fundanus, a close friend of Pliny, is the principal speaker in the *De cohibenda ira*; and, lastly and most importantly Sosius Senecio, the addressee of the Parallel Lives as well as of the *Quaestiones convivales* and the *Quomodo quis suos in virtute sentiat profectus* was a friend of Pliny. Thus the circumstantial evidence for Pliny's acquaintance with Plutarch seems to be complete.[22] On the other hand Pliny mentions Nepos only once (*Ep.* 5. 3. 6), in a fleeting reference to those Romans who composed light poetry. Interestingly enough Nepos' poetical efforts are nowhere else mentioned in our extant sources—may one surmise that Pliny's reference reveals an intimate acquaintance with otherwise unknown details of the work of his North Italian compatriot? The massive use made of Nepos by the Elder Pliny and the interest of the latter's nephew in the work of his uncle would certainly support such a hypothesis.

Pliny or any other of Plutarch's North Italian friends may have suggested to Plutarch to read Nepos. Be this as it may, Plutarch's acquaintance with the work of Nepos is a fact. The references[23] leave no place for doubt of the use made by the Greek biographer of his Latin

[19] L. E. Lord, "The Biographical Interests of Plutarch," *CJ* 22 (1926–27) 499; cf. A. J. Gossage, Plutarch in: *Latin Biography*, ed. T. A. Dorey, (London 1967) 75, n. 48.

[20] On Nepos' work see J. Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos and Ancient Political Biography* (Historia Einzelschriften 47 [Stuttgart 1985]) 84 ff.

[21] Jones, *Plutarch and Rome*, 48 ff., esp. 58, provides all the essential references for what follows.

[22] Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* 61 suggests that Pliny may have omitted Plutarch from his correspondence because the Greek was not well-connected enough. But it is more simple to assume that the omission is due to Plutarch not having visited Rome for some years before the start of Pliny's correspondence.

[23] *Marc.* 30; *comp. Pel. Marc.* 1 = *Marc.* 31; *Luc.* 43; *TiGr.* 21.

forerunner. It is not too far-fetched to assume that the acquaintance antedates, at least briefly, the inception of the work on the Parallel Lives. However, there still remains the difficulty that the structure of the Parallel Lives, viz. the comparison of individual statesmen and generals, is basically different from the comparison of groups as practised by Nepos. I shall return to this issue presently, but first I should like to say a few words on Plutarch's choice of heroes.

It has been mentioned above that Plutarch's knowledge of Roman history and acquaintance with its heroes, as mirrored in the *Moralia*, was restricted to commonplaces and the minimum of conventional education. However, even though we know (*Aem. Paul.* 1) that Plutarch did expand the series as it progressed he must have had some initial plan, a tentative list of heroes whose lives he intended to describe. I have suggested, and wish now to reaffirm the suggestion, that such a tentative list of Roman heroes was derived from Nepos' *De viris illustribus*, who thus served as Plutarch's first guide to Roman biography.[24]

Up to this point I have been reiterating and to some extent confirming and expanding the connexions between Plutarch and Nepos as suggested by other scholars and by myself. Indeed the influence of Nepos on Plutarch is not to be underestimated. On the other hand if our emphasis has resulted in making light of the originality of Plutarch it is time now to redress the balance.

As I have stated, the general idea of the Parallel Lives may have been influenced by Nepos, and the list of Roman heroes to be treated may also have been derived from Nepos. However, besides the basic idea of comparisons and a general outline of the contents, a third ingredient, at least, is to be assumed in Plutarch's blueprint, viz. the literary format of the individual Lives—or rather books containing a pair each—and of the series as a whole. It is here that Plutarch's dependence on Nepos ends and his genius comes to full fruition. It must have been at a very early stage that Plutarch decided on the scale of his biographies, and it is this scale where the most obvious difference between him and Nepos can be seen.

