



The Regal Image in Plutarch's Lives

W. Jeffrey Tatum

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THE REGAL IMAGE IN PLUTARCH'S *LIVES*

I. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTIONS IN PLUTARCHAN NARRATIVE*

THAT the physical description of a biographer's subject constitutes a natural and (one should think) necessary element of the genre seems an unremarkable premise on which to entertain a reading of Plutarch. In such chronicles of wasted time as we possess, after all, descriptions of the fair and the not-so-fair are hardly unusual, regardless of literary category. And, at least since the time of Leo, the prevailing scholarly assumption has been that Plutarch's *Lives* ordinarily include an account of the subject's appearance as a standard structural component of the biography—an idea still to be found in P. Stadter's magisterial commentary on the *Pericles*.¹ One ought perhaps to hesitate in speaking of generic requirements for Plutarchan biography, if only because we are now more than ever quite uncertain in which exact literary tradition our author is most appropriately situated, though it is fair (I think) to observe how commonly physical descriptions are to be found in the extant biographies of Cornelius Nepos and in Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*.² The narrative conventions of biography, one instinctively supposes, require a personal description. Moreover, the *eikonismos* (εἰκονισμός) was by Plutarch's day a staple of rhetorical technique, useful to encomium and invective alike, and regularly discussed in handbooks.³ Literary and rhetorical expectations, then, tend to support Leo's proposition.

But, as Aristoula Georgiadou has pointed out, physical description is by no means a regular feature of Plutarchan biography.⁴ Now, while my own reckoning diverges somewhat from Georgiadou's, and a few physical descriptions have been overlooked in her paper, none the less she is essentially correct to observe that in approximately forty percent of Plutarch's *Lives* the subject's appearance goes unrecorded.⁵ Furthermore, several of Plutarch's descriptions are exceedingly brief, even by the standards of the *eikonismos*: Flamininus' appearance is simply *φιλόνηθρος*; Themistocles' is simply heroic—although in each of these lives Plutarch alludes specifically to sculptural representations of their subjects. Marcellus is 'powerful in body with

* Versions of this paper were read at Siena and at Liverpool. I am grateful to both audiences for their patience and for their advice. Special thanks are owed to Jeri DeBrohun and Chris Pelling for their scrutiny of an earlier draft. Tim Duff was kind enough to lend me his copy of his Cambridge dissertation, *Signs of the soul: moralising in the parallel lives of Plutarch* (1994), which is soon to appear (in revised form) under the imprint of Oxford University Press. This final version incorporates some material that will appear in I. Gallo (ed.), *Teoria e prassi politica nelle opere di Plutarco. Atti del v convegno internazionale plutarcheo*. All references to Plutarch's *Lives* are to the Teubner editions of K. Ziegler.

¹ F. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer literarischen Form* (Leipzig 1901) 180 ff.; cf. P.A. Stadter, *A Commentary on Plutarch's Pericles* (Chapel Hill 1989) xxxiv.

² Genre: J. Geiger, *Cornelius Nepos and ancient political biography* (Stuttgart 1985); cf. J.L. Moles *CR* xxxix (1989) 229-34. Descriptions in Nepos and Suetonius: J. Couissin, *REL* xxxi (1953) 234-56; E.C. Evans, 'Physiognomics in the ancient world', *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* lix (1960) 49 ff.

³ G. Misener, *CPh* xix (1924) 97-123, is fundamental. Descriptive essays were part of the stock-in-trade of imperial sophists, cf. A.S. Pease, *CPh* xxi (1926) 27-42; C.P. Jones, *The Roman world of Dio Chrysostom* (Cambridge, Mass. 1978) 15.

⁴ A. Georgiadou, 'Idealistic and realistic portraiture in the Lives of Plutarch', *ANRW* ii. 33. 6 (Berlin and New York 1992) 4616-623.

⁵ Physical descriptions overlooked by Georgiadou: *Thes.* 5. 1; *Rom.* 3. 4-5; 6. 3; 7. 5 (see below); *Flam.* 5. 7. There are in some cases further instances in the *Lives* of a subject's description which are not noted in Georgiadou's article: e.g. *Sert.* 4. 3; *Pyrrh.* 24. 5; *Mar.* 34. 5; 43. 2. Such (venial) oversights (it must be said) constitute one of the common hazards faced by anyone studying so large a corpus as Plutarch's.

a hand forged to strike', whereas Coriolanus is merely 'strong'.⁶ And it is hardly obvious exactly how one should receive what is more accurately designated as a non-description, such as the often cited representation of Marius at *Mar.* 2. 1: 'I have seen a marble statue of the appearance of Marius at Ravenna in Gaul; it very well conveys the harshness and bitterness which are ascribed to his *ethos*'. It too often passes unremarked that Marius's countenance is not actually described here, but rather his character.⁷ The point of this is to notice not merely the occasionalness of physical description in the *Lives* generally, but to underline Plutarch's tendency to omit extended descriptions of his biographical subjects.

The relative infrequency of extended descriptions is remarkable in view of the factors which, in addition to the literary and rhetorical conventions just mentioned, ought to have prodded Plutarch toward the inclusion of descriptions in his *Lives*. Granted, most of Plutarch's subjects were amply represented in painting and sculpture, so that his contemporary readers will have possessed a satisfactory image of (say) Caesar's or Alexander's features when they began to unroll the relevant *Life*. Nevertheless, what most of all plants the expectation of physical description in the mind of Plutarch's reader, I should suppose, is the author's own intense and abundantly demonstrated interest in representing the *ethos* of his subject, a topic which invites a related interest in the subject's physiognomy.⁸

The notion that inner excellence is reflected in superficial beauty—as well as the reverse of that notion—was unquestionably a deep-seated habit of Greek thought, reflected in the perfection of Homer's gods and heroes—and the inferiority of Thersites—and the ubiquitous expression, καλοκάγαθός. Furthermore, the idea that physical appearance signified certain aspects of nature and character suffused Greek culture, though in various ways and with varying degrees of sophisticated reflection, from the vulgar popularity of the handsome⁹ to the rather distasteful Greek disapproval of Oriental and barbarian physical traits¹⁰ to the philosophical efforts in the Hippocratic corpus to explain the relationship between climate, physique and disposition.¹¹ The most extreme manifestation of this habit of mind is to be found in the writings of the physiognomists, scientists who explored in detail the relationship between the body and character—not for purposes of explanation (as Galen was to complain) but for diagnosis.¹² Few Greek or Roman authors emerge as strict physiognomists, but the proposition that a physiognomic consciousness pervaded Greco-Roman literature seems difficult to refute.

Physiognomic tendencies had their effect on Greek art as well, though not without some controversy. In his *Memorabilia* Xenophon represents Socrates and the painter Parrhasius debating whether it is possible for portraiture to imitate the *ethos* of the soul, an assertion

⁶ *Flam.* 1. 1 (Flamininus' statue); 5. 7 (his appearance); *Them.* 22. 3; *Marc.* 1. 1; *Cor.* 2. 1. In each case, even the brief description provided by Plutarch plays into the thematic character of the life; for the latter two lives see esp. S. Swain, *JHS* cx (1990) 126-45, esp. 136-42.

⁷ A realistic description of the overweight Marius comes at *Mar.* 34. 5, and at 43. 2 there is a (generalized) depiction of Marius' terrible visage.

⁸ On the ethical purpose of the *Lives* see C.B.R. Pelling, *Plutarch, Life of Antony* (Cambridge 1988) 11 ff.; Stadter (n. 1) xxvi ff., T.E. Duff, *Signs of the Soul: Moralising in the Parallel Lives of Plutarch* (Diss. Cambridge, 1994) 2 ff., each with further literature.

⁹ Cf. *Plut. Alc.* 16; *Pomp.* 2. 1.

¹⁰ J. Jouanna *Ktéma* vi (1981) 3-15; E. Hall, *Inventing the barbarian: Greek self-definition through tragedy* (Oxford 1989) 172 ff.

¹¹ An example would be the essay, [Hipp.] *De Aere Aquis Locis*; cf. Evans (n. 2) 17 ff.; W. Backhaus, *Hist.* xxv (1976) 170-85.

¹² In addition to the monograph by Evans (n. 2), see T.S. Barton, *Power and knowledge: astrology, physiognomics, and medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor 1994) 95-131; M. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and self-presentation in ancient Rome* (Princeton 1995) esp. 55 ff.. Galen's complaint: Galen, *Mixt.* ii 6.

