THE POET AS HERO: FIFTH-CENTURY AUTOBIOGRAPHY AND SUBSEQUENT BIOGRAPHICAL FICTION

The old proverb πολλὰ ψεύδονται ἀοιδοί ('poets tell a lot of lies') can still more accurately be applied to their biographers.[1] Even the more plausible and psychologically tempting details in the lives of literary figures derive from these authors' fictional works, poems, and dramas, and not from the kind of source material biographers use today, letters, documents, eyewitness testimony.[2] Critics and readers eager to establish some historical correlation between any ancient poet's life and his work should expect to be disappointed. But even if the ancient lives are useless to the historian or critic trying to explain what in Euripides' experience compelled him to write about Medea, these stories are of interest to mythologists. If we stop being angry at the *Lives* for failing to be historical, and look at them rather as myths or fairy tales, some informative patterns begin to emerge.

Consider, for example, the *Life of Aristophanes*.[3] Most of the 'data' about him derive explicitly from his comedies, except maybe for his father's and children's names, and his deme (p. 155. 1–3). Three instances of his political and moral views are taken directly from *parabaseis*, where the poet by tradition addressed the audience through the chorus in *propria persona* (p. 156. 40–1, 48–50, 51–3). Two further instances of his opposition to Cleon are based on quotations of speeches by the character Dicaeopolis in the *Acharnians* (5, 377), whose role in the play is paralleled closely by the poet's behaviour in the *Life*. Aristophanes also is portrayed as a hero attempting to save the city, on the basis of *Ran.* 686, 'it is right for the holy chorus to give a lot of good advice to the city' (p. 156. 48–50), and he too is an outspoken critic of Cleon, as evidenced by passages in *Vesp.* 1039 (p. 157. 40) and *Eq.* 231 (p. 156. 15). The portrait of Aristophanes as a political hero in the *Life* is rounded off by two anecdotes, (1) based on *Ach.* 646 ff., that even the king of Persia had heard of him (p. 157. 51–3), and (2) that when the tyrant Dionysius wanted to understand Athenian government Plato advised him to learn about it from Aristophanes (54–7).[4] The narrative concludes by describing how the political and economic situation at the end of the Peloponnesian war forced him to write his last comedies without choruses or social satire (p. 158. 60 ff.). A biography of Monty Python composed along similar lines would establish him along with Mrs. Thatcher as an influential spokesman of conservative policies.

[1] *Paroem. Gr.* 1. 371. 17, attributed first to Solon, fr. 29 W. On poets' lives, see esp. J. A. Fairweather, 'Fiction in the Biographies of Ancient Writers', *Ancient Society* 5 (1974), 231–75. Also M. R. Lefkowitz, 'Pindar's Lives', *Classica et Iberica* (*Festschrift Marique*; Worcester, Mass., 1975), 71–93; 'Fictions in Literary Biography: the New Poem and the Archilochus Legend', *Arethusa* 9 (1976), 181–9; A. S. Riginos, *Platonica: The Anecdotes Concerning the Life and Writings of Plato* (*CSCT* 3; Leiden, 1976).

[2] Cf., e.g., the legal documents assembled in M. M. Crow and C. C. Olson, edd., *Chaucer Life-Records* (Austin/Oxford, 1966).

[3] Citations of the poets' *Lives*, unless otherwise indicated, are from A. Westermann, ed., *Biographi Graeci Minores* (Braunschweig, 1845; repr. Amsterdam, 1964).

[4] On Aristophanes and Plato, see Riginos (n. 1), pp. 176–8. A comic scene also turns up as a 'historical' instance in Plutarch; see D. S. Robertson, 'Cleon and the Assembly', *CR* 37 (1923), 165.

These biographical data, while completely fictional and valueless as history, are none the less worthy of interest as a form of a popular and pervasive new mythology, in which the angry and combative hero of epic and of early drama was replaced by a hero equally remote from ordinary men and also acknowledged in some way by divinities, but whose weapons are words and whose duty it is to serve the commonwealth rather than themselves.[5] Examples of this new type of hero may be found in Plato's portrayal of Socrates in the *Apology*, much of which follows the outline of Gorgias' defence of the mythical Palamedes; in the characterization of Plato in the *Seventh Epistle*; in most of the shorter lives in Diogenes Laertius, and ultimately in some of the traditions about teaching saints, such as Paul of Tarsus and Pionius of Smyrna. The accounts of these men's lives derive their basic form and much of their social impact from the general patterns of the jejune and often sentimental new mythology.[6]