Dare we guess that comparison of pairs of Lives rather than of whole series was a consequence of the size of Plutarch's biographies? Certainly a comparison such as Nepos' would not have been practicable after a number of book-length pairs such as Plutarch's. Size and literary format are

[24] I cannot discuss here the problem of the sources of the anonymous *De viris illustribus* found in the Aurelian corpus (see P. L. Schmidt in *RE Suppl.* 15. 1641 ff., disregarding his contention that what is known as Nepos is in fact Hyginus: J. Geiger, "Cornelius Nepos and the Authorship of the Book on Foreign Generals," *LCM* 7 (1982) 134 ff.; on the *elogia* of the forum of Augustus see M. M. Sage, "The Elogia of the Augustan Forum and the *De viris illustribus*," *Historia* 28 (1979). Unfortunately Sage in this and two other papers devoted to the *De viris illustribus* refuses to reexamine the question of the sources). If Nepos was a source the similarities between the lists of Plutarch and the *De viris illustribus* may be regarded as circumstantial evidence in favour of our hypothesis.

inseparably connected. Plutarch must have sensed at an early stage that the strait-jacket of short Lives, more or less on the scale of those of Nepos, would hardly provide the opportunity to develop characters such as envisaged by him. That literary works, not unlike living organisms, attained to the peak of their development only at an optimal size was a doctrine already established by Aristotle (*Poetics* 1450b35–1451a15). Indeed it is too often that modern commentators ignore or pay too little attention to this important aspect of literary genre.

There must be a certain correlation between the theme an author undertakes to treat and the literary genre employed by him. Plutarch's biographies seem to owe at least part of their success to their size—not only in relation to Nepos, but also to some of their modern mammothian counterparts. The insistence of modern literary criticism on the significant differences in genre between novel, short story, "short short story" etc. emphasizes, rather than otherwise, the importance of length for the various genres: taking the various lengths as a datum they seem suited to the expression of basically different literary forms.[25]

II

There is no need to stress Plutarch's achievement as an author nor to emphasize again that his biographies should not be used as quarries that only provide stones to erect the edifices of Greek and Roman history. Nevertheless literary analyses of Plutarchean Lives are still few and far between. I shall devote the second part of this paper to a literary analysis, or, rather, the analysis of two important literary aspects of one of the most successful Lives, the *Cato minor*, with a view to demonstrate Plutarch's achievement and to show how this achievement was bound up with shaking off the fetters of the short, Nepos-sized, biographies.

Leo[26] established that at the outset of a Life, before the narration of the πράξεις of the hero proper, Plutarch assembles certain sets of information

[25] See e.g. R. J. Kilchenmann, *Die Kurzgeschichte. Form und Entwicklung*[5] (Stuttgart etc. 1978); B. von Wiese, *Novelle*[3] (Stuttgart 1967); V. Shaw, *The Short Story. A Critical Introduction* (London and New York 1983). It is perhaps not too fanciful to admit the analogy from biology. Apparently Aristotle's postulates have been vindicated by modern biology: though there is a certain correlation between the size of an animal and the size of its brain, so that larger mammals need larger brains simply to fulfil the same functions as small mammals, we may predicate the intelligence of a certain species by its deviation from the quotient postulated for it between body-size and brain. Man is more intelligent than other animals not because the size of its brain—elephants and whales have larger ones—but because it has the largest positive deviation from the expected brain-size for an animal of its dimensions: S. J. Gould, *Ever Since Darwin. Reflections in Natural History* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex 1986) 181 ff. Similarly, other characteristics are achieved at greatest effect at a certain body size.

[26] F. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form* (Leipzig 1901) 180 ff.

divided into categories.[27] These categories include, in the present case, Cato's γένος, ἦθος, παιδεία, δίαιτα and λόγος. Yet after the analysis of these characteristics one realizes immediately that a large section of the first part of the Life, chs. 2–3, is left out of this analysis. Though Leo refers to this section briefly in saying that sometimes, as in the case of both Catos and of Alcibiades, characteristic anecdotes are told beforehand, the significance of these chapters goes far beyond that and is crucial to the structure of the whole Life. The two chapters are, on their face value, the narration of a number of anecdotes from the childhood of Cato. Yet these episodes are not merely "characteristic anecdotes told beforehand" but suggestive in their features of the central issues of the whole Life. There is no need here to repeat that Plutarch regarded characteristic deeds, even if of small significance in themselves, as the best way to expound the character of his heroes.[28] It is clear that these anecdotes are inserted in their place not only because they belong to Cato's childhood, but also because they reveal much about his ἦθος, which was ἄτρεπτον καὶ ἀπαθὲς καὶ βέβαιον ἐν πᾶσιν (1. 3). His steadfast character was bound to react over and over again in the same way in the same circumstances and have the same reactions; hence these childhood anecdotes are not merely characteristic stories about our hero, but become foreshadowings, subtle prefigurations of other, more important incidents in his life. Thus the themes of these episodes assume the force of leitmotifs, and in ever-recurring incidents of a familiar shape we are reminded of the main traits of the character of our hero.