Parrhasius rejects by asking: 'But how could a thing be represented, Socrates, which has neither symmetry nor color ... and which, in fact, is not even visible?' (*Mem.* iii 10.3). Yet artists, especially artists of the Hellenistic age and later, claimed to employ not simply *mimesis* but a deeper intuitive insight, *phantasia* (φαντασία), which enabled them to portray dimensions of a subject that transcended mere physical appearance.¹³ Hence the claim of Lysippus that, whereas others sculpted men 'as they were', he was able to represent them 'as they appeared'.¹⁴ Plutarch was aware of the limitations of some artists, that not everyone could be a Lysippus: in his *De Fortuna Alexandri* (2.2 = *Mor.* 335B) Plutarch observes that 'Lysippus was the only one who revealed in bronze the *ethos* of Alexander and who at the same time expressed his virtue along with his form'. And in his explanation for composing a *Life of Lucullus* Plutarch remarks that 'since we believe that a portrait which reveals character and disposition (τὸ ἦθος καὶ τὸν τρόπον) is far more beautiful than one which merely copies form and feature, we shall incorporate this man's deeds into our parallel lives' (*Cim.* 2. 2). Still, whatever the failings of various artists, the second century of our era was dense with paintings and statuary, coins and gems, all promulgating the likenesses of famous men, especially of past rulers and the current emperor, images which were wrought with the express intention of signifying one or several aspects of the ruler's character and which consequently required deciphering by the multiple constituencies of the viewing public.¹⁵ The art of Plutarch's age, like its literature, encouraged the expectation that a biographer whose susceptibilities tended toward matters ethical would deal at least briefly with his subjects' physical appearance. And it must be observed that Plutarch himself draws the analogy between the artist's attempt to communicate his subject's *ethos* in the expression of the face (and especially in the eyes) and the biographer's intention that his own art will provide for each subject an image of his life.¹⁶

Nor should we forget that Plutarch lived at a time when interest in the science of physiognomy was at a peak.¹⁷ His rough contemporary, the famous sophist Polemo of Laodicea, was an enthusiastic and influential student of physiognomy. Which is not to suggest that Plutarch was so much a child of his age that he could scarcely avoid being a strict physiognomist—a thing he certainly was not—but nor can we doubt that Plutarch was aware of the practices of the physiognomists or that he lived and wrote in an atmosphere heavy with what

¹³ J.J. Pollitt, *The ancient view of Greek art* (New Haven 1974) 52 ff. and 293 ff. Cf. also *id.*, *The art of Rome, c. 753 BC-AD 337, sources and documents* (Cambridge 1983) 213 ff.

¹⁴ Pliny, *N.H.* xxxiv 65: 'ab illis factos quales essent homines, a se quales uiderentur esse'. Cf. J.J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge 1986) 47.

¹⁵ Often a rather thorny matter owing to the problem of reallocation of statues: cf. Dio Chrysostom xxxi and Jones (n. 3) 28 ff. Reallocation also affected painting: Pliny, *N.H.* xxxv 94. That statues could be assumed to preserve an accurate likeness of their subjects (despite the problem of reallocation) was Plutarch's working principle, cf. A.E. Wardman, 'Description of personal appearance in Plutarch and Suetonius: the use of statues as evidence,' *CQ* xvii (1967) 414-20 and J. Buckler, 'Plutarch and autopsy', *ANRW* ii 33. 6 (1992) 4819 ff. and 4829 f., a view which obtains in modern scholarship as well, cf. G.M.A. Richter, *Greek Portraits* ii and iii (Brussels 1959-1960). The literary purposes to which statues were put by Plutarch are examined by J. Mossman, 'Plutarch's use of statues,' in M.A. Flower and M. Toher (eds.), *Georgica. Greek studies in honour of George Cawkwell*, *BICS* Suppl. lviii (London 1991) 98-119.

¹⁶ Plut. *Alex.* 1. 3; *Cim.* 2. 3; *Per.* 2; *De Gen.* 1 = *Mor.* 575B-D; cf. F. Fuhrmann, *Les images de Plutarque* (Paris 1964) 47; Buckler (n. 15) 4789 f. and 4829 f.; Duff (n. 8) 4 ff.

¹⁷ Evans (n. 2) 11 ff. On Polemo see W. Stegemann, *Antonius Polemon, der Hauptvertreter des zweiten Sophistik* (Stuttgart 1942); G.W. Bowersock, *Greek sophists in the Roman empire* (Oxford 1969) 20-25 and 120-23; (more generally) G. Anderson, *The Second sophistic: a cultural phenomenon in the Roman empire* (London 1993) 13-46; Gleason (n. 12) 21 ff.

I have already called a physiognomic consciousness.¹⁸ This awareness, yet again, will have raised expectations of physical descriptions in Plutarch's work, even as it required the biographer to react to the prevailing tendency to associate external qualities with habits of character.

Plutarch's decision to eschew extended physical descriptions constitutes an issue both of literary style and of intellectual predisposition. To begin with the former, Plutarch must be said to be manipulating a narrative convention both when he omits extended descriptions and when, more rarely as we have seen, he includes one. For it was by no means the case that Plutarch was opposed to vividness (ἐνάργεια) in narrative. Quite the contrary: he regarded *enargeia* and even δῖαθεσις as high and admirable rhetorical virtues. Though Plutarch tended toward a Platonic suspicion of *mimesis* he was able none the less to acknowledge the aesthetic merits of a vivid text without thereby confusing graphic description for reliable history.¹⁹ In the *Lives* Plutarch resorts to a great variety of narrative devices to portray the biographical subject: nearly every scene is composed with so much concentration on the actions, postures and manners of the protagonist that secondary figures are frequently occluded or ignored.²⁰ What rarely enters the picture is sheer physical description.

Consequently, in the context of Plutarchan biography, an extended description, especially in view of its marked quality, requires a critical response. The problem of description, that is, the contemplation of the nature of the relationship obtaining between (especially) set-piece descriptive passages and the actual telling of a story within a narrative, has increasingly become a topic of interest to students of classical literature.²¹ The obvious focus of critical concern, it is fair to observe, has been the *ekphrasis* of poetry, and the current avenue of approach has been along narratological lines.²² That such a tack is reasonable seems beyond question. The narratological studies of Gérard Genette and his successors have successfully established a vocabulary and a typology of techniques useful for isolating various modes of representation in narrative, though, as the continuing industry of literary theorists attests, the integration of narrative's many modes resists fully adequate articulation.²³ Descriptions, our concern here, can be understood variously as ornamental recreational pauses, as digressions challenging conventional ideas of literary unity and literary wholeness, or as discrete passages that inspire a need to integrate the description into the totality of the text.²⁴ Nor is this a problem confined to the study of poetry. Historiographers, too, have evinced an appreciation for this uneasy aspect of the texts which they must confront. While students of Plutarch's *Lives* have been for the most part blissfully unaffected by this literary-critical concern, it is clearly relevant to the study of

¹⁸ Plutarch not a physiognomist: Wardman (n. 15) 414-20 (cf. 417: 'In all this Plutarch shows himself as a master of eclectic convenience'); Georgiadou (n. 4) 4623. Physiognomic expectations obtained in ancient drama as well: D. Wiles, *The masks of Menander* (Cambridge 1991) 152 ff.

¹⁹ L. Van der Stockt, *Twinkling and twilight. Plutarch's reflections on literature* (Brussels 1992) 26-36.

²⁰ F. Frazier, 'Contributions à l'étude de la composition des "Vies" de Plutarque: 'l'élaboration des grandes scènes', *ANRW* ii 33. 6 (1992) 4493 ff. and 4506 ff.

²¹ The bibliography is (of course) ponderous. Important modern contributions include: G. Genette, *Narrative discourse: an essay in method* trans. J.E. Lewin (Ithaca 1980); *id.*, *Figures of literary discourse* trans. A. Sheridan (New York 1982), esp. 127 ff.; J. Kittey, 'Descriptive Limits', *Yale French Studies* lxi (1981) 225-43; M. Bal, *Narratology, introduction to the theory of narrative* trans. C. van Boheemen (Toronto 1985). An excellent treatment, both theoretical and pragmatic, of this issue in Greco-Roman poetry is D.P. Fowler, 'Narrate and describe: the problem of Ekphrasis', *JRS* lxxxi (1991) 25-35 (Fowler provides a valuable bibliography of contemporary work at p. 25 n. 3).

²² Genette, *Figures of literary discourse* (n. 21) 134; cf. Fowler (n. 21) 26; A. Laird, *JRS* lxxxiii (1993) 18 ff.

²³ P.J.M. Sturges, *Narrativity: theory and practice* (Oxford 1992) 6 and 142 ff.