When and why did this new mythology get started? As Momigliano demonstrates, evidence exists that the lives of famous men had become a topic of interest by the beginning of the fifth century, in Heraclitus' story about Homer and the boys and the lice, and in the late and possibly not very secure information that Theagenes of Rhegium (among others) wrote about Homer's poetry and life.[7] But a better preserved, and perhaps in the end more influential source of information about the poets' lives is what the poets said about themselves in their own poetry. The first of these is Hesiod, who presents in the *Theogony* a closely defined picture of his professional intentions: he is specially chosen by the Muses; he can, through them, tell true things and false things like the truth (22–34); his power of speech is useful also to kings in governing their cities (77–103).[8] In the *Works and Days* he provides specific information about his life to illustrate his moral superiority over his brother Perses (27–41, 633–42), or to join with his listeners in protest against the hard conditions of his present life (174–5, 635–40). Aristophanes, when he expresses views about his own individuality, his superior moral stance as a poet, and his usefulness to the *polis*, was already working in an established tradition that had been fully developed by poets like Pindar and Xenophanes, and by philosophers (if that is what he should be called) like Heraclitus.[9]

When ancient poets start to write about themselves in the first person, it has been natural to want to think of them as speaking directly about their feelings and their lives.[10] But it is a mistake to take these I-statements as naïve, direct

[5] On the angry hero, see M. R. Lefkowitz, 'Pindar's *Pythian* 8', *CJ* 72 (1977), 213–14, 217–19.

[6] J. A. Coulter, 'The Relation of the *Apology of Socrates* to Gorgias' Defense of Palamedes, etc.,' *HSCP* 68 (1964), 289–95; Fairweather (n. 1), 238. See also n. 49 below. Another case in point is the story (first told in the fourth century) about the poet Tyrtaeus being a lame Athenian general imported by the Spartans (Tyrt., fr. 10W/Lycurg., *Leocr.* 107; fr. 5W/ΣPl., *Leg.* 629 a.

[7] A. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), pp. 18–28; 'Second Thoughts on Greek Biography,' *Meded. d. Kon. Ned. Akad. v. Wet.* Afd. Lett. Nieuwe Reeks 34 (1971), 5–6. Theagenes B 1, I. D–K; see T. W. Allen, *Homer: The Origins and the Transmission* (Oxford, 1924), pp. 36–7.

[8] Hesiod puts distinctive emphasis on the poet's ability to alter men's perception of experience. On traditional views of the powers of speech, see C. P. Roth, 'The Kings and the Muses in Hesiod's *Theogony*', *TAPA* 106 (1976), 331–8; L. Bieler, Θεῖος Ἀνήρ (Vienna, 1935) ii. 43–5.

[9] Cf. also the poet Solon's hardly unbiased description of his own singularly righteous conduct of Athenian politics, fr. 39W, and the story about his poem on Salamis, fr. 1W.

[10] Fairweather (n. 1), 234.

expressions about some particular development in time, rather than as the formal utterance of some professional persona.[11] Consistency of emphasis on separation from others, moral righteousness, and professional competence in first-person statements suggests that we are better justified in regarding such statements as we regard narratives which follow repeated patterns, that is, as myth, not as history.[12] If Heraclitus and Xenophanes both represent themselves as set apart from other men because of their knowledge or skill, we should suspect that they wish to be recognized as representative of some archetype, as teachers or even as prophets, to whom (like Calchas in the *Iliad*) ordinary men can turn if they want their affairs to be run well: 'an athlete isn't as worthy as I; our wisdom is better than the strength of men and of horses . . . (if someone wins at the games), on that account his city won't be in good order' (Xenophanes 2. 11–12, 19 D–K); or 'even though everything happens according to this *logos*, men are like beginners even though they have had opportunity to learn the kind of words and deeds which I profess, separating each according to its shape and stating how it is' (Heraclitus B 1. 6–9 D–K).[13]

Pindar, of course, at least in the victory odes, could not represent himself as claiming that his skill (like Xenophanes') was better than an athlete's strength. But we can see in some of the longer first person statements a similar emphasis on his separation from other inferior men, his special wisdom, and his concern for the community. Recently some scholars have argued that these long first person statements are primarily paradeigmatic, intended as impersonal advice to the victor, not as professional statements about and by the poet.[14] My own view is that they are both at once, but for our purposes it is less important to know how Pindar meant them than how his listeners interpreted them.[15] The evidence is clear that by the last quarter of the fifth century 'I' was understood – no matter how generally applicable the poet's advice – to represent the poet.[16]

In the longer statements the 'I' consistently professes model behaviour: he is moderate in ambition and politics, grateful to the gods, conscious of the limits of his mortality, interested in attaining lasting fame: 'May I be passionate for the beautiful that comes from god, striving for what is possible in my life. In politics I find that moderation flourishes with longer happiness. I find fault with the destiny of tyrants' (*Pyth.* 11. 50–3).[17] Cf. 'May my nature never be such (like the envious), father Zeus, but may I fasten on simple paths of life, so that

[11] On the dangers of biographical criticism, see esp. Lefkowitz, 'Pindar's Lives' (n. