Beginnings in Plutarch's *Lives*

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I

"Men can do nothing without the make-belief of a beginning."[1] "Make-belief," because in the world of action it is objectively impossible to isolate a putative first step within the chain of contiguous causes and consequences. Current thinking frowns upon the axioms of origin, of authorship, of the unitary validating enactment. In the swirl of contextualization and dialogicity, a genuine starting point will go down as a dubious fiction. "The genesis... is never more than a transition from one structure to another, but also a formative transition that leads from a weaker to a stronger structure."[2] Edward Said borrows Hayden White's deprecatory coinage "inaugural gestures" to convey the artificiality and delusoriness of a sense of beginning.[3] He lists the various ways in which "beginning" can be understood: as physical exigency, as a departure from an antecedent, as a moment in time, a place, a principle, an action, a verbal stratagem of easing into sequence. His expansive temper and his commitment to renewal condition him to see in a genuine beginning a revolutionary element, challenging the conventions but also harnessed by the structures of the context. Nowhere in his massive book does Said provide a discussion of how a writer's first paragraph relates to the larger enterprise; his concern is with the total enterprise *as* a beginning.

1. George Eliot, quoted by H. Abzug in Veninga (1983) 21. The present essay had been sent to the editor when, through the kindness of Philip A. Stadter, I received a copy of his detailed, learned and generous "The Proems of Plutarch's *Lives*." Thanks to it my discussion has profited from a few last minute changes and additions. Unavoidably our papers evince some duplication, but the perspectives and the results seem to me sufficiently distinct to warrant proceeding with the submission of my piece.

2. Piaget (1968) 121, cited by Said (1975) 192. Said's book remains the most detailed analysis of the complexities of the notion of a beginning. (For full references see Works Cited at end of the essay.)

3. Cf. White (1978) 5.

My interest is in first paragraphs, or even first lines. By what initiatory tactic does the writer open a window on the desk top of literature to frame the construct upon which he is engaged? Do his "inaugural gestures" suggest that he is aware of the linkage of his project to a larger context or tradition, and that his construct is, more or less violently, torn from that tissue of indebtedness, or, on the contrary, fuelled by that tradition? Again, what yardstick, if any, do we apply in deciding where a beginning, a head, comes to its end and the body of the work supervenes? These are difficult questions, to be answered, if at all, variously, depending upon the organizational perspicuity of the work studied, or, often, upon the properties of the genre with which we might be willing to associate a particular work or writer.

In the case of Plutarch's *Lives*, one might suppose, a scrutiny of beginnings promises some rewards. Plutarch is not one of those who, in Harold Bloom's phrase, write against writing. There is nothing in the *Lives* to suggest, even at a submerged level of composition, a demonic wrestling with authority. Plato's authority, as Plutarch understands it, he accepts unreservedly; others he rifles or opposes in his disciplined, academic, appreciative or dismissive manner. His "awe in the presence of a classic"[4] is restrictive only in the sense that he chooses not to recapitulate everything his sources have reported in authoritative detail.[5] His own uncomplicated sense that in writing biography he is doing something that has not been done in quite the same manner before has been vindicated by those specialists who have condemned attempts to fold Plutarch's achievement into an earlier evolution of the genre.[6]

A brief reminder of the material involved. We have twenty-two sets of *Parallel Lives*, each containing two biographies, of a Greek and a Roman, followed, with some exceptions, by a concluding comparative-contrastive analysis (σύγκρισις); one set of four

4. Wardman (1974) 154. Wardman has in mind Plutarch's respect for Thucydides, Xenophon, and Philistus.

5. *Artaxerxes* 8.1. Plutarch criticizes Timaeus in *Nicias* 1.2–4 for replicating the material drawn from his sources in a spirit of competition. As for himself, he proposes to summarize the findings of his authorities, and bring in only those details that may have escaped their scrutiny. Cf. Pelling (1980); de Romilly (1988).

6. Cf. especially Dihle (1956) and (1987); Erbse (1956); Krischer (1982); Momigliano (1971); Russell (1966a); Wardman (1974); Ziegler (1951).

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biographies (*Agis*, *Cleomenes*, and the *Gracchi*); and a set of two (*Galba* and *Otho*) rescued from another collection, the *Lives of the Emperors*.[7] The *Lives* were almost certainly written in the later period of Plutarch's career, between c. 96 and c. 120 CE. An impressive attempt has been made to date the *Lives* in relation to one another,[8] but no definitive consensus about these relations exists, and in this paper chronological considerations will be disregarded. Nine of the twenty-four Greek figures, from Theseus to Demosthenes, are drawn from the history of Athens. Only one of the contrasting heroes is not a Roman but a Persian: Artaxerxes; and in one case (*Galba* and *Otho*) the two figures juxtaposed (not paralleled) are both Romans. The conspicuousness of the Romans in the *Lives* is noteworthy in the light of Plutarch's admission, in *Demosthenes* 2.2–4, that he came late to the study of the Latin language, and that he lacked the leisure to master the niceties of the tongue.[9] He hastens to add that his understanding of the meaning of the words was facilitated by his practical experience. And it is evident that his knowledge of Roman materials is indebted to authorities who wrote in Greek.

Why did Plutarch compose his *Lives*? There is no doubt about the didactic intention.[10] By putting on the stage the imitable (and, occasionally, the cautionary) examples of outstanding public figures, Plutarch installs mirrors, not just for magistrates, but for all men who prize the products of excellence (ἀρετή) and character (ἦθος). In the wake of Plato and Aristotle and the Hellenistic ethical philosophers, Plutarch accepts a vital connection between these moral staples, experience, habituation, and behavior under pressure. In the *Lives* he focuses on actions and decisions

7. *Demosth.* 3.3–5 presents the best formulation of why Plutarch wrote parallel lives: he is interested in ὁμοιότητες φύσεως, similarities of natural endowment, but also in πολλὰ τῶν τυχηρῶν, the frequency of the coincidence of circumstance. Cf. also *Pelop.* 2.9–12 and *Aemil.* 1.6. In my discussion I will deal with *Galba* and *Otho* as if they were part of the collection of *Parallel Lives*.

8. Jones (1966). Some of the *Lives*, including, probably, the first written, have not been preserved. The order in which the extant *Lives* have come to us in the manuscripts, or in the so-called catalogue of Lamprias, is demonstrably not the order in which they were penned. In one case, *Aemilius Paulus* 1, Plutarch's statement of why he continued with the series suggests that there had been a break, and that the *Life* constitutes a new beginning.

9. Pelling (1979) 74–76 argues that for the Roman *Lives* Plutarch lacked the ready fund of recollections he was able to invest in the Greek *Lives*.

10. See especially Ziegler (1951) coll. 903–05. Also Erbse (1956) 419, who cites confirmatory evidence from the *Moralia*.

and elicits from them the evidence he seeks concerning the qualities needed to lead a good life. This immediately raises a historiographic problem that may turn out to be reflected in Plutarchan beginnings. Is it not true that the closer a student gets to the intricacies and the opacities of biographical reality, the more refracted the moral entities become? An understanding of ethics sharpens the suspicion that the practicalities and the necessary compromises of a successful public life are the least likely arena in which to uncover exemplary manifestations of virtue. Perhaps the *Lives of the Philosophers*, a prominent Hellenistic literary genre, and certainly the Christian *Lives of the Saints* would prove more bountiful in rendering up prototypes of the exercise of excellence. Plutarch does not see it that way. His own uncomplicated sense of what is right and the experience gained as a leading citizen persuade him that successes achieved against great odds and in the taking of risks are equally effective and perhaps superior indices of moral assets. Nor is he inclined to ferret out the negatives in the careers of the ancients; note his objection to the practice of Herodotus (*de malign. Herod.* 874B): he compares his malice, his βλασφημία and κακολογία, to the activity of a rose beetle ravaging the smooth and delicate tissues.

It is here that the biographer's art of selection comes into its own. Nepos, in the preface to his *Life of Epaminondas*, worries that readers, not in tune with the customs of the Greeks in Epaminondas' time, might be turned off by the prominence of music and dancing which was part of his hero's education. We may compare Plutarch's disdainful comments about poets and musicians at the beginning of his *Pericles* and elsewhere. Nepos insists that he cannot omit these details: "when ... we wish to produce an impression of the habits and the life of Epaminondas, we must not appear to omit anything that might be relevant to its fulfillment." This target of inclusiveness or totalization is not one that Plutarch acknowledges. His declaration that he will not reiterate what his sources have already delivered, but will look for additional materials they might not have caught,[11] permits him to shape the details of his *Lives* so as to elicit the significant moral patterns with a minimum of interference. His occasional hesitation

11. Herodotus 6.55 shows that this is an authentic historiographical move.

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about which version or judgment to adopt has to do with the lack of a decisive motive, or the lack of documentary evidence.[12] And where the lives inspected prove to furnish negative rather than positive paradigms, as in the cases of *Demetrius* and *Antony*, Plutarch, a Corneille *avant la lettre*, reserves to himself the right of admiration, in the belief that even here there is enough promising material for a discerning emulator to take heart. The cautionary or deterrent ingredient in his didacticism is, for the most part, distinctly understated.

Plutarch's decision to organize his biographical sketches in tandems, many of them culminating in comparative-contrastive analyses or summaries, is a further mark of the confidence with which he handles his task. For if his purpose is didactic, to establish embodiments of achievement for imitation, the coupling of two embodiments would seem to make the task more difficult. Elsewhere, in his *On the Virtues of Women* (243B–D), addressed to a distinguished woman friend, Plutarch talks about the principles involved in comparing the accomplishments of women with those of men. We must juxtapose lives, and actions, like great works of art, and compare them for successes, intelligence, nobility, and other goods. Their divergent natures produce different hues; so do the contemporary mores, personal temperaments, upbringing, lifestyles. Achilles was brave in one way, Ajax in another. But this does not mean that the two heroes exhibited two distinct kinds of bravery, only dissimilarities in their instantiation of the same bravery. One may wonder whether in this varied lumping together of men and women, of people and art objects, of properties split and unsplit, Plutarch has given the problem of comparing all the thought it deserves. The argumentative discourse indicates that he is aware of the difficulties. But the problem recedes in the face of his assurance.

Later we will have occasion to ask whether the manifest assurance of the method is gainsaid by what happens in the introductions to the *Lives*. Meanwhile let us ask another question. How does Plutarch's procedure measure up against what we understand by biography? The partiality for the stars of one's culture is still discernible in the vulgate variety represented by the

12. Barbu (1934) 143ff.

National Inquirer and *People Magazine*, and again in the interbellum pattern biography chronicling the corruption of the hero by the power he seeks.[13] It is not difficult to think of the *Lives* as the ancient counterpart to the seductive tales of glamorous success and rightful fall our mass culture has spawned. But Plutarch's practice is superior to these bastard varieties in that it conforms more closely to the four principles which according to Leon Edel sustain serious biography: the biographer must understand his subject's dreams; he must preserve a critical distance from the spell of his hero; he must analyze his materials for the keys to the deeper truths about his subject; and he must discover the unique literary form that will express the special quality of the life considered.[14] Plutarch's fascination with virtue and character, and his special mix of admiration for what the hero has achieved, tempered by limited but firm reservations in the face of the subject's shortcomings, bring him close to a realization of Edel's requirements. So does his control of the literary means whereby the data of the life are turned into a compelling *Life*. Only Edel's further comment that a biographical account "need no longer be strictly chronological... Lives are rarely lived that way" would not earn Plutarch's consent. Chronological sequence is Plutarch's major organizing device for what happens after the introduction; without the equivalent of an *ab ovo* the body of the work would not set itself off from the introduction.

Albrecht Dihle has put us in his debt by venturing to circumscribe the characteristics of the biographical tradition to which, he argues in the face of doubts, Plutarch subscribes. Biography, he says, trains its sights on the totality of a man's life, in its before and after, not *necessarily* in all its details; it is shaped to capture the attainment of moral values *commensurate* to the *experience* of the reader.[15] I have italicized what seem to me the principal points on which further questions might be raised. In what sense is biography more compellingly entitled to the claim of commensurateness than any other form of verbal or indeed

13. The most popular writer of this type of biography was Emil Ludwig. For an entertaining critique, see Lowenthal (1980), who considers this species, with its hypostasis of an iron-willed history creating its own figures, a travesty of sociology.

14. Edel (1984) 28–30.

15. Dihle (1987) 8–9; cf. also Dihle (1956) 88, who puts a greater emphasis on the inclusion of the insignificant (*unscheinbar*) events of daily life.