²⁴ Fowler (n. 21) 26-28.

ancient biography.²⁵ Granted that biographical (like purely historical) discourse is unlike pure fiction in important respects, it none the less tells a story by employing narrative techniques inviting literary analysis (however aware the critic must be of the genre's distinctive truth claims).²⁶

Descriptive passages in Plutarch, if I may employ a crude functional distinction, fall into one of two sorts: one is the typical set-piece description, the *eikonismos*, coming near the beginning of the life and linked ordinarily with the subject's origins and early character; the other is more cunningly woven into the fabric of the story, where it is less ostensibly ornamental and operates more efficiently in the economy of the narrative. In both cases, as I hope to show, the physical description is integrated into the action, the themes and the lesson of the life.²⁷

II. REGAL IMAGES

Let us turn now from matters of style. Philosophical suspicion of *mimesis*, whatever Plutarch's Platonist propensities, will hardly account for the rarity of physical descriptions that we have observed, since vividness represents a rhetorical virtue even for Plutarch—nor is *enargeia* a quality lacking in his *Lives*. It is not the representation of men, then, that troubles Plutarch, else he should not have become a biographer, nor does he shy from graphic narrative apart from treatments of personal appearance. Which makes it all the more intriguing that so many of Plutarch's physical descriptions are attached to the biographies of regal figures, an observation that brings us back to the physiognomic consciousness in view of the heavy significance of image in Greek philosophizing about monarchy.²⁸ It is from this perspective that Plutarch's intellectual predisposition can emerge into view. In what remains of this paper I should like to consider Plutarch's portrayal of kings, in order to illustrate the biographer's versatility in exploiting possibilities for integrating description into his narrative and in order to show how Plutarch's use of the image of the king underscores some of his own conceptions of monarchy, which diverge both from the vulgar tradition (as represented in the iconography of the plastic arts) and the philosophical tradition of kingship theory. It will become evident as we go along that Plutarch's dissatisfaction with traditional royal ideology is of a piece with his implied critique of the premises of the physiognomic consciousness.

But first a few comments on the ideology of monarchy. Kingship inspired in the Greeks a

²⁵ F.E. Brenk, 'Plutarch's Life "Markos Antonios": a literary and cultural study', *ANRW* ii 33. 6 (1992) 4402 ff. and 4420 ff.; Frazier (n. 20). See also A. Deremetz, 'Plutarque: Histoire de l'Origine et Genèse du Récit', *REG* ciii (1990/91) 54-78.

²⁶ Cf. Genette, *Fiction et diction* (Paris 1991), esp. ch. 3. Recent work that addresses (from varying perspectives) the literariness of biography includes: J.H. Anderson, *Biographical truth: the representation of historical persons in Tudor-Stuart writing* (New Haven 1984); P. Rose, 'Fact and Fiction in biography, in *Writing of women: essays in a renaissance* (Middletown 1985) 64-81; P.J. Eakin, *Fictions in autobiography: studies in the art of self-invention* (Princeton 1985); W.H. Epstein, *Recognizing biography* (Philadelphia 1987); P. Honan, *Authors' lives: on literary biography and the arts of language* (New York 1990). Very important for ancient historiography is the work of S. Hornblower in S. Hornblower (ed.), *Greek historiography* (Oxford 1994) 2 f. and 131 ff. (though Hornblower curiously refers to narratology as 'the new art' [p. 2] and as being 'in its infancy' [p. 166]).

²⁷ The two types outlined here should not be regarded as strict categories but rather as limits on a (not yet fully resolved) spectrum. *Lives* which present a typical *eikonismos*: *Cim.* 5. 3; *Per.* 3. 3; 5. 1; *Fab. Max.* 1. 4; *Sull.* 2. 1; *Demosth.* 4. 4-5; *Alex.* 4. 1-3; *Cat. Min.* 1. 3-5; *Ant.* 4. 1; *Pyrrh.* 3. 6-9 (but cf. 24. 5). *Lives* which display physical descriptions that are more functionally implicated in the text: *Thes.* 5. 1; *Alc.* 1. 4-8; 16. 3; *Lys.* 1. 1; *Ages.* 2. 3-4; *Cic.* 3. 7; *Caes.* 4. 5-9; 17. 2-3; *Sert.* 1. 8; 3. 1; 4. 3; *Eum.* 11. 3; *Agis* 4. 1. Less easy to decide are: *Them.* 22. 3; *Pomp.* 2. 1; *Phoc.* 5. 1; *Mar.* 2. 1; *Philop.* 2. 1-3; *Arat.* 3. 1-2. I have ignored *Cor.* 2. 1, *Marc.* 1. 1, and *Flam.* 5. 7 owing to their excessive brevity.

²⁸ Of the lives of kings, only *Numa*, *Cleomenes* (if that may be regarded as a separate biography) and *Artaxerxes* lack physical descriptions of their subjects.

vision, or rather visions, of the ideal monarch, a topic which has often attracted the attention of modern scholars.²⁹ Especially from the fourth century BC, prescriptions for the best kind of king are provided in abundance by philosophers and orators: he must possess every excellence, justice being the universally recognized *sine qua non* of the good ruler, and he ought to be superior in bodily appearance, like Isocrates' Evagoras (*Ev.* 22-23) or the ideal king of the neo-Pythagorean, Diotogenes, whatever his date.³⁰ It is worth observing that the idea of physiognomy was inherent in royal ideology from the start. The necessity of reinventing monarchy during the period of the 'successor kings' created an opportunity for artists and philosophers to explore the nature of the institution, one result of which is that Hellenistic monarchy remained the vehicle for the examination of the good ruler well into the empire, as the content of Dio Chrysostom's orations *Peri basileias* suffices to demonstrate (*Or.* i-iv).

Justice was important to the perfect king, but might—the capacity to win victories and to impose security—was crucial to his success. Consequently, an imposing physique which elicited awe, even outright fear, became an expectation of the good king both in the (explicit) opinion of intellectuals and in the view of ordinary subjects, as one can easily infer from extant royal portraits in sculpture and on coinage. The typical artistic representation of the Hellenistic king, a type which survived (though with decreasing frequency) well into the empire, is youthful, vigorous, strikingly handsome, and adorned with heroic and even divine attributes.³¹ This corresponds all too neatly with the regal profile preserved in the surviving discourse of Diotogenes (*ap. Stob. Anth.* iv 7.62 = 266 ff. [Hense]):

And besides issuing public decrees the good king should present to the state proper attitudes in body and mind. He should impersonate the statesman and have an appearance of practicality so as not to seem to the mob as either harsh or despicable, but at once pleasant and yet watchful from every angle. And he will succeed in this if first he make an impression of majesty by his appearance and utterances, and by his looking the part of a ruler; if secondly, he be gracious both in conversation and appearance, and in actual benefactions; and third, if he inspire fear in his subjects by his hatred of evil and by his punishments, by his speed of action and in general by his skill and industry in kingly duties. For majesty, a godlike thing, can make him admired and honored by the multitude; graciousness will make him popular and beloved; while the ability to inspire fear will make him terrible and unconquerable in his dealings with enemies, but magnanimous and trustworthy toward his friends. ... He must wrap himself about with such distinction and superiority in his appearance, in his thought life and reflections, and in the character of his soul, as well as in the actions, movements, and attitudes of his body. So will he succeed in putting into order those who look upon him, amazed at his majesty, at his self-control, and his fitness for distinction. For to look upon the good king ought to affect the souls of those who see him no less than a flute or harmony.³²

The practical political dimension of the king's image must not be overlooked. Impressions mattered. As the thoroughly pragmatic Polybius tells us, Antiochus III judged Demetrius, the son of Euthydemus I of Bactria, 'worthy of kingship on account of his appearance, demeanour

²⁹ Fundamental is E.R. Goodenough, 'The political philosophy of Hellenistic kingship', *YCS* i (1928) 55-104. See also K. Scott, 'Plutarch and the ruler cult', *TAPhA* lx (1929) 117-35; G.F. Chesnut, *ANRW* ii. 16.2 (Berlin and New York 1978) 1310-32; A. Henrichs, *HSCP* lxxxviii (1984) 139-58 (esp. 147 ff.); S.R.F. Price, *Rituals and power: the Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1984); F.W. Walbank, 'Monarchies and Monarchic Ideas', in F.W. Walbank and A.E. Astin (eds.), *CAH*² vii. 1 (Cambridge 1984) 62-100; R.R.R. Smith, *Hellenistic royal portraits* (Oxford 1988) 49 ff.; S. Sherwin-White and A. Kuhrt, *From Samarkhand to Sardis: a new approach to the Seleucid empire* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1993) 114-40; the essays by K. Bringman and L. Koenen in A. Bulloch, E.S. Gruen, A.A. Long, A. Stewart (eds.), *Images and Ideologies: self-definition in the Hellenistic world* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1993) 7-24 and 25-115 respectively—all with further references.

