

This paper deals with the role of animals in the characterization of a biography's hero. Just as the inclusion of minor characters in Plutarch's *Lives* may not be ascribed solely to their presence in the original source material, but is also the result of their literary function in the narrative, so is the use of animals in the biographies. Each and every minor figure seems to represent different traits of the hero's nature. Similarly, beasts serve to highlight various aspects of the main character. As animals are associated with the realm of passions, it would seem that any appearance of theirs alludes to the irrational side of the hero. This suggestion will be examined in the relatively neglected *Life* of the Persian king Artaxerxes.

One can discern several modes in which animals are used to characterize the main figure. Most of them are indirect. The first may be termed as *Incarnation of Passions*. In this mode the hero's interaction with animals can be regarded as a symbol of the internal conflict between his uncontrolled passion and curtailing reason. For instance, Artaxerxes' portrayal as falling off his horse may show how his cowardice is taking hold of his soul (6.4) or else indicate the fact that he is thrown off balance, about to start an honour-seeking phase in his life (10.1-2). Conversely, the scene in which the king willingly steps down from his steed and proceeds by foot (24.10) may imply some sort of restraint upon passions (in the biography, this episode foreshadows the picture in which he suppresses the conspiracy of his son Darius, 29.11). Another example would be the bird named *Runtake*, which is divided into two parts by the queen-mother only to be served, poisonous, to the queen (19.5-7). Like Artaxerxes himself, the bird is placed between the two women, and its two halves may imply two ways in which the monarch deals with his passion: one is excessive violence, realized in the severe punishment inflicted on a slave-girl involved in the making of the poison (19.8-9), and the other is clemency, shown by the king towards his mother (19.10).

Other modes displayed in the *Artaxerxes* involve *Two-Step Indirect Characterization*, in which animals are employed to underline a feature of minor characters, who, in their turn, shed light on a specific trait of the hero. Here one would find the *Personification* of animals, which makes animals *dramatis personae* of the biography. The notable case is Cyrus' horse, known by the name of *Pasacas* (9.1). This beast is closely linked with the prince, and its unruly character reflects that of its rider. Cyrus himself exemplifies the uncontrollable ambitious nature of the king. Another mode stresses *Beastly Punishment* in the story, when animals are used as a punitive measure which fits the crime and reflects the character of the sinner. In the *Artaxerxes*, this can be seen in the case of the dogs and birds that devour the Greek generals except for Clearchus (18.7), an outcome which is presumably some sort of divine retribution for the gluttonous nature of the commanders, who had seized the provisions sent to Clearchus (18.3). Their behaviour points to the insatiable side of the Persian king, who marries two of his own daughters (23.5, 27.8), and refuses to give up Aspasia (27.3-4), even though he has approximately 360 concubines more (27.2). Employing the mode of *Fusion*, Plutarch blurs the boundaries between man and beast, as manifested in the gruesome torture of the soldier Mithridates, where worms come out of his intestines and consume him (16.6-7). This picture may allude to the irrational force of destruction inherent in both the soldier and the king.

Animals are used in a *Direct Characterization* on one occasion. The narrator likens tyrants to frightened animals, who are hard to tame (25.4), and explains by this comparison the murderous activities of the monarch. In this way Plutarch guides our reading of the biography and its characters.

The central role played by animals in creating a round and complex literary figure, seems to point at Plutarch's philosophical views on the ethical lesson to be drawn from the similarities between man and beast.