

Since the end of 19th century, research in Classics has disdained the *synkriseis* of Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* – and undervalued their importance. As rhetorical exercises, however, these concluding comparisons of the *bioi* provide exceptional material for the analysis of the conceptual criteria determining Plutarch's assessments of his protagonist's virtues and vices. Combined with an examination of introductory *prooimia*, critical attention to the *synkriseis* show that these criteria turn out to be based neither in "Greek" nor in "Roman culture", but refer rather to a moral discourse with pretensions to universal validity. We find that negative and positive judgments are meted out to Greek and Roman models in a precisely balanced fashion. This balance results, I argue, from the rules of rhetorical form. Form determines content, and rhetoric consequently acts as a set of rules that determines logic and thought. Despite the fact that Plutarch mentions in some of his political treatises the "Roman boot" that dominates Greek *poleis*, he develops a different perspective in the texts addressed to Greek and Roman elites alike. Here he teaches philosophical and moral advice for proper conduct. For this reason, Plutarch's vision is not uniform, and he definitely does not from a simplistically "Greek" point of view envision Rome as a representation of the "other." The perspectives of Plutarch's texts result instead from the technical requirements of their production according to rhetorical principles. Concepts of "Greek" and "Roman culture", formulated in the context of 19th-century European nationalism by an *Altertumswissenschaft* in quest of non-existent cultural "purity" are not at all suitable for the study of the multiple and syncretistic cultures of the Trajanic period. Perhaps the only aspect of a truly Greek tradition in Plutarch is his pretension of teaching the elements of the good life to political elites – yet even this tradition was not exclusively Greek – at least since the days of Cicero, if not Cato the Elder.

E-mail: thomas.spaeth@unibas.ch

Thomas Späth ist lecturer in Ancient History at the University of Basel. His main fields of research are gender history in antiquity, Roman historiography, and the comparative study of biography and historiography. He is the author of *Männlichkeit und Weiblichkeit bei Tacitus. Zur Konstruktion der Geschlechter in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Frankfurt a.M./ New York 1994) and of a number of articles on the concept of individuality in Plutarch's *Lives*, on gender discourses in Roman culture and on historiographical topics. As editor he published (with B. Wagner-Hasel) *Frauenwelten in der Antike. Geschlechterverhältnisse und weibliche Lebenspraxis* (Stuttgart 2000) and (with M. Coudry) *L'invention des grands homes de la Rome antique/ Die Konstruktion der grossen Männer Altroms* (Paris 2001).

Further informations: http://pages.unibas.ch/altegeschichte/mitarbeiter/spaeth_thomas.html