³⁰ The importance of justice: Goodenough (n. 29) 57-79; Walbank (n. 29) 82 f. Diotogenes: Chesnut (n. 29) 1313 ff. (with discussion of the difficulties in dating). Diotogenes' views: Diotogenes *ap. Stobaeus, Anth.* iv 7. 61-2.

³¹ Smith (n. 29) 46 ff.

³² This translation is from Goodenough (n. 29) 71 f.

and bearing' (Polyb. xi 39).³³ The ideal king, then, ought in principle to incorporate his virtues, for reasons both philosophic and practical.

What is remarkable in view of the infrequency of extended physical descriptions in Plutarch's *Lives* generally is the fact that the image of the king does actually appear in most royal biographies. One might be tempted to assume that here at last our author has succumbed to the physiognomic sensibilities of his age and especially the weighty role of physiognomy in monarchical theory. Such an assumption would be erroneous, however, and, in order to make this clear, it is time now to turn from contexts to texts themselves. Which brings us to the regal image in two lives that I should like to examine with some care, the *Demetrius* and the *Romulus*.

III. DEMETRIUS

No physical description in Plutarch rivals in extent or detail that of Demetrius.³⁴ In the *Demetrius* the depiction of the king constitutes the sort of isolated segment one associates with the generic requirements of biography: it follows Plutarch's examination of Demetrius' origins and introduces an anecdote illustrating the intimacy that existed between Demetrius and Antigonos, itself a conspicuous theme of the *Life*. Like an *ekphrasis* in poetry, then, Plutarch's portrayal of the man who would be king has important implications for the remainder of the biography and for Demetrius' subsequent career; it begs for interpretation and remains a palpable reference for the interpretation of the biography:

Demetrius was lesser in stature than his father, but he was tall none the less. In the appearance and beauty of his face he was astonishing and strange, so that none of the sculptors or painters achieved a likeness of him. For at once he had charm (χάρις) and gravity (βάρος) and the capacity to inspire awe (φόβος) and the freshness of youth (ῥοα)—and blended with his youth and impetuosity were a heroic appearance and a kingly majesty, all of which was hard to reproduce. His *ethos* was so fitted by nature as to inspire in men both fear and delight. For while he was a most agreeable companion and the most delicate of kings in the leisure devoted to drinking and luxury, he none the less had a most energetic and eager persistency in action. Wherefore he used to make Dionysus his pattern, more than any other deity, since this god was most terrible in waging war, and on the other hand most skilful, when war was over, in making peace minister to joy and pleasure. (*Dem.* 2. 2-3).

Here Plutarch has represented the ideal royal physique, corresponding perfectly both to the ideology of kingship purveyed in philosophical discourses and to the evidence of royal portraiture in the plastic arts, though it is worth observing Plutarch's insistence that the image he describes here could not be recuperated from an examination of art, an emphasis betraying at once the biographer's awareness of the difficulties faced by artists hoping to do more than fashion a mere likeness, as well as Plutarch's recourse to literary sources, in this instance to Hieronymus of Cardia.³⁵ Demetrius' *ethos* is embodied in a figure which boldly advertises his royal capacities, a glorious speciousness which the reader perhaps ought to read as ironic, owing to the proem of the work, which justifies the composition of the *Demetrius* on the grounds that 'great natures yield great evils as well as great virtues' (*Dem.* 1. 7) and which describes both Demetrius and Antony as blameworthy.³⁶ As one modern scholar has put it, 'Plutarch is setting

³³ Cf. Polyb. xxvii 12; xxx 18; xxxvi 15.

³⁴ Plut. *Dem.* 2. 2-3. The description of Antony in the parallel *Life*, *Ant.* 4. 1, in which Antony is assimilated to the image of Heracles (curiously categorized as 'realistic' by Georgiadou [n. 4] 4618), is similarly detailed. A recent, useful introduction to the *Demetrius* is O. Osvaldi and R. Scuderi, *Plutarco, vite parallele: Demetrio e Antonio* (Milan 1989) 35-93.

³⁵ J. Hornblower, *Hieronymus of Cardia* (Oxford 1981) 69; cf. Diod. Sic. xix 81. 4.

³⁶ *Dem.* 1. 7-9.

up his perfect Diadoch for his tragic reversal of fortune'.³⁷ Still, the impressive and extensive profile of Demetrius which Plutarch provides at this point in the biography at least raises the question whether his perfectly regal exterior signifies true regality or mere show. For at the start, as ch. 4 explains, Demetrius was by nature φιλόανθρωπος and inclined to justice.³⁸

Indeed, the biography of Demetrius can scarcely escape becoming a commentary on Hellenistic kingship. As is well known, the diadem and the royal title were assumed by Antigonos in 306, after Demetrius' crushing defeat of Ptolemy at Salamis, a victory which established Antigonos' heir with the credentials critical for the assertion of a dynasty; immediately receiving the regal title, Antigonos sent a diadem to his son, whom he addressed as king. Thus was born the Hellenistic monarchy, imitated by the remaining successors, but invented, as it were, by Antigonos out of the martial successes of his son and out of their secure, stable relationship—the latter being an asset inimitable by Antigonos' rivals.³⁹

Of these events Plutarch was well aware; indeed, he is a principal source for the modern historian. The process of the monarchy's reinvention after Alexander fascinates our author, who describes the flattering, despicable conduct of the Athenians in 307 when they hailed Demetrius as king (*Dem.* 10. 3) and elevated him nearly to the status of a god, an account in which reminiscences of the description of Demetrius can be detected: the image of the king is explicitly invoked at *Dem.* 10. 4-5, though from an oblique perspective and with greater conciseness ('They also decreed that the figures of Demetrius and Antigonos should be woven into the sacred robe of Athena, together with those of the other gods'); moreover, in ch. 12, we find the proposal that 'whenever Demetrius visited Athens he should be received with the same divine honors that were paid to Demeter and Dionysus' (*Dem.* 12. 1). In fact, the Athenians went so far as to rename the Dionysia as the Demetria (*Dem.* 12. 2).⁴⁰ But the image of the king is susceptible to cross-readings: the gods sent winds that tore to pieces the representation of Demetrius on Athena's robe, and frost forced the cancellation of the Demetria.⁴¹

Yet it is the investiture of 306 that most interests Plutarch, and he formulates the effect of the renewal of kingship in terms of an unfortunate costume change.⁴² After citing the rush on the part of the other diadochs to imitate the Antigonids, Plutarch makes the observation: 'The assumption of these dignities meant something more than the mere addition of a name or a change in appearance. It stirred the spirits of these men, raised their ideas to a different plane' (*Dem.* 18. 5). The assumption of the monarchy introduced pride, self-importance, harshness and open autocracy; the successor-kings are compared to tragic actors who, though ordinary men, alter their deportment when they don regal robes for the stage.⁴³ Though possessed by nature of a genuinely royal presence, as we are told at the start, and naturally disposed to justice, Demetrius also participated—to his own disadvantage—in the charade of the new monarchy. That such was the case is made clear at *Dem.* 41 and following. There Demetrius is explicitly compared with actors, and his theatricality is criticized, along with his arrogance and his new

³⁷ Smith (n. 29) 52.

³⁸ *Dem.* 4. 1.

³⁹ R.A. Billows, *Antigonos the One-Eyed and the creation of the Hellenistic state* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1990), 136 ff., esp. 155 ff. On the importance of the dynastic factor in Hellenistic kingship generally, see most recently Sherwin-White and Kuhrt (n. 29) 125 ff.

⁴⁰ The importance of Dionysus in royal portraiture: Smith (n. 29) 37 ff. It is unimportant to our purposes that Plutarch is historically inaccurate here, cf. Billows (n. 39) 150.

⁴¹ *Dem.* 12. 2-7.

⁴² *Dem.* 18.