In the first of the childhood anecdotes we are told (2. 1–5) how Poppaedius Silo, the Italian leader, when at Livius Drusus' home in Rome during the agitation of the Allies for citizenship, asked Cato, then four years old, to exert his influence with his uncle on behalf of the claims of the Italians. When the boy silently refused, Silo turned to menaces and threatened to throw him out of the window. After all this was of no avail he let him go and expressed to his friends his admiration for Cato's character.

This steadfastness of character and absence of fear of physical harm were time and again put to trial in later life, when the violent clashes of the Late Republic often converted the forum into a battle-field. Plutarch emphasises the courage of Cato, last to retreat even against the most formidably superior enemy: thus he defies Metellus Nepos and his gangs and bravely fights back until victory (27. 4–28. 5). He is last to retreat when Caesar's men maltreat Bibulus and his followers and drive them away from the forum (32. 4). When he offered single-handed resistance to Caesar's Campanian

[27] For the following cf. my dissertation *A Commentary on Plutarch's Cato minor* (Oxford 1971) and the Introduction to the forthcoming bilingual Italian edition and translation of the Life (Rizzoli, Milano).

[28] One of the most important utterances to this effect is contained in the *Cato minor* itself (24. 1).

Law he did not stop arguing and persuading even when led away to prison (33. 2). Cato is the last to retreat before the partisans of Pompey when they use force to stop Domitius from presenting himself as a candidate for the consular elections (41. 6–8). Lastly, Cato resists force used against him in his various attempts to stop the passing of the *lex Trebonia* (43. 2–7).

In the second of the childhood anecdotes (2. 6–8) young Cato, while taking part in the games at a birthday-party, is asked for help by a boy imprisoned in a chamber by an elder boy; Cato frees him and then, angrily departing, is escorted home by the other boys. The purpose of the anecdote is to show Cato's inherent sense of justice and righteousness, brought out again and again in the Life.

Among the many acts of justice related by Plutarch it will suffice to mention Cato's handling of the Treasury (17. 2–4), the story about the absolute trust in his uprightness even by his adversaries (21. 5–6), his choice as umpire to ensure the fairness of elections (44. 7–14 with a short digression on the virtue of δικαιοσύνη); his support for Favonius against foul play at elections (46. 2–3), and his saving the Uticans from mass-murder (58. 1). Small wonder that Cato becomes a by-name for uprightness (19. 7) and his membership on a jury is considered sufficient to ensure a fair and just trial (48. 9–10). His being escorted home by his playmates is often repeated in later life by his supporters: on the last day of his quaestorship he is escorted home by almost all the citizens, who approve of his conduct (18. 5); the senators accompany him when he is led away by Caesar to prison (33. 3); upon his return from Cyprus he is met by all the magistrates, priests, senate and a large part of the people (39. 1); when defeated at the praetorian elections he is escorted home by more people than all the successful candidates together (42. 7); and when arrested by Trebonius he is followed on the way by such a crowd that the tribune prefers to let him go (43. 6).

Two of the anecdotes told by Plutarch are dated to Sulla's dictatorship. When the aristocratic youth were performing the "Troia" under Sulla's regime the participants insisted on substituting Cato for their appointed leader (3. 1–2). Subsequently Plutarch is at pains to make Cato appear as a popular favourite, always deemed worthy of leadership, though of course his failure to obtain the highest offices of state could easily be suggestive of the contrary, as Plutarch himself must have been aware.[29] Cato receives from his soldiers while a military tribune δόξα καὶ χάρις καὶ ὑπερβάλλουσα τιμὴ καὶ φιλοφροσύνη (9. 8); there is a graphic description of the emotional scenes when he leaves them (12. 1). He is invited to stand for the tribuneship (20. 1); in the praetorian elections he would have headed the poll but for Pompey's machinations (42. 4); only Cato, of all the commanders, is able to arouse the soldiers before Dyrrhachium (54. 7–9); in Africa he

