Plutarch’s Lives have been the subject of growing scholarly interest over the last few decades. The focus has shifted from seeing Plutarch’s texts simply as mines for historical source material or for reconstructing the fragments of lost historians; recent work has emphasized their philosophical content, their highly ‘literary’ and allusive nature, and their importance as documents of contemporary Greek constructions of their own history and identity. This paper aims to throw new light on the techniques and priorities of Plutarchan narrative through a close study of what might at first appear to be minor linguistic details: grammatical subordination and verbal aspect. It will argue that Plutarch’s manipulation of these feature has profound effects on the focus of the narrative (where emphasis is placed), on its speed and on the perspective from which it is told – effects which Plutarch himself understood and theorized. Recognition of these effects clarifies keys aspects of Plutarch’s narrative strategies and of the genre within which he wrote, and also has implications for our use of his texts as historical sources.

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