⁴³ *Dem.* 18. 5.

unwillingness to dispense justice properly.⁴⁴

Demetrius' conduct undermines his regal aspect, whereas we are told that the Macedonians came to admire Demetrius' rival, Pyrrhus, because only in his actions 'could they see an image of Alexander's courage' (*Dem.* 41. 5).⁴⁵ Not that courage is, in Plutarch's view, the chief glory of monarchy, a message he underscores in this *Life*:

And indeed there is nothing that becomes a king so much as the task of dispensing justice. Ares, the god of war, is a tyrant, as Timotheus tells us, but Law, in Pindar's words, is the monarch of all things. Homer tells us that Zeus entrusts kings not with 'city-takers' or bronze-beaked ships, but with decrees of justice, which are to be protected and kept inviolate, and it is not the most warlike or unjust or murderous of kings but the most righteous to whom he gives the title of Zeus' confidant and disciple. Demetrius on the other hand took pleasure in being given a nickname which is the opposite of the one bestowed on the king of the gods, for Zeus is known as the protector of cities but Demetrius as the besieger. It is through such an attitude that naked power, if it lacks wisdom, allows evil actions to usurp the place of good, and glorious achievements to be associated with injustice (*Dem.* 42. 8-11).

Demetrius' nature and its handsome display become contemptible in the absence of a properly developed character. Lacking princely counsel, the dashing 'successor' doomed himself to failure and disgrace. For Demetrius there was to be no 'majesty though in ruin'.

IV. ROMULUS

The *Romulus* illustrates how Plutarchan descriptions can be more intimately involved in the movement of the narrative, what Genette has referred to as 'concurrency'.⁴⁶ In the *Romulus* Plutarch enjoyed a wider range for his literary invention. For, despite his hopeful wish that 'myth yield and be purified by reason and take on the appearance of history' (*Thes.* 1. 5), Plutarch cannot have failed to appreciate that the legendary quality of the lives of Theseus and Romulus introduced a certain poetic aspect to the biographer's art. Our awareness of the extent to which Plutarch succeeded in exploiting the literary possibilities of this *Life* has been enhanced by the recent work of A. Deremetz, who has demonstrated how Plutarch's narrative, through its juxtaposition of varying accounts of Rome's origins, requires the reader to rehearse the historiographical challenges facing the student of early Rome and, furthermore, that, in its preference for Greek accounts (chosen on grounds valid by Greek standards), the text both problematizes and affirms the role of Greek erudition in the recuperation of Roman history.⁴⁷ In short, Deremetz has made clear the extent to which narrative strategies are employed in the *Romulus* in order to deliver messages that are at once didactic and, from Plutarch's comprehensive perspective, philosophical. Plutarch's manipulation of focalization functions similarly in this *Life* to instruct the reader in the proper virtues of a king and on the discriminating appreciation of royal physiognomy.

⁴⁴ *Dem.* 41-42. Theatricality, of course, constitutes a criticism. Brenk (n. 25) 4364 has suggested that Plutarch's criticism of ruler cult may to some extent derive from the excesses of the Neronian period; if so, then the introduction of theatrical language in Plutarch's treatment of Demetrius carries additional significance (*cf.* Brenk, *op. cit.* 4356 f. and 4363).

⁴⁵ It may be, as Mossman (n. 15) 109 maintains, that εἰδωλον here suggests Pyrrhus' fundamental inferiority to Alexander, though the chief point is to criticize Demetrius. Elsewhere Mossman has perceptively if tentatively proposed reading the *Pyrrhus* and the *Demetrius* against the backdrop of the *Alexander* ('Plutarch, Pyrrhus, and Alexander,' in P.A. Stadter, *Plutarch and the historical tradition* [London 1992] 90-108, esp. 92 and 103 f.), a line of interpretation that merits further discussion for all the *Lives* of the 'successors'; *cf.* J.L. Moles, *CR* xliii (1993) 31.

⁴⁶ Genette, *Narrative discourse* (n. 21) 102. As an introduction to the *Romulus*, see C. Ampolo and M. Manfredini, *Plutarco: Le vite di Teseo e di Romolo* (Milan 1988) esp. vii-lxxxii.

⁴⁷ Deremetz (n. 25); on Plutarch's use of implicit moralism, see Duff (n. 8) 22 f..

At *Rom.* 3 and following, Plutarch reports the version of the origins and early career of Romulus and Remus that in his view enjoys the widest credence, in which account Romulus literally makes his first appearance along with his brother at *Rom.* 3. 4, when they are born to Ilia. The pair are described concisely and in a manner efficient to the advancement of the narrative: 'And she bore two sons who were extraordinary in size and beauty; for this reason Amulius was even more frightened and ordered a slave to take the boys and cast them away' (*Rom.* 3. 4-5). The description may adequately be categorized as ideal, reflecting the common if banal assumption that kings are (or certainly ought to be) big and beautiful. But is that all there is to Plutarch's treatment of the image of King Romulus?

The superior physique of the twins, indicative of their noble descent (from Numitor and ultimately Aeneas) and suggestive of their putative divine parentage (the legend of Mars' seduction of Ilia is recounted at *Rom.* 4. 2), constitutes from the perspective of the plot the immediate motivation for Amulius' deepened fear (*Rom.* 3. 5: δι' ὄ).⁴⁸ Thus we are presented with not only a representation of the twins' looks, but also an account of Amulius' reading of the significance of their looks. The narrative has suddenly shifted from an external focalization—an apparently neutral, objective description—to internal focalization: the character Amulius has become the percipient and it is his vision of the twins' physical attributes, which he correctly understands to signify their regal origin, that propels the story.⁴⁹ Royal beauty is polysemous, at once inspiring fear and delight, as was true of Demetrius' natural presence.

This initial description, after a digressive examination of variant accounts of the twins' origins, is essentially repeated at *Rom.* 6. 3, though here the twins' size and appearance are explicitly diagnosed for the reader by Plutarch ('The excellence of their bodies in size and appearance—even when they were infants—illustrated their nature'). Yet while their externals may demonstrate their *physis*, they are no precise guides to the *ethos* of either twin. For Plutarch immediately turns to the development of the two brothers, which is only to some degree—but by no means fully—prefigured in their childhood mould: 'And when they grew up, they were both courageous and manly, possessing minds that were inclined toward danger and a daring that was wholly unshakeable. But Romulus seemed to exercise his judgment more and to have a statesman's intelligence' (*Rom.* 6. 3). Thus the kingly features which frightened Amulius and reinforce for the reader the twins' regal essence are shown to be inadequate evidence for discerning their developed *ethos*. Unlike Amulius, whose construal of the twins' appearance was adequate for his own base purposes, the reader is instructed by Plutarch on the proper signification of the boys' superficial attributes.

This second description, which marks the conclusion of the digressive catalogue of variant origins, a common employment of ring composition in Plutarch,⁵⁰ might have been nothing more than a narrative pause allowing Plutarch to resume the thread of his narrative of the twins' adventures. But Plutarch makes it into a didactic passage which also introduces an exposition of character that elliptically transports our story from the twins' infancy to their young manhood.⁵¹ The resumptive description, then, functions both to mark a section's conclusion

⁴⁸ The relationship between description and motivation in narrative: Bal (n. 21) 130.

⁴⁹ My use of the term 'focalization' (and related terms) derives from the treatment in Bal (n. 21) 104 ff., which, one should note, diverges significantly from the discussion in Genette, *Narrative discourse* (n. 21) 189 ff; cf. Genette, *Narrative discourse revisited* trans. J.E. Lewin (Ithaca 1988) 72 ff. See also the insightful article by Kittey (n. 21). The application of narratological technique to historical narrative is illustrated impressively by Hornblower, 'Narratology and Thucydides,' in Hornblower (n. 26) 131-66 (Hornblower tends to employ Genette's terminology).

⁵⁰ See the concise but excellent discussion in J.L. Moles, *Plutarch: the life of Cicero* (Warminster 1988) 11 and 13.