[29] Cf. *Phocion* 3. 1.

yields the command to Metellus Scipio, his superior in rank, although he is the popular favourite (57. 6); he is appointed commandant of Utica upon request of the inhabitants as well as of Scipio (58. 2); the council in Utica prefer to die with him than to escape by betraying his virtue (60. 2); the horsemen who escaped from Thapsus said that they did not need Juba to pay them and would not be afraid of Caesar if Cato were to lead them (63. 3); and his esteem in the eyes of the Uticans is shown by the lamentations and the honours they bestow on him after his death (71). His escort on many occasions is another series of examples of the favour he commanded.

Perhaps the most interesting and certainly the most important among the anecdotes of Cato's youth is the one where he, then fourteen years old, asks his tutor Sarpedon for a sword to slay Sulla and free the State from slavery (3. 3–7). Libertas and Cato's determination to fight for it is the leitmotif that goes through the whole of the Life, gaining strength as the fight for the survival of the Republic becomes more and more desperate, until Cato's self-immolation on the altar of Libertas ends his story in an all-powerful crescendo. Cato, who as a youth wanted to slay the tyrant Sulla, prefers to die rather than to receive mercy from the hands of the victorious tyrant Caesar. Characteristically, Cato already envisages the possibility of death in the fight for Libertas when Metellus Nepos returns to Rome to stand for the tribunate in 63 (20. 5); henceforth ἐλευθερία is the watchword that permeates all the political controversies in which Cato takes part; every struggle and fight of Cato from now on is a fight for Roman Libertas; Cato dies when there is no hope for Libertas, and there is no hope for Libertas when Cato dies. Even the epilogue carries on the story of Libertas, telling how Cato's son falls at Philippi in the cause of Freedom (73. 5) and his daughter commits suicide after the death of her husband Brutus the Liberator (73. 6).

The last episode in the series tells us about the brotherly love of Cato and Caepio and Caepio's admiration for his half-brother's σωφροσύνη and μετριότης (3. 8–10). The story is to some extent out of the line with the preceding ones since its concern is with the δίαιτα, the private conduct of the hero and not his public image and behaviour. Nevertheless the one is as much part of the biography as the other, and the episode told here is as characteristic of Cato's δίαιτα in later life as were the foregoing anecdotes of his public life. Love for his brother, we are told, made him join the army in the war against Spartacus (8. 1), and his conduct at the untimely death of Caepio (11) is sufficient proof of this trait of his character. Indeed his reliance on family and marriage ties (with Silanus 21. 3; Lucullus 29. 6; Domitius 41. 3) may reveal something of the same feature. Last but not least Caepio's praise for Cato's σωφροσύνη and μετριότης should be noted; here we should mention, besides the characteristics that Plutarch assembles under the category of δίαιτα (5. 6–6. 7), his first campaign (with brother Caepio!) where his εὐταξία and ἀνδρία, reminiscent of his glorious

ancestor, are mentioned among the virtues as opposed to the μαλακία and τρυφή of his fellow soldiers (8. 2; cf. 3. 10); there is great emphasis on his modesty as military tribune (9. 4) and on his Asian journey (12. 3–4); the modest prizes he gives to the victors at the games (46. 4–5) and, of course, his conduct when leading his troops through the hardships of the African desert (56. 6–7).

So it happens that at the outset of the narration of Cato's career we have not only sufficient knowledge of his background, ἦθος, παιδεία, δίαιτα etc., but the events of the life themselves, the πράξεις of his career, from the beginning to the glorious end, present themselves to us with an ease that makes any explanations and interruptions in the flow of the narrative superfluous. Clearly such a highly sophisticated narrative technique, showing off Plutarch's artistry to its best advantage, could only be possible in a biography of a certain size, where recurrent leitmotifs had ample space for development.

I wish to conclude with a few remarks on Plutarch's technique of synkrisis in the *Cato minor*, the more so since it has been recently suggested[30] that it is of no importance in that Life. It will become evident that such a technique could have been developed by Plutarch only in biographies of the size contained in the Parallel Lives and must have been basically different from whatever comparisons were included in Nepos' works.