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non-verbal communication registering upon a consciousness readied by the experience of living? In fact, commensurability has recently become the object of philosophical inquiry, with one critic asserting that it can be said to exist only for insignificant options.[16] It could further be argued that, far from "not necessarily" maximizing coverage, Plutarch has no interest whatever in producing a critical mass of details. On the contrary, the didacticism and the foregrounding of the tension between moral values and the risks of fortune (τύχη) require a strenuous selectiveness. Some *Lives* are considerably shorter than others; it is unlikely that the availability of source material had anything to do with this variance. Details of intimate and domestic conduct may be just as important for the clarification of character as actions of state (*Cato min.* 37.10). But precisely because they are designed to clarify the moral dimensions of the man, they must not be allowed to take on a life of their own. The didacticism of the genre, and its pliable selectiveness, continue to be with us, though rarefied and adjusted to our more skeptical temper.[17]

More crucially, we often prefer writers and texts that incorporate struggle, tension, recalcitrance, the lure of the unfinished and the disoriented. Plutarch, on the contrary, gives us heroes who, it is understood if not overtly stated, know what they want, and experience brief though repeated disappointments only because history and luck do not always wait upon them. Plutarch does not capitulate to the temptation of vitalism, the surrender before the irresistible fulness of life, which tends to detach the hero of serious modern biography from the moorings of social accountability and descriptive transparency.[18] Because of these restraints, Plutarchan biography has about it the air of the predictable. Both the nature of the challenges to which the hero is exposed and the choices he makes in response to the challenges are severely limited. Though each hero has his own special qualities, his function as a role model within the limitations of a homogeneous scene of politics and military ventures renders his life virtually collapsible into that of his peer in the parallel match-up; and together the two lives are once again collapsible into the

16. Raz (1986) ch. 13.
17. Scheuer (1979) 6.
18. Cf. Lowenthal (1980) 243–44. The liveliness of Plutarch's writing is not easily identified with the relative simplicity of the conceptual design; cf. Russell (1966a) 143.

larger pool of lives of Plutarch's heroes. It is against the foil of the relative sameness of the lives, or better: of the *Lives*, that the beginnings, the first paragraphs, will have to be studied.

Yet ancient biography is not the same as encomium. Isocrates' *Evagoras* is "rhetorische Heldendichtung" (the term is Krischer's[19]), with all negative features omitted from the idealized portrait. To avoid a possible trespass upon the utopian arena of the encomium, biography must always try to avoid the impression that the life portrayed is both satisfactorily unified and independently meaningful.[20] Plutarch's choice of the dual structure, the governing feature of his *Parallel Lives*, makes it easier for him to abide by this warning.

Plutarch is aware of the need to distinguish between biography and history, though his admiration of Thucydides makes it difficult for him to stipulate a clear boundary between the two genres. His statement early in *Galba* is symptomatic of a reluctance to leave historiography entirely behind: "The precise reporting of what happened in each case is a function of the history of events (πραγματικὴ ἱστορία); but I too must not pass over the noteworthy moments in what was done or experienced by the Caesars." Perhaps we might say that biography, for Plutarch, is a convenient and appealing mechanism for cutting history, the potentially overwhelming and infinite stream, up into cameo units furnishing the comforting semblance of beginning, middle, and end, with the agents, rather than the actions, providing the nuclei of orientation. "We do not write histories but lives. The most visible actions do not carry within them a foolproof index of virtue or its opposite; that is furnished often by a limited act or utterance or pleasantry. They give a greater insight into character than battles with mountains of dead or gigantic confrontations or investments of cities" (*Alexander* 1).[21] Plutarch adds an Aristotelian comparison with painters who go out of their way in their attention to facial

19. Krischer (1982). The encomiast, unlike the biographer, is constantly aware of the risks of exaggeration and attendant φθόνος, the resentment triggered among the audience.

20. Kracauer (1963) 75–80.

21. Wardman (1974) 4 suggests that Plutarch's remarks are motivated as much by the special case of Alexander (and Caesar) as by more general considerations. Dihle (1987) refers to Polybius 10.21.1–8 and Cicero *ad fam.* 5.12 for revealing discussions of the difficulty of distinguishing biography from historiography. Cf. also Nepos' proem to *Pelopidas*.

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expression rather than taking account of the full outline of the body. The comparison is intriguing, but one wonders whether history, as practiced by Plutarch's admired predecessors, is greatly different in this respect from his own practice, or, conversely, whether in his own practice he can ever get away from the historical materials he proposes to remodel. It is almost touching to see him apologize, *after* detailing the pincer movement at Cannae, the dismounting of the Roman cavalry, Hannibal's reaction, and the heroism of Paulus Aemilius, for the disproportionate fulness of a battle account that cannot be said to help us to a better understanding of the peculiar greatness of Fabius Maximus (*Fab.* 16).

II

We are now in a better position to look at the choices Plutarch makes to launch his biographies.[22] The issues to which we need to be alert include the extrication of the great individual from the enveloping events of his time; the recognition, or the lack of it, of data that might conflict with the paradigmatic intention of the *Lives*; the inclusion, or the lack of it, of references to the childhood of the hero, to demonstrate the presence, already plottable, of the man in the child; and generally an anticipation of the several rubrics which Friedrich Leo, the founder of the modern study of Greek biography, proposed to find in the tradition from the start: lineage, family, looks, character, lifestyle, education, evidence of intelligence.[23] A question of a different sort, alluded to above, concerns the indispensability of "beginnings." Can Plutarch ever be said to start *in medias res*, without the flourish of an introduction? If so, will this allow us to gauge the limits of the prefatory statement in cases where he does not?

22. I am deliberately leaving aside the question of the comparability of beginnings in other writers, including post-classical historians and essayists. The challenge to Plutarch's beginnings is greater and distinct because of the relative invariability, even predictability, of the pattern of the *Lives*. So even if it is true that Ephorus or Lucian or Dio or Philostratus practiced a comparable versatility in their introductions, a preliminary and isolated scrutiny of Plutarch's procedure has its value.

23. Leo (1901). Leo admitted that not all of the subheadings are found in any one life or in the same order. The exceptions acknowledged by Leo are generally thought to subvert the case for a generic scheme; cf. Barhu (1934) 5–6.

Let us call the prefatory statement, coming before the systematic description of the hero's ancestry or birth or early life, "proem,"[24] understanding that Plutarch himself is unlikely to have regarded his initial remarks as analogous to the clearly articulated proems of forensic oratory.[25] Typically, we shall find, the *Lives* that are headed by prefatory matter (and by no means all of them are) begin with a proem of about two or three chapters' length (counting the modern organization of the text), a not unreasonable delay of the beginning of the *Life* proper. Finally, the concept of the *Parallel Lives* provokes a question peculiar to it: does the proem do justice to the specificities of both of the lives celebrated, or, if one of them is more clearly intended by the prefatory remarks, is it that of the Greek or the Roman?[26] Does the second *Life* of the pair get its own proem, of equal weight with the proem of the first? A special problem is of course set by the quadruple treatment of Agis, Cleomenes, and the Gracchi. It is just as well to begin with this document. It is hoped that the reader will not be put off by a series of summaries, highlighting the diversity of content, structure, and control, whereby Plutarch initialled his *Lives*.