⁵¹ See Genette, *Narrative discourse* (n. 21) 86 ff. for a discussion of narrative duration.

and to indicate the beginning of a distinctly new—and critical—stage in the twins' career.⁵²

Plutarch's emphasis on physique through his twice repeated description of the infant twins may also be deemed proleptic, for, later in this *Life*, at *Rom.* 7, Remus' appearance plays an integral part in the reunion of the twins with their grandfather, himself the rightful king of Alba. Chapter 7 tells us how the herdsmen of Numitor fell upon Remus, who was taken prisoner and handed over by Amulius to Numitor for punishment. Numitor, however, 'was astonished at the young man's marked superiority in size and strength of body, and he perceived in Remus' countenance that the boldness and vigor of his soul could not be enslaved nor suffered from his present circumstances' (*Rom.* 7. 5). The portrait of Remus comes not as a decorative adornment to the tale but as an account of Numitor's own perception of the youth; the focalization is again internal, thereby revealing not only the vision of Remus but also elucidating the character of the observer, Numitor himself.⁵³ Numitor's reactions to the sight of Remus have double significance since, as Remus himself will inform his grandfather, the brothers are twins and therefore identical; the virtues of Remus' figure also belong to Romulus, who is not portrayed separately and redundantly by Plutarch.⁵⁴ This lends to the scene the presence of the absent Romulus. Numitor's insight into Remus' adult features contrasts sharply with Amulius' earlier fear of the infant pair. Numitor is a percipient who ought also to have been hostile and to have regarded Remus' grandness as menacing (though our expectations as readers familiar with the tale render Numitor's superiority to Amulius unsurprising), yet we find in him a cross-reading of Remus' looks that underscores the fundamental differences between the two brothers, Numitor and Amulius (differences greater than but also adumbrating those which must emerge between Romulus and Remus). Furthermore, Numitor, like a good Plutarchan, extends his curiosity beyond mere externals; he learns that Remus' deeds correspond to his looks.⁵⁵ This combined interest in appearances and actions instantiates the lesson presented earlier in Plutarch's second description of the twins.

Now properly informed, Numitor chances upon the truth of Remus' origins, though he does not reveal his discovery but instead makes further inquiries of his prisoner.⁵⁶ This time it is Remus' turn to read the signs of his captor's bearing; Numitor's gentle voice and philanthropic countenance inspire the young man with hope, out of which he declares, 'I will hide nothing from you, for you seem to be more kingly than Amulius', though this is not a conclusion Remus draws primarily from Numitor's physiognomy but rather from his conduct, as he goes on to say, 'for you listen and examine before you punish, while he surrenders men without a trial' (*Rom.* 7. 6). Once again, justice is the hallmark of the genuine monarch. And so begins the reuniting of Romulus and Remus with their proper—and royal—family.⁵⁷

⁵² On this technique in Plutarchan narrative, see Pelling (n. 8) 123.

⁵³ Bal (n. 21) 108.

⁵⁴ Remus stresses his twinship with Romulus at *Rom.* 7. 6. Remus' description, which applies as well to Romulus, is an example of what might be called 'iterative description', on which expression see Genette, *Narrative discourse* (n. 21) 99. Although mythical twins are frequently described as differing in some respect (e.g. Apollo and Artemis, the Dioscuri, Heracles and Iphicles) and granted that ἰδύμοσ admits of the same ambiguity as 'twin,' there is no reason to assume that Romulus and Remus were not identical, nor does Plutarch state or imply that they were not identical (except in matters of statesmanship). Iconographically, Remus' appearances are nearly always limited to the *Lupa Romana* or to scenes depicting the exposure of the infants, in which cases there is no real differentiation made between the twins; cf. J.P. Small, 'Romulus and Remus,' in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* vii. 1 (Zurich and Munich 1994) 639-44.

⁵⁵ *Rom.* 7. 5. Plutarchan interlocutors often gaze at one another before they speak; cf. Frazier (n. 20) 4511.

⁵⁶ *Rom.* 7. 5.

⁵⁷ Similarly, in the parallel *Life*, Theseus' (concise) physical description (the shearing of his hair) marks the point when it is appropriate for him to learn his true identity, cf. *Thes.* 5. 1.

The image of the king in Plutarch's *Romulus* is at no point extraneous to the requirements of his biographical story. The three descriptive passages are thoroughly insinuated into the narrative, though their diegetic functions may vary. The reader, of course, finds a satisfactory representation of Romulus' beauty, obliquely provided through Numitor's inspection of his twin brother. Moreover, we find in Plutarch's treatment, both in his explicit commentary at *Rom.* 6. 3 and in the contrasting behavior of Amulius and Numitor—as well as in Remus' evaluation of his grandfather's royal nature—unmistakeable qualifications regarding the correct diagnosis of even a king's physiognomy. The multiple perceptions of the image of the king serve in themselves to illustrate the potential for misreadings when attention is directed too exclusively to externals.⁵⁸

V. PLUTARCH AND THE REGAL IMAGE

Plutarch understood the polysemous quality of physical attributes at both the superficial and the moral levels. He begins his *Lysander* by referring to a statue standing within the treasury of the Acanthians at Delphi. Many viewers falsely identify the statue as Brasidas, 'but the portrait is of Lysander' (*Lys.* 1. 1). Plutarch then proceeds to describe the image as that of a traditional, old-fashioned Spartan sporting the beard and long hair of Lycurgan custom. He then adds that the lawgiver had established the habit of wearing long hair 'because it made the handsome more distinguished, the ugly more frightening' (*Lys.* 1. 3). As Stadter has demonstrated in a keenly perceptive article, the polysemous nature of this physical attribute, whose effect is formulated in terms that in Greek signify both appearance and character (καλός / αἰσχρός), renders Lysander's image a symbol of his own paradoxical life—he was in some respects exceedingly Spartan and yet in others quite un-Spartan.⁵⁹ This stance of uncertainty, which emerges in the *Sulla* (the life parallel to the *Lysander*) as well,⁶⁰ achieves a strong impression in the *Lysander* largely because Plutarch refuses to interpret explicitly the statue of Lysander which he has introduced as an emblem of the man's character and career (though of course we know that the portrait itself must be generically handsome, hence the false attribution to Brasidas). Plutarch finds less ambiguity when it comes to Philopoemen's appearance: 'he was not ugly, as some suppose; for a statue of him is still to be seen at Delphi'. But stories of Philopoemen's sordid looks persisted into the biographer's own day, for the last of the Greeks had an unfortunate penchant for less than fashionable dress. Still, the question of precisely how to interpret superficial appearance persists. For, when properly construed, Philopoemen's dress becomes a mark of his simplicity (ἀφέλεια), one of the man's indubitable virtues, whatever one takes to be Plutarch's ultimate judgment of Philopoemen.⁶¹

That physiognomic expectations can lead to interpretations of the regal image that are equivocal, to say the least, constitutes an obvious concern of the *Agésilau-Pompey*. Although the Spartan king's deformity was familiar to his readers, Plutarch does not introduce it until he has related the quality of Agesilaus' character, a description that is embedded in a distinctly erotic context: while he was being trained in the traditional *agoge*, Agesilaus had as his *erastes*

⁵⁸ Plutarch's concept of *mimesis* requires a reader capable of perceiving—and appreciating—the intelligence manifested in the artistic representation; cf. Van der Stockt, *QUCC* xxxvi (1990) 23-31.

⁵⁹ P.A. Stadter, 'Paradoxical paradigms: Lysander and Sulla', in P.A. Stadter (ed.), *Plutarch and the historical tradition* (London 1992) 41-55.

⁶⁰ Cf. *Sull.* 2 and 6. 14 ff. See now, on the *Lysander-Sulla*, Duff (n. 8) 50 ff.

⁶¹ That Philopoemen is portrayed by Plutarch as incorruptible and inclined to simplicity is the verdict of J.J. Walsh, *Philologus* cxxxvi (1992) 208-38, who none the less finds in this pair (*Philopoemen-Flamininus*) a harsher characterization of Philopoemen than does S. Swain, *ICS* xiii (1988) 335-47.

no less a figure than Lysander, who was smitten by the decency of the youth's nature,⁶² a point Plutarch enlarges upon by delineating the various dimensions of Agesilaus' conduct, such as his keen ambition, his gentleness, his obedience and his intense sense of honor. Only then does the narrative mention Agesilaus' lameness, a physical defect that in Plutarch's account only heightens the appreciation on the part of others of the beauty of the Spartan's disposition, for down to his extreme old age Agesilaus' character rendered him more adorable (ἔρασμιώτερον) than even the handsome or the young.

What might appear a straightforward preference of excellence in character over excellence in body is somewhat tempered, however, when Plutarch concludes this section of his biography by alluding to the anecdote preserved by Theophrastus, according to whom Agesilaus' father was fined by the ephors for marrying a small woman, on the grounds that she would bear not kings but kinglets. The story possesses no real relevance to Agesilaus' deformity, but rather reinforces traditional physiognomic notions of the regal physique, and, unless Plutarch simply could not resist the ephors' *bon mot* the anecdote seems most of all to prepare the reader for the controversy of Diopieithes' oracle. For Agesilaus' elevation to the throne required that his claims be preferred to those of Leotychides, who Lysander insisted was a bastard.⁶³ Opposition to Agesilaus, in Plutarch's narrative, focuses on his lameness when Diopieithes reveals an oracle which he understands as proof that it is contrary to the gods' will that a cripple become king:

Φράζεο δῆ, Σπάρτη, καίπερ μέγαλαυχος εἶδ' ἔσθ' αὖ,
μὴ σέθεν ἀρτίποδος βλάστη χολῆ βασιλεία·
δηρὸν γάρ νοῦσοι σε κατασχίσουσιν ἀελπτοὶ
φθισιβρότου τ' ἐπὶ κύμα κυλινδόμενον πολέμοιο.

Bethink thee now, O Sparta, though thou art very glorious, lest from thee, sound of foot, there spring a maimed royalty; for long will unexpected toils oppress thee, and onward-rolling billows of man-destroying war.⁶⁴

But Lysander interpreted χολῆ βασιλεία not as a reference to anyone's superficial deformity but to the (alleged) illegitimate origins of Leotychides, whose investiture would, in Lysander's exegesis, yield a more profoundly 'maimed royalty' than that of the hobbling Agesilaus. Lysander's arguments won the day, but not to the satisfaction of Plutarch. In the *Synkrisis* (2. 1) Plutarch maintains that the Spartans could and should have found an heir who was alike of sound birth and of sound limb, an opinion suggesting that the author felt obliged to recognize the legitimacy of the oracle's admonition despite its physiognomic bias. Indeed, he faults Lysander for his obscurantist reading of the prophecy.⁶⁵ On the surface of things, though, Lysander's view of Agesilaus' deformity seems to have a properly Plutarchan appreciation of the superior significance attaching to actions rather than to mere appearance. Of course one might advance the observation that Lysander's reading of Agesilaus' looks is vitiated in the event by its corrupt motive, the impropriety of which is marked by the less than opaque quality of Diopieithes' oracle. But such an argument fails to explain entirely Plutarch's criticism of the Spartans' elevation to the throne of a physically unsound king. What persists is the impression that the physiognomic approach, while far from satisfactory, is nevertheless not wholly irrelevant to the institution of monarchy. In short, Plutarch tends to underscore the extent to which the ethical interpretation of physique must be problematic.

⁶² *Ages.* 2. 1: Λύσανδρον ἔσχεν ἔραστῆν, ἐκπλαγέντα τῷ κοσμίῳ τῆς φύσεως αὐτοῦ [viz. Agesilaus].

⁶³ Ample discussion of this (historical) event can be found in P. Cartledge, *Agesilaos and the crisis of Sparta* (Baltimore 1987) 112 ff.

⁶⁴ *Ages.* 3. 7, with B. Perrin's Loeb translation.

⁶⁵ *Synk. Ages.-Pomp.* 2. 1 (μὴ δι' Ἀγησίλαον ἐπεσκότησε τῷ χρησμίῳ Λύσανδρος).

This complication can also be detected in Plutarch's treatment in this *Life* of the fact that Agesilaus forbade the rendering of his likeness in painting or in sculpture, a point introduced by the biographer as a qualification to his description of the king as small and unimposing. No motive for Agesilaus' decision receives mention, an omission which allows, if it does not actually encourage, the inference that it was embarrassment which prevented the king from permitting his image to be represented (despite Plutarch's undeniable stress on the healthy and easy sense of humor with which the king bore his deformity). That this is in fact the inference which Plutarch intended his reader to draw receives support from the observation that absent from the *Agesilaus* is one of the Spartan's best known apophthegms. In justifying his deathbed commandment against any fabricated likeness of himself, Agesilaus is said to have explained: 'For if I have done any noble work, that is my memorial; but if I have done nothing noble, then all the statues in the world, themselves the works of menial and worthless men, mean nothing'.⁶⁶ Such a sentiment—if expressed—would here have emphasized Agesilaus' superiority in virtue in despite of his inferiority in form. It can hardly be accidental that Plutarch, in inserting this information into his account of Agesilaus' youth rather than that of his demise, removed the crucial *bon mot*. Indeed, if Plutarch had availed himself of the opportunity to include in this biography Agesilaus' alleged rejection of the Thasians' offer to grant him divine honors, then the king's avoidance of graven images might well have been implicated in the biographer's brief against the excesses of ruler cult.⁶⁷ Indications of such a connection, however, are wanting. In this instance, then, if Agesilaus' remarkable absence from the plastic arts serves deeper purposes in this passage, one must surely be to emphasize the king's problematic physique.

Agesilaus' looks, then, signify little (in Plutarch's view) as to the beauty of his character, nor do they hamper the benefits to his leadership capacities (of which Plutarch is quite respectful) wrought by his traditional Spartan education. Yet they are not wholly irrelevant to Agesilaus' kingliness: his smallness itself embodies a defect, and his lameness may reasonably be construed as vitiating his monarchy on religious grounds. And this remains true despite the man's glorious career. Plutarch's acknowledgement of the polysemous nature of the regal image, then, clearly punctuates physiognomy's problematic status: for the regal image to be appreciated correctly in each sighting, a detailed and thoroughly informed understanding of the sighting's context as well as an intense and thoughtful scrutiny are required.⁶⁸ Nothing could be further from the mechanical exercise of physiognomy advertised in the handbook of (e.g.) Polemo.⁶⁹

Agesilaus' defective appearance contrasts markedly in this pairing with that of Pompey. Whereas the Spartan's manner compensated for his lameness and diminutive stature, the Roman's youthful good looks lent him an air of majesty; indeed, they 'pleaded for him before he spoke'.

From the start he had an appearance which in no small way made him popular with the people and pleaded for him before he spoke. For his loveliness was humanely dignified, and the prime of his youthful beauty at once made manifest the stateliness and the regal majesty of his *ethos*. And there was a certain unshakeable *anastole* of his hair and a softness of the contours of his face around his eyes, all of which produced a likeness—more talked about than apparent—to the statues of King Alexander (*Pomp.* 2. 1).

⁶⁶ *Apophth. Lac.* = *Mor.* 215A: εἰ γὰρ τι καλὸν ἔργον πεποίηκα, τοῦτό μου μνημεῖον ἔσται· εἰ δὲ μή, οὐδ' οἱ πάντες ἀνδριάντες, βαναύσων καὶ οὐδενὸς ἀξίων ἔργα ὄντες. Essentially the same passage is found at *Reg. et Imp. Apophth.* 12 = *Mor.* 191D. Cf. *Xen. Ages.* 11. 7; *Cic. Fam.* v 12. 7; *Dio Chrysostom* xxxvii 43. It can be a mark of wisdom to avoid honorific statues: *Cat. Ma.* 19; *Mor.* 198E- F; 820B-C; cf. *Mossman* (n. 15) 113.

⁶⁷ *Apophth. Lac.* 25 = *Mor.* 210D. M. Flower, *CQ* xxxviii (1988) 123-34, has recently argued for the historical veracity of this event.

⁶⁸ One might compare Plutarch's similarly complex view of astronomical phenomena; cf. *Duff* (n. 8) 71 ff.

⁶⁹ *Gleason* (n. 12) 29 ff.

Pompey's physiognomy is unquestionably regal, but his actual similarity to the king *par excellence*, Alexander, is at once described in detail by Plutarch and discounted. Pompey, unlike Agesilaus, looks the part of a king, a role of course denied him by the realities of the Roman constitution but none the less a theme both of his actual career and his biographer's *Life*.⁷⁰ The correspondence between Plutarch's treatment of Pompey, which underscores not merely Pompey's kingly countenance but the importance of a majestic appearance as well, and that of Agesilaus is unmistakable. The point, however, remains less obvious. The claims of physiognomy appear to possess greater legitimacy, at least in some respects, in this pair—though the obvious candidate for kingship (from the purely physical perspective) can only be said to be regal in a metaphorical sense.