The *Phocion-Cato minor* is, together with the *Alexander-Caesar*, the *Themistocles-Camillus* and the *Pyrrhus-Marius*, one of the few pairs in the Parallel Lives that lack a formal synkrisis. Indeed the formal comparisons at the end of the books serve too often to point out the differences rather than the similarities between the two heroes. In our case it is again a technique of recurring motifs that binds the two Lives in this pair together—they are not compared κατὰ κοινὰς ὁμοιότητας but simply as good men devoted to the state (*Phoc.* 3. 6). The reason for linking them is their outstanding virtue:

> "But the virtues of these men, even down to their ultimate and minute differences, show that their natures had the one and the same stamp, shape and general colour; they were an equal blend, so to speak, of severity and kindness, of caution and braveness, of solicitude for others and fearlessness for themselves, of the careful avoidance of baseness and, in like degree, the eager pursuit of justice."

It is important to remember that this outline is the most extensive direct characterization of the two heroes: in the Lives proper the

[30] Pelling, *op.cit.* [note 16], 83 f.; for earlier discussions see A. Stiefenhofer, "Zur Echtheitsfrage der biographischen Synkriseis Plutarchs," *Philologus* 73 (1914–16) 474 and especially H. Erbse, "Die Bedeutung der Synkrisis in den Parallelbiographien Plutarchs," *Hermes* 84 (1956) 404.

delineament of character is done by the usual means of the πράξεις of the men. Thus it is left to the reader[31] to follow up and judge for himself to what extent Phocion and Cato conform in their actions to Plutarch's sketch.

The mixture of αὐστηρόν and φιλάνθρωπον in Phocion is apparent from the contradiction between his ἦθος and his countenance (5. 1); the Athenian people, when in need of a commander, would call upon one who was αὐστηρότατος and φρονιμώτατος (8. 3). Phocion, though harsh and stern, earns the surname of χρηστός (10. 4), and in the following section Plutarch discusses at length this mixture of austerity and kindness.

In Cato too austerity seemingly overcame kindness: hence the saying of Curio (14. 7–8). Cato seemed to be a by-word for austerity (19. 9), yet it is suggested that this austerity was outward, deemed suited for public business, while in private he behaved εὐνοϊκῶς καὶ φιλανθρώπως (21. 10). Cato's legislation to provide cheap food for the populace is an act of φιλανθρωπία and μετριότης (29. 4); Cato's speech to the Uticans displays his ἀδεές, γενναῖον and φιλάνθρωπον (60. 1).

The combination of ἀσφαλές and ἀνδρεῖον is more easily apparent in Phocion, whose public career was in the first place that of a military leader. Phocion attached himself to the general Chabrias, whose boldness was not counterbalanced by caution, as was the case with Phocion (6. 1 ff.); on the whole, his entire art of war demonstrated the admirable balance of the two qualities, as can be seen e.g. from the battles chs. 13; 25. Cato on the other hand never had real opportunity to display his qualities as a general (and only for the general is caution becoming), yet on the occasion of his service in the slave-war his courage was among the qualities that were admired (8. 2).

The next shared quality of Phocion and Cato, their care for others mingled with fearlessness for their own person, is again and again demonstrated in their Lives: e.g. Phocion, always fearless for his own person, is worried about the resources of the city (23. 3), does everything possible to save his fellow-citizens (23. 1; cf 31. 2), and his chief concern when facing trial is not for himself, but for his fellow defendants (34. 8). Examples of Cato's fearlessness have been collected above, starting with his behaviour as a four-year-old; his care for others is extended to the Syracusans (53. 4) and to all cities subject to Rome and Roman citizens (53. 5–6); he saves the Uticans from mass-murder (58. 1), and during his last days constantly the fate of his friends and the inhabitants of Utica is before his eyes, while he prepares without fear for death.