III

In the first two chapters of *Agis and Cleomenes* Plutarch establishes the ethical and political maze within which the lives of the Spartan kings and of the Gracchi promise interesting test cases for the reflection and potential emulation of the readers.[27] Plutarch starts with the image[28] of Ixion, who desired Hera but embraced

24. Plutarch's own term, in a case where the articulation approaches the rhetorical division (*Pelopidas* 2.5), is προαναφώνησις. But cf. Lucian's προοίμιον and φροιμιάζεσθαι: *de conscr. hist.* 53. Stadter (1988), folding Plutarch's practice back into the rhetorical tradition, also adopts the term "proem" for the introductory section, whose precise limits he chooses not to discuss. For the conceptual and textual properties of the proems, and a possible distinction between "formal" and "informal" proems, see Stadter 276; he counts thirteen "formal" proems. My limitation of the confines of the proem to the material that comes before the canonic sketch of the hero's pedigree, birth, or youth is responsible for my omission of much that Stadter considers proemial.

25. For the earlier proemial tradition, see the valuable summary of Stadter (1988) 277–82. For ancient theory, see the materials cited by Stadter n. 12, and by Lausberg (1960) 150–63, all of which, of course, go back to Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.14.

26. Stadter (1988) 284 finds that "The thirteen formal proems...each respond to the particular needs of a pair of lives..." But contrast his remarks on p. 291.

27. Cf. Marasco (1981) 42 and 175ff. 28. For imagery, see below, n. 35.

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a cloud, to characterize those who yearn for high position and authority but in working for it take their guidance from the untutored masses whose admiration they wish to attract. The emphasis is on influenceability and corruptibility. "For these men, attaching themselves to prestige which is a sort of mirror of virtue, accomplish nothing genuine or authoritative, but much that is spurious and half-bred; they are uncertain in their directions, slaves to resentments and passion." To drive home his point, Plutarch cites a passage of Sophocles[29] and brings in an analogy from shipping, where the lookout, though more informed about what lies ahead than the captain, takes his orders from him. In Chapter 2 the influenceable and therefore corrupt man is contrasted with the man of inherent virtue. Plutarch immediately qualifies this by conceding that in their younger years good men need the applause of others to develop their native virtue; but then returns to his strong condemnation of men whose political lives are lived in obedience to popular approval. This section is garnished with references to a work by Theophrastus, to a conversation between Phocion and Antipater, and to a fable about a snake whose tail rose up against its head. We cannot fault Plutarch for larding his discussion with literary, philosophical, visual, and anecdotal materials.[30] But a closer look at the sequence of ideas, and the application of the moral in the balance of Chapter 2, leave us with serious questions.

To take up the latter point first: my remarks about the dangers of looking for popularity, Plutarch concludes, are prompted by considering the effect of what happened in the case of the Gracchi: their character, education, and political philosophy were above reproach, but they were undone, less by a craving for acclaim than by a fear of not living up to it. So it turns out that the proem is primarily designed to prepare the *Lives* of the two Romans (but even they, Plutarch admits, were not really the slaves to popular approval to whom the reflections of the proem

29. For Plutarch's use of quotations, see Helmbold and O'Neill (1959). The evidence does not suggest that quotations are more likely to be found in proems than elsewhere.
30. Stadter (1988) 290 says that Plutarch's proems employ many rhetorical devices including "χρεῖαι, γνῶμαι, comparisons, digressions, metaphors, and indirection." My understanding of what constitutes a proem in the *Lives* suggests that "digressions" goes awkwardly with the rest of the devices. The proem is digressive or, perhaps better, ingressive by definition.

would apply). To find his way back to the Greeks, Plutarch, at the end of Chapter 2, has to say that, like the Gracchi, Agis and Cleomenes also in increasing the power of the people and trying to restore a commonwealth that had turned sick, drew upon themselves the hatred of the powerful. The parallel is less than adequate; corruptibility is not one of the vices with which either Agis or Cleomenes (or the Gracchi) could be charged. By this unsatisfying transition Plutarch manages to close his proem and to open Chapter 3, which details the forebears of Agis. Such genealogies or pedigrees are to be found in the great majority of the *Lives*; they form a convenient starting point for detailing the career of the hero, via a minimal reference to his childhood and upbringing. They are found at the start of the *Life* proper, after the prefatory remarks. Neither ancestry nor childhood is anticipated in the proem. In the present case the genealogical details that follow the proem are unusually extended and intricate, as if Plutarch owed Agis a debt for his earlier focus upon the Gracchi.

This is not the only proem in which the organization is determined by the questions to be asked about the Roman rather than the Greek.[31] On more than one occasion, it seems, it was the Roman life that was selected first, and the Greek life suggested by it was consequently placed ahead of it for reasons of chronology.[32] Could it be that Plutarch's information about the Romans was less hymnodic or more detailed, so the paradigmatic objective was more easily enriched by means of interesting caveats? Does the Roman life lend itself to "an initial crude presentation... which is then [sc. within the parameters of the Greek life] developed and refined?"[33] Better yet, does Plutarch start to think about the Greek, but quickly turn to the Roman to gain the distance and the perspective that a good beginning requires? This last explanation, though accounting for only a minority of the cases, would do

31. See also *Theseus, Nicias, Cimon, Alcibiades, Timoleon, Eumenes. Pace* Geiger (1981), when Plutarch proceeds from the figure cited first to the figure to be matched with it, he does not say that he is looking for a parallel life, and thus initiate us into the process of selection, but merely states that such and such a person is comparable. The points of similarity will be detailed, but we gain no insight into Plutarch's working method.

32. Cf. Marasco (1981) 178, who also remarks that the association of the Gracchi with Greek counterparts is already found in Cicero and earlier.

33. The quotation is from Pelling (1986) 96.

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justice to the view that a true beginning calls for a deflection, a move away from the context in which the topic to be dealt with is imbedded. Whatever the reason, the surprise displacement of the Greeks by the Romans in the proem leaves the reader wondering.

Equally important, to return to the *Life of Agis*, the combination of moves in support of the condemnation of the love of acclaim, φιλοδοξία, offers its own surprises. The analogy from navigation, which clearly derives from Plato's *Republic*, is turned upside down by finding fault with the proposition that the deckhand is to be answerable to the captain. And as Plutarch turns to Theophrastus for the notion that in the child's development of character praise is a necessary nutriment, he evades the possible objection that such praise might not be dangerous to a grown man by adding that excess (τὸ ἄγαν) is always a trap, and it is a killer for men who want political acclaim. I suspect the difficulty Plutarch has with the logic of his proem has something to do with the snags of the Greek tradition of fame, κλέος. From Homer onwards a man's, and particularly a leading man's, standing in the community is measured by how people talk about him. By itself, the desire for popular acclaim is easily squared with the requirements of an excellent character, of virtue. By suggesting that the desire for acclaim can be an instrument for descending to the moral level of average people, Plutarch maneuvers himself into a precarious seesaw between moral approbation and moral warnings, precisely the kind of mixture that will make a biography interesting, but that will also obscure the ethical tenor of a proem. His mercurial willingness to accommodate negatives within his models and to proceed as if the models were eminently imitable is, as always, worrisome. But in this case the proem comes down heavily on negatives which the *Lives* themselves fail to sustain. It appears, then, that Plutarch has built more than enough surprises into the structure and the argument of this particular proem to fashion it into an appropriate vehicle for introducing his readers to some of the issues in his practice of biography. Or should we rather say that the surprises constitute an overkill, leaving a needless disparity between the asymmetries of the proem and the more shapely text that follows? May we speak of overdetermination, or even of counterproductiveness?