The matching of Agesilaus with Pompey allowed Plutarch to introduce regal physiognomy into a non-regal life. That the manipulation of monarchical physiognomic expectations might provide a useful narrative strategy in formulating the *Life* of a pretender was not lost on the biographer, who employs the image of the ideal monarch yet again (and again with complications) in his *Eumenes*. Regal imagery, both in its marked absence and in its unmistakable presence, constitutes an important compositional device in *Eumenes*, naturally enough in view of the man's actual manipulation of the royal mystique throughout his marvelously checkered diadochal career. Plutarch is quite plain in criticizing the destructive nature of Eumenes' φιλονεικία: Eumenes could have enjoyed high honor and secure prosperity as Antigonos' lieutenant (*Synk.* 2.1-2). But instead Eumenes, by protesting an unwavering loyalty to the Argead house, pursued an independent and rival policy in competition with the other successors. A pose of conspicuous fealty to Alexander's memory and to his legitimate heirs was Eumenes' means of securing the loyalty of his troops, and Plutarch's biography devotes considerable attention to this dimension of Eumenes' leadership—even at the expense of the Greek's actual (and considerable) military success.⁷¹

At *Eum.* 13 Plutarch indicates the favorable disposition of the Argead house toward Eumenes (whom it sees as the best counter against the burgeoning might of Antigonos): Olympias invited Eumenes to take charge of Alexander's son, while Philip Arrhidaeus sent him to fight Antigonos, an assignment that associated him with the commanders of the Silver Shields, Antigenes and Teutamus, men who envied Eumenes bitterly. In order to control these officers without outraging their Macedonian pride, Eumenes resorted to what Plutarch designates δεισιδαιμονία, superstition, by which he means the famous stratagem of the Tent of Alexander. Eumenes claimed to his officers that Alexander had appeared to him in a dream in which he promised that, if a tent were decorated in royal fashion with a throne placed within and if they should conduct their deliberations in that tent, then he would always be present to assist and bless their counsels. Antigenes and Teutamus embraced the revelation, which allowed Eumenes to command officers who credulously preferred the barest hints of Alexander's presence—for it was an empty throne that signified the great king—to the instructions of living Argeads or the directions of their gallant but Greek general. Plutarch's disapproval of Antigenes and Teutamus could not be more obvious, and the episode obviously adumbrates Eumenes' eventual betrayal at the hands of the venal Silver Shields.⁷²

Alexander's empty throne constitutes a regal image meaningful only to Eumenes' jealous and superstitious officers, against which one may juxtapose the impression made by Eumenes'

⁷⁰ E.g. P. Greenhalgh, *Pompey, the Roman Alexander* (London 1980) 11 and 171 ff.

⁷¹ A.B. Bosworth, 'History and artifice in Plutarch's *Eumenes*' in P.A. Stadter (ed.), *Plutarch and the historical tradition* (London 1992) 58, 63, 70.

⁷² Tent of Alexander: *Eum.* 13. 4-5. Envy of Antigenes and Teutamus: *Eum.* 13. 3; 14. 1. Betrayal by Silver Shields: *Eum.* 17-18.

appearance during the siege of Nora:

And his appearance was sweet—not at all like a warrior or someone tried with weapons—rather he was delicate and youthful; and with respect to his entire body he was perfectly proportioned as if he had been precisely assembled by art, with limbs that possessed astonishing symmetry (*Eum.* 11. 3).

This description derives from Hieronymus of Cardia, but the literary use to which it is put is Plutarch's own. In Nepos' *Eumenes* essentially the same description of the protagonist (in so far as the damaged text permits one to draw conclusions) comes in the recounting of Eumenes' exchange with Onomarchus when the former was Antigonus' prisoner. According to Diodorus' account, Eumenes was popular with his men at Nora because he shared their rations and was affable.⁷³ Plutarch employs Eumenes' shared table in order to lead into his physical description, a transition made by punning on the word ἡδύς, sweet. Eumenes clearly possesses the idealized royal physique of Hellenistic kingship: charming, handsome, youthful and perfectly proportioned.⁷⁴ His besieged troops take refreshment from his kingly presence—though Eumenes, despite his fierce ambitions, is forbidden any claim to royal station, a point driven home by the effectiveness of the Tent of Alexander in subsequent chapters. Here again it is difficult to miss Plutarch's critique of physiognomic expectations generally and, more specifically, of the specious obsessions of ruler cult, for the arrangement of these successive images—the regal Eumenes at Nora and the Tent of Alexander—enacts, both in the individual image and in their succession, an implicit argument.

The corresponding portrayal of Sertorius, it is perhaps worth noting, also strikes a (discordant) physiognomic note: the dashing general, Plutarch observes, retained only one eye, and such a condition (he jests) is a symptom indicating superior cunning and military capacity. There are few light moments in Plutarch's *Lives* and this one, which patently ridicules the physiognomic consciousness, is curiously blunt beside the more subtle use to which physiognomy is put in the *Eumenes*.⁷⁵

Externals (by now it is unmistakable) may mirror inner reality, or they may not. But in every case they are hazardous guides to character. Hence the biographer's distrust of external signs of regal excellence, which are all too liable to false readings. This is made abundantly clear in Plutarch's fragmentary *Ad Principem Ineruditum* (*Mor.* 779D ff.), a useful template for understanding the biographer's royal *Lives*. Here we learn that the good king must be the living Logos (ἔμψυχος λόγος)⁷⁶ and the champion of justice:

Now justice is the aim and end of law, and law is the work of the ruler, and the ruler is the image of god who orders all things. Such a ruler needs no Pheidias nor Polycleitus nor Myron to model him, but by his virtue he forms himself in the likeness of god and thus creates a statue most delightful of all to behold and most worthy of divinity (*Princ. Inerud.* 3 = *Mor.* 780E).

This ruler is to be preferred to monarchs who, like unskillful sculptors, mistake the external signs of dignity and majesty for their substance,⁷⁷ or those who represent themselves in painting and sculpture with the attributes of the gods (a common practice in royal portrait-

⁷³ Nepos, *Eum.* 11. 5; Diod. Sic. xviii 42. 5.

⁷⁴ On the importance of symmetry, see Evans (n. 2) 53 f.

⁷⁵ *Sert.* 1. 8. Cf. C.F. Konrad, *Plutarch's Sertorius: a historical commentary* (Chapel Hill 1994) 31-33.

⁷⁶ *Princ. Inerud.* 3 = *Mor.* 780C.

⁷⁷ *Princ. Inerud.* 2 = *Mor.* 779F.

ure).⁷⁸ The image of the true king resides not in bronze or marble, but in action, in the execution of justice. This view of monarchy conforms with Plutarch's general concern with *ethos* and its proper development. Excellence lies in good character, which is in Plutarch's view only observable in the making of proper choices, in the performance of right actions.⁷⁹

The theatricality of a Demetrius remains a sham even when the corrupted actor possesses a kingly disposition. And the intelligent percipient, like Numitor or Remus, will understand how much weight attaches to externals and how much to the evidence of deeds when estimating a man. Plutarch's *Lives* constitute the practical application of his own moral and political principles through the representation of men's actions in their historical context, by which means the biographer meant to provide an accurate and therefore instructive depiction of his subject. This is expressed with elegant conciseness in the introduction to the *Pericles*: 'What is beautiful and noble (τὸ καλόν) spontaneously drives us to itself and instills in us an immediate urge to action; it does not build character in the observer by means of representation (οὐ τῆ μιμήσει) but produces a moral purpose by means of the history of action (τῆ ἱστορίᾳ τοῦ ἔργου)'.⁸⁰

That Plutarch's moral purposes underlie his literary choices has long been recognized. In the matter of physical descriptions, their common absence from his biographical narratives is by no means accidental; indeed, their omission or excessive conciseness represents a challenge to and a critique of prevailing literary and intellectual conventions. This at least seems the most obvious inference to be drawn from the uses to which he puts his extended descriptions in the regal biographies. There Plutarch's unmistakable criticism of traditional royal ideology is sustained through a variety of stylistic techniques. Plutarch's literary exploitation of physical descriptions, whether as set-pieces or implicated throughout the narrative, reflects his conviction that externals are pale traces of inner reality.

W. JEFFREY TATUM

The Florida State University

⁷⁸ *Princ. Inerud.* 3 = *Mor.* 780F. On this practice in actual portraiture, see Smith (n. 26) 38 ff. See also Plut. *Praecepta Gerendae Reipublicae* = *Mor.* 820B-C, for Plutarch's recommendation that the statesman eschew the honor of a statue in favor of an inscription.

⁷⁹ Pelling, *ICS* xiii (1988) 257-74; *id.*, 'Childhood and personality in Greek biography', in Pelling (ed.), *Characterization and individuality in Greek literature* (Oxford 1990) 213-44. It scarcely need be said that in his emphasis on action as the proper sign of character Plutarch is part and parcel of traditional Greek thinking on this matter, cf. S. Halliwell, 'Traditional Greek conceptions of character', in Pelling, *op. cit.* 32-59. What distinguishes Plutarch is his cautious and explicit distrust (even distaste) for attending inordinately to the outward trappings of kingliness (or of excellence generally). One might compare his attitude toward feminine beauty at *Amat.* 23 = *Mor.* 769C-D.

⁸⁰ *Per.* 2. 4. The difficulties attending the proper interpretation of this sentence are discussed by Van der Stockt (n. 19) 32 ff.; cf. Stadter (n. 1) xxix-xxx.