Finally, the two share an avoidance of meanness and the pursuit of justice. The examples are too numerous to be collected here entirely; for Cato what has been assembled above should suffice. With Phocion the examples of his treatment of prisoners and allies (13. 7 ff.), and his own

[31] As was Plutarch's wont to do: cf. Stiefenhofer, *op.cit.* 468.

relatives (22. 4) are characteristic of a man who, in true Socratic fashion, would prefer to suffer rather than inflict injustice (32. 6[32]) and who was recognised after his death by the people as a patron and guardian of moderation and justice (38. 1). Phocion rejected all attempts to be bribed or influenced by money (21. 3–4; 18. 1; 30. 1), and it is Plutarch's belief that to attack Cato for αἰσχροκέρδεια is like accusing Heracles of cowardice (52. 8).

Thus on the whole Plutarch was successful in demonstrating the similarities of character between Phocion and Cato. Few will lament the absence of a formal synkrisis at the end of the book, which would hardly add significantly either to our historical knowledge or to our psychological understanding of Plutarch's characters by pointing out in antithetical form the minute differences of the fortunes and fates of the two heroes. On the other hand the transition between the two Lives of the book, making use of a μέν. . . δέ—clause, is a most skilful structural device. The last sentence of the *Phocion* draws the parallel between the deaths of Phocion and Socrates: it is left to the reader to draw the parallel between the deaths of Socrates and Cato, so often alluded to, but never expressly stated in the Life.

I think it should be clear by now that Plutarch's art of comparison is sometimes most dominant where it is only implied rather than given a separate section in the book. Most importantly for our subject, it is here that his relation to Nepos seems to be most typical: possibly he owed the idea of comparison to Nepos, but it was his literary genius that brought it to full fruition.

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[32] Cf. Plato, *Gorg.* 469c.

4

Aspects of Plutarch's Characterisation

CHRISTOPHER PELLING

1. Childhood and Development

Immediately we consider Plutarch's treatment of his heroes' childhood, we find ourselves confronting a strange paradox.[1] He is clearly most interested in childhood and education; indeed, it is the exclusive concern of several of his moral essays.[2] He has a quite elaborate theory of youthful development, drawing heavily on the Aristotelian ethic: our initial δυνάμεις render us capable of feeling and responding to specific πάθη, and our responses gradually constitute particular ἕξεις of habitual activity; these eventually evolve into settled ἤθη which inform our moral choices. All that comes out particularly clearly in the *De uirtute morali*. Naturally enough, he insists that moral development of character is the norm for all human beings, and that education has a peculiar value in moulding character and restraining passions.[3] Naturally enough, too, in the *Lives* he makes a good deal of whatever childhood material he finds in his sources, often straining uncomfortably to extract unreasonably large consequences from slight anecdotes (*Sulla* is a good example of that). He also gives extensive space

[1] This paper overlaps closely with my essay on "Childhood and Personality in Greek Biography" (henceforth "Childhood"), to appear in *Characterization and Individuality in Greek Literature*, a collection of essays which I am editing for the Oxford University Press (1989): but the scope of that essay did not allow any extended treatment of individual *Lives*, nor any discussion of the distinguished analysis of Dihle. Some of the points are also treated in an essay on "Plutarch: Roman heroes and Greek Culture" (henceforth "Roman heroes"), to appear in *Philosophia Togata* (ed. J. Barnes and M. T. Griffin [Oxford 1989]). The present article is lightly annotated: further argument and exemplification of several points may be found in those papers. I apologise for this immodest ring of self-reference, and hope readers will not find the circle too vicious.

[2] Especially *De profectibus in uirtute, An uirtus doceri possit?, and De audiendis poetis*.

[3] *Mor.* 392b–e, cf. e. g. 28d–e, 37d–e, 76d–e, 82b–c, 83e–f, 450f, 453a, 551c–552d, 584e. Inherited nature was of course important too, as those passages show. Cf. esp. C. J. Gill, "The Question of Character-development: Plutarch and Tacitus," *CQ* 33 (1983) 469–87. For education as a civilising and restraining force in the *Lives*, cf. esp. *Cor.* 1. 4–5, *Mar.* 2. 2–4, *Them.* 2. 7, *Numa* 26 (4). 10–12; B. Bucher-Isler, *Norm und Individualität in den Biographien Plutarchs* (Noctes Romanae 13 [Bern and Stuttgart 1972]) 21, 24, 49, 67–8.

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