On the same topic of currying popular favor, the proem to *Phocion* extends over three chapters and constitutes a complex argument: Plutarch begins with a comparison of Demades, a quisling under the Macedonians and a most unattractive character (at least so Plutarch thinks), with the respected Phocion for the constraints under which they lived, and which darkened their reputation. He proceeds, with the help of an assortment of images and similes, to recommend a compromise between steering a wilful course and taking one's guidance from the populace; and finds the same tough mixture of moral goodness and public concern in both Phocion and Cato. "Cato's lineage, as will be shown, derives, by general agreement, from distinguished ancestors; Phocion's, I find, is by no means humble or without honor." Thus Plutarch slides, by means of a characteristic chiasmus, into the customary genealogy, after a proem more vivid than most, and once again conforming to the usual prescription of quotations from the authors, pregnant comparisons, references to persons or institutions only remotely connected with the lives at issue, and moral judgments in excess of covering the fates about to be featured.

I next turn to the proem of the *Life of Cimon*, an equally complex structure, though, for once, a straight narrative. The story is full of adventure and erotic strife, a peculiar overture to the life of a man whose conservatism might be thought to invite a less colorful introduction. It is a tale of gang violence in Plutarch's Chaeronea; of the city being taken to court for killings consequent upon the sexual intrigue between a Roman officer and a rugged and handsome adolescent; of the Roman general, Lucullus, finding for the city; of the adolescent, now matured, invited back but promptly assassinated; of ghosts haunting the city and soot-faced revellers recalling the ancient mayhem; and of the Chaeroneans setting up a marble statue of Lucullus in recognition of his clearing them of a charge brought against them by their rival Orchomenus. This story, even more erratic than my summary would let on, covers the first chapter and the start of the second. In the balance of the chapter Plutarch narrows his focus upon the statue: his aim, prompted by continuing gratitude to Lucullus, is to do better than a sculptor, who concentrates on externals, and to compose an image that gives shape to (ἐμφανίζει = "suggests"

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and "emphasizes": the term is from rhetoric) the hidden qualities, character, and temperament. Painters, he continues, in the interest of truthfulness would not pass over small imperfections though of course they would not blow them up. We must do the same, in the case of mistakes or even horrors (κῆρες) arising out of misfortune or public constraint. They will figure in our treatment as imperfections of virtue rather than as the active enhancements of vice. This particular formulation of the tension between imitability and realism takes Plutarch to the beginning of Chapter 3, in which he finally turns to Cimon and explains why he is the most suitable pendant to Lucullus. And in Chapter 4 the genealogy of Cimon inaugurates the *Life* proper.

Once again, then, Plutarch introduces the Roman of the dyad before he turns to the Greek. But the line of reasoning is remarkably tortuous. The soot-faced emulators of the ancient murder gang occupy a disconcertingly large space side by side with the honorary state of Lucullus; the local pride and embarrassment celebrating the native rowdyism clash with the deference shown the Roman general. The aetiological expansiveness coloring the antecedents of what in his own time, by his own account, was a staid and quiet country town is in stark contrast with the standard move of the comparison between biography and the visual arts. If the proem to *Agis and Cleomenes* seemed problematic in its inconsequentiality and its displacement of the Greeks, what are we to make of the preamble to *Cimon*, mixed as it is of equal measures of thuggery, sexual violence, ritual charade, and methodological considerations that appear to fly in the face of the very purpose of the *Lives*, which is not to monitor defects and trace disasters that are thrust upon people, but to sketch the accomplishments of the much better than average. To be sure, the *Lives*, as we learn on many occasions, allow for the inclusion of πάθη, of what is done to the heroes, as well as of what is done by them. But the bedlam of this particular horror story far exceeds the usual limits of πάθη, of the sufferings experienced by the individuals who attract the biographer's attention. One can only gather that Plutarch was not interested in fashioning a prologue suited to the quality of the heroes of the hour, and that he saw nothing wrong with bringing in material that could as easily have been used in some of the more sensationalist portions of his

Moralia. Perhaps it was the consciousness of the peculiarity of taking his cue from the Roman of the dyad that prompted him to resort to the circuitry evident in the proem to *Cimon*.[34]

The three proems we have analyzed are unusually complex. I hasten to repeat that their complexity is not demanded by the complexity of the *Lives* they introduce. Other *Lives*, of equal or greater resistance to normative expectations, such as *Alcibiades* and *Alexander*, receive less ambitious proems or none at all. Why Plutarch chose to endow one *Life* with a substantial proem and leave another to sail along without such an introduction or with a lesser brand we cannot tell. Plutarch disposes of no standard technique to introduce his *Lives*; each occasion calls for a reconsideration of the form and the quantity to be invested in the initiatory statement. Another issue raised earlier should, however, be settled at this point: as a rule, the second *Lives* – and that means, usually, the *Lives* of the Romans – carry no proems of their own. Of the second *Lives* we have, only those of Romulus and Marius are granted brief introductory remarks. Clearly Plutarch felt that one proem covering the dual composition was sufficient, especially since that proem usually claims to cover the needs of both heroes of the tandem structure.

The affection for Chaeronea, Plutarch's sleepy home town, demonstrated in *Cimon* also plays a role in the *Life of Demosthenes*. The proem starts out by asserting that the stature of the native city is unimportant for the rise of the public hero; his excellence could originate and flourish in any environment. But the arts, and that includes the work of historians and essayists, are dependent for their success on the logistical support and the resonance they are more likely to find in large cities, with their cultivated readerships and their well-endowed libraries. For myself, Plutarch continues, I am content to stay in Chaeronea, if only because my departure would make the town even smaller than it is. But I did have some experience with living in Rome – and at that point

34. One is tempted to invoke the ancient category of the shocking, the παράδοξον σχῆμα or *admirable* (or *turpe*) *genus*, used by orators to enhance the moral defensibility of the case (Lausberg [1960] 58). Could the strangeness of the proem be an instance of *insinuatio*? Cf. Lausberg 160: "Die *insinuatio* besteht darin, dass durch listige Verwendung psychologischer Mittel ... das Unterbewusstsein des Publikums in einem für uns günstigen Sinne beeinflusst wird ..." Hardly; there is no live audience; readers do not need to be inveigled into reading.

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Plutarch proceeds to his account of the lateness of his exposure to the Latin tongue, to which I have already referred. In Chapter 3 we are introduced to Demosthenes and Cicero. In what Plutarch says about them – and for once they enter the discussion together, on a level of parity – there is no link whatever with the matters taken up in the first two chapters. He says that he will look at their public lives and not at their speeches; he compares them for their appetite for honors, their love of freedom, their reluctance to take risks, and their involvement in strokes of bad luck. Only glancingly does he revert to the topic of small-town birth, by saying that they became powerful from obscure beginnings. To drive the reference harder would have been impossible in the case of Demosthenes, whose birth in Paeania was tantamount to birth in Athens. The arguments of the first two chapters, then, are largely unrelated to what follows; and my summary of those arguments has skimmed lightly over a number of smallish dislocations and erudite notes which distance the proem even more radically from the concerns of the subsequent *Lives*.

The proem to the *Life of Pericles*, one of the longest and most contrived, is too well known for me to need to rehearse its contents at length. Unlike the proems we have inspected, it has a certain standing as an introduction to what Plutarch considers important and what he considers counterproductive in the writing of biography. It is notorious for its Platonizing critique of the arts, especially of music and sculpture, but also of poetry: we may appreciate good verse but we cannot admire its creators. Nobody wants to be another Phidias or Anacreon, but each of us desires to be another Pericles or Fabius Maximus. We all love to learn and see, but we disapprove of those who love to learn and see unworthy objects. The whole proem, full of anecdote and simile and rife with class prejudice against working with one's hands, shows Plutarch at his most skittish and disconcerting, as if the *Life* itself, with its allowance for the relation between Pericles and Phidias and its inclusion of the hero's family experiences, gave him cause to worry ahead of time that the greatness of the hero's virtue might not in the end emerge with sufficient brilliance. What is more, the long shadow thrown by the majesty of Pericles blocks any serious consideration of Fabius in the proem.

Demetrius starts out with a peculiar analogy drawn between the

sensations and the arts: both of them are capable of distinguishing contraries. Vision registers the light and the dark; by the same token the art of medicine studies sickness and health. Plutarch's own art is capable of focusing on both positive and negative paradigms. The students of human behavior must know both; the Spartans made helots drunk in order to parade them before their young as warning examples. Plutarch concedes that one might quarrel with the ethics of this practice. But, he continues, as long as history offers us paragons of imperfection, it may be useful to bring a few to the notice of his audience. Hence the *Lives* of Demetrius and Antony, men who confirm Plato's view that great natures (αἱ μεγάλαι φύσεις) are capable of exhibiting great vices along with their virtues. Before they reached their unhappy end, both these men distinguished themselves by their love life, their drinking, their warring, their generosity, their extravagance, and their violence. Next Plutarch leads into the pedigree of Demetrius with an extended passage on both men, a procedure which is normally found in the contrastive analyses at the end of the pair of *Lives*. His willingness to make room in the *Lives* for high rollers as well as paragons, though a natural consequence of the Aristotelian insight that perfectly good characters make for indifferent drama, comes through in this instance with particular clarity. By the same token, Plutarch cannot be said to make any clearer how the career of the gambler works within the didactic scheme of the *Lives*.

Up to now I have touched on proems introducing the *Lives* of the Greeks. Of the twenty proems giving Plutarch a chance to pose as an essayist before the *Life* settles down to an account of the lineage or the youth (and looks) or both of the hero, fifteen are attached to the *Lives* of the Greeks, although, as we have seen, they may take their cue from the Romans; only five have the function of introducing the *Life* of the Roman. This is of course largely due to the fact that the *Life* of the Greek as a rule precedes that of the Roman (*Demosthenes* 3.5 baldly states: we must begin with the one who came first), no matter which of the two heroes looms larger in the author's imagination. The three exceptions to this rule are *Sertorius*, which unaccountably precedes *Eumenes* (the proem awkwardly advertises the coincidence of events, and of personal identities; both Eumenes and Sertorius were one-eyed!);

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Aemilius, whose equally curious precedence over *Timoleon* was inverted by the Aldine; and *Galba*, which is matched, or better followed, by *Otho*. (*Romulus* and *Marius* are, as we have seen, second *Lives*.) The proem of *Galba* anticipates several of the themes taken up again in the body of the work, with a major emphasis on the importance of discipline and obedience in the military. It was, we learn, because of the disorganization and the viciousness of the military machine and the empire that Galba, a virtuous man, was undone. For once, the proem, introducing a set of lives deriving from another cycle, does not indulge in imagery or digressions or wit.[35] And in as much as it consists of statements that with equal or better justice could have come by way of commentary on Galba's death, its pertinence to the demonstration of Galba's personal qualities is dubious, and its anticipation of the terminal expression of sorrow may be regarded as out of place and wasteful.

A few additional examples, briefly summarized, will attest further to the inventiveness and the eccentricity of the proems. At the beginning of *Lysander* Plutarch "corrects a popular fallacy current at Delphi: the statue at the door of the Treasury of the Acanthians represents, he tells us, not Brasidas but Lysander."[36] *Romulus* gets underway with seven different accounts given for the naming of Rome; the last account, designating Romulus as the most qualified source, carries over easily if speciously into the standard discussion of Romulus' ancestry. The proem of *Theseus* openly declares, once again, that the Greek hero is being selected to form a pair with Romulus, the primary paradigm, and offers a colorful and unhurried discourse on the murkiness of the distant past, more distant than the periods in which Plutarch had found

35. I differ profoundly with Georgiadou (1988) 351: "Plutarch's moralizing introduction in the *Life of Galba* 1.1–2.1 closely resembles the introductory chapters of many of the *Parallel Lives*, which open with one or more moral concepts and then describe the heroes in accordance with the concept, as far as possible." For imagery in Plutarch, see Fuhrmann (1964). Fuhrmann has nothing to say about imagery in the *Lives* as distinct from the rest of the corpus, or about the positioning of the imagery in the *Lives*. A cursory check suggests that the frequency and the kind of imagery in the proems are no different from those in the bulk of the *Lives*. But the topic deserves further study.

36. Russell (1966a) 151. Russell continues: "Let us call this προοίμιον ἀπὸ οἰκείου, following a hint in Lucian (*de conscr. hist.* 53) about historians' prefaces: they should aim, he says, at securing προσοχή and εὐμάθεια, though they need make no special effort for εὔνοια; and προσοχή is secured if the topic broached is 'great', 'essential', 'familiar', or 'useful'. Plutarch chooses the familiar."

his earlier subjects. He hopes, he says, to be able to convert these opacities into believable history; but if the material does not submit to this kind of naturalization, he begs his listeners to be tolerant. The proem to *Pelopidas* is a more narrowly focused if also more prolix construct. Anticipating a possible reservation concerning Pelopidas and Marcellus, namely that in demonstrating their personal bravery they substituted recklessness for courage, Plutarch agrees and lists a number of authorities, including Simonides and Homer, who warned that a good fighter must protect himself and not rashly throw away his life. The proems of the *Lives* of Nicias, with its uncharacteristically savage invective against Timaeus and his spurious etymologies, and of Aratus, with its sententious appeal to a descendant of the Sicyonian who, Plutarch argues, knows the material already but who might want the essay for his children, are further evidence of a desire to diversify and to hang the biographies upon pegs that are icons of the distance Plutarch needs to travel before homing in on his subject.

Having canvassed at some length the varied stratagems Plutarch employs in his proems, we now come to one that may give us a deeper insight into the reasons for his inaugural surprises. This is the proem of *Aemilius Paulus*, a *Life* which has attracted to itself an introduction that might equally well have been attached to *Timoleon*, the second of the pair. Plutarch muses that he started the *Lives* for the pleasure of others, but that he has come to enjoy and draw profit from staying with the project, "trying, somehow or other, to use my research as a looking glass by which to embellish and improve my life in the light of the achievements registered in the *Lives*." He makes each of the heroes his guest, admires him as Priam admired Achilles, and gets moral advantage out of the encounter. Since, he says on this occasion, he selects the best figures and what is best about them, he avoids the risk of being corrupted that may attach to a different kind of biography. With respect to the particular work at hand, the two heroes about to be featured are outstanding both in quality and in their luck. In fact, readers will find it difficult to decide whether excellence or circumstance was responsible for their successes.

This bare summary of the contents of Chapter 1 shows Plutarch in the curious role of posing as his own appreciative reader. As a

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collector of models to be emulated and as a miner of earlier records Plutarch is always a reader, a reader of other authors' texts. Here, for once, he spells out the advantages and the risks of perusing his own materials. He has been improved, not merely by the example set by Aemilius and Timoleon, but by reflecting upon his own presentation and interpretation of their lives. Conversely, because he must be included among the readers appealed to at the end of the proem, the author cannot tell whether the achievements chronicled are triggered primarily, or exclusively, by the characters' native excellence or by the good luck without which, Aristotle teaches, no lasting accomplishment is possible. Plutarch, then, as both composer and reader, interpreter and consumer, must leave certain basic questions unanswered. His control over the material is limited (cf. also the uncertainties in the proem of *Theseus*, cited above); the information transmitted by his sources counts for more than any analysis or perspective furnished by him. More important, the proem equips the space in which he becomes the critic of his own composition. Unlike the post-modern, Barthesian critic, he refuses to transcend and eclipse the writing.[37] But he is made uneasy by what he reads, and by the project as such. His authorial "I" is transformed into the reactive middle voice. This is our clearest case in any of the *Lives* of an authorial disclaimer, of the sense that the *Lives* write themselves, and that it is their automaticity that guarantees their authority, but also baffles the interpretive control of the biographer. Whether this might also explain why the proem is displaced and attached to *Aemilius* rather than to *Timoleon*, which lacks the honor of a proem, is a question we cannot answer.

IV

The assortment of *Lives* we have considered should suffice to demonstrate the variety of ways in which Plutarch eases himself into the orderly accounts of the public careers in which he is interested. The proems, by their diversity and inventiveness as

37. Wright (1984) 123: "Barthes is the reader of his own writing, self-consciously displaying the various effects of transference." The reference is to Roland Barthes, *A Lover's Discourse* (New York 1979).

much as by their risk-taking, serve to hide from view, at least initially, the routine pattern, the repetitive quality of the *Lives* which, as records of model careers, must fall into line within a narrow range of imitability. Plutarch, the Platonist, is mildly conscious of the absurdity of a model life that, because of the compromises of history and because of the needs of a minimal degree of realism, must be flawed.[38] Hence a touch of discomfort, which translates into the gyrations exercised in the proems. Unlike Nepos, who in a proem like that of his *Epaminondas* sets out the order in which he is going to proceed within the work,[39] Plutarch luxuriates in an enlargement, or distortion, of the focus before the mandatory narrowing called for in detailing the genealogy or the first emergence of the hero. I use the term "luxuriate" deliberately, for when Plutarch, at the end of the proem, enters into the heart of his enterprise, he renounces the leisureliness of the preliminary amble and resigns himself to selection and focusing and restriction.[40]

But let us note once again that in thirty of the *Lives* Plutarch proceeds as Nepos and Suetonius customarily do: instead of creating a cushion of diversification before launching into his tale, he immediately sets to work upon the family background or the upbringing and the looks of the young hero, or other vital statistics such as offices held (*Camillus*), with lucubrations about the uncertainty of evidence furnishing a routine softening of the fabric. Many of these unprefaced *Lives* are, as I have said, found among the seconds, the Romans, of the pairs, whose need of an introduction may be thought to be satisfied by what is said at the start of the dyad. But note *Romulus* and *Marius*, discussed above, second pieces endowed with proems of their own.[41] And some of the most celebrated of the Greek *Lives* are without proems, notably *Solon*, *Themistocles*, *Aristides*, and *Alcibiades*. The lack of a

38. See Ferrari (1989) 122: "For the young Guardian, the models of virtue are scarcely distinct from the actual human paragons whom he begins by emulating and whose ranks he can hope... to join." Human paragons in history are not unflawed paragons.

39. It should be mentioned that only two of Nepos' twenty-nine *Lives*, *Pelopidas* and *Epaminondas*, are prefaced. Not even *Atticus*, by far the longest and most substantial of Nepos' compositions, has a proem. Of the initial chapters of Suetonius' twelve extant *Lives* of the Caesars, from Julius Caesar to Domitian, only that of Galba strays from the standard focus upon family and birth by exhibiting Livia in her encounter with an eagle chasing a white hen.

40. Schneeweiss (1985).

41. Note also *Pompey*, which combines lineage and character *e contrario*.

proem to the last is particularly expected Plutarch to use his prefa anecdote, and tribal wisdom to le show off the pitfalls of the facile looks. Some of this is done in the which brings the dyad to a close σύγκρισις; and there appears t between the lack or presence of a of a final stocktaking.[42]

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42. Erbse (1956) demonstrated that σύγκ work, guiding the selection of *topoi* and the interesting than its anticipations. This last draws attention to the "extemporizing" in t 416, that "Jede Aussage der Rahmenkapi sich... wenigstens einmal, meist öfter, in den as unduly optimistic, considering the eccen "Rahmenkapitel" assumes a regular affinity seem to me to exist.

43. Ordinarily "Plutarch deals with his su Pelling (1988) 117, on *Antony*, where Pelling fi also Pelling (1979) 91–96 for valuable sug composing the *Lives*. For the view that the beg by Scardigli (1979) 198, note 704.

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proem to the last is particularly noteworthy; one might have expected Plutarch to use his prefatory art of poetic citation, simile, anecdote, and tribal wisdom to lead into a story well calculated to show off the pitfalls of the facile combination of talent and good looks. Some of this is done in the comparative-contrastive analysis which brings the dyad to a close. Not all dyads conclude with a σύγκρισις; and there appears to be no correlation whatever between the lack or presence of a proem and the presence or lack of a final stocktaking.[42]

There is, I fear, no way of explaining why some *Lives* are preceded by an expansive prefatory section, and others are not. And where we might wonder about the absence of a proem, as in *Caesar*, we might further wonder why Caesar is not even found worthy of the stock privilege accorded to all (except Otho), a pedigree of his own, but is thrust into midlife as a mature man.[43] In the end it is as if Plutarch wanted to frustrate modern critics intent on reconstructing a biographical *schema*, a formal canon available to him and readily, if with some modifications, put to use. Whether purposely or because no need is felt, Plutarch defeats our expectation of formal consistency, except that where proems are supplied, their length is roughly the same.[44] He refuses to introduce a *Life* in the manner of a modern journalist, by anticipating and giving dramatic exposure to a specific act within the hero's career that might serve as a beacon for the *Life* as a whole, and then retracing his steps to the beginnings. The sayings

42. Erbse (1956) demonstrated that σύγκρισις is a crucial element in the body of the work, guiding the selection of *topoi* and themes. In fact, the final σύγκρισις is often less interesting than its anticipations. This last point is emphasized by Pelling (1986), who draws attention to the "extemporizing" in the final sections. Erbse's pronouncement, p. 416, that "Jede Aussage der Rahmenkapitel [sc. proem and σύγκρισις] manifestiert sich ... wenigstens einmal, meist öfter, in den erzählenden Teilen der Syzygie," strikes me as unduly optimistic, considering the eccentric scope of some of the proems. Further, "Rahmenkapitel" assumes a regular affinity between proem and σύγκρισις that does not seem to me to exist.

43. Ordinarily "Plutarch deals with his subject's γένος even when there is little to say": Pelling (1988) 117, on *Antony*, where Pelling finds the coverage remarkably unhurried. See also Pelling (1979) 91–96 for valuable suggestions concerning Plutarch's method in composing the *Lives*. For the view that the beginning of *Caesar* is lost, see the literature cited by Scardigli (1979) 198, note 704.

44. I am puzzled, therefore, by Russell's remark (1966a) 143 that an "elaborate preface" is distinctive of the *Lives*. But one of the best appreciations of the virtual structure of the *Lives* is Russell's composition (1966a) 149 of a *Life of Churchill* along Plutarchan lines. See also Russell (1966b) 47, commenting on *Alcibiades* 1–16: he characterizes the composition as "a loose structure, alarming in its incoherence."

or actions of *others* cited in many of the proems (prime specimen: *Pericles*) serve the same purpose of providing a moral jumping-off point, but the frequent lack of manifest relevance makes them into temporary enigmas waiting to be solved, with a definitive solution only rarely in evidence. The classical historians begin by identifying themselves, or their methods, or they provide a résumé of the events and the conditions of the era preceding the period in which they are interested. Philosophical writers after Plato head their treatises and their essays with generalizations designed to trigger the problems to be taken up. Plutarch himself, as an essayist, is capable of a "brisk opening" furnishing the necessary information, and then going on to justify the writing of the essay.[45] The biographer has no proemial method. The substance of the life to which he hopes to give literary shape takes its organization from the personality and the career of a public figure celebrated or considered remarkable by earlier writers, not the kind of material that lends itself either to inventive restructuring or to systematic exploitation, and hence inhospitable to an orderly preface. I would go further and say that Plutarch has to be ill at ease in the face of the disproportion between the didactic intention of the *Lives*, announced on several occasions, and the subjects' resistance to moral reduction. The great versatility of his opening gambits is a documentation of the wealth of his learning and of his creative flexibility in making connections. But it may also be the index of an embarrassment felt in the face of a task that offered no precedent for cushioning or naturalizing the routine beginning of pedigree and youth. Perhaps it is not unfair to conclude that the drifting and the freakishness of many of Plutarch's proems vindicate, to a degree, the sense of Said and Hayden White that "inaugural gestures" are deeply problematic. Plutarch, I said earlier, *appears* to exhibit remarkable assurance in fashioning his *Lives*. This assurance, I daresay, does not extend to the proems, whose unsteadiness may well reflect a larger uncertainty. The proems are full of the most fascinating material, but *as* proems many of them must be declared failures. Perhaps Plutarch should be commended for this also, for clearly demonstrating to us that in so ambitious a project as the setting

45. Hillyard (1981) 37, on *aud. poet.* I am not sure about Hillyard's "brisk," but he is right about the pragmatic relevance of the opening.

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st be declared failures. Perhaps
ed for this also, for clearly
nbitious a project as the setting

not sure about Hillyard's "brisk," but he is
ening.

up of models for imitation, a patently unrevolutionary act, beginnings are bound to stumble.

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Initium mihi ope iterum T. Vir

THOMA

So begins Tacitus' famous accou four emperors and, with it, the r as a historian. Both beginnings, at least partially grounded in S itself, so we are informed, is an *Lepido Q. Catulo consulibus ac de* Sallust began his own *Historie* general account of events over a the author's boyhood or youth; two preliminary studies devo individual Romans active towa for treatment in the *Histories* (A foreign enemies of Rome (th Numidians).

The parallels are striking an to explain what might otherwise of when and how to begin.[2] Wh Sallustian, annalistic precedent beginning of a particular consu 1–16, 69) during which Galba roughly in the middle of the per began in early 68, once it beca

1. Fr. 1. Cf. Klingner (1928) 167ff. a references see Works Cited at end of chapt

2. Well stated by Hainsworth (1964), the I think, been satisfactorily solved in any subs treatments, the survey in Fuhrmann (1960) alone in finding the choice of January 69 so discussion.

3. One cannot, of course, know how rigi year-by-year articulation of events announc inferences from the two representatives of 1.60.4ff., Tacitus, *Ann.* 1.55ff.), where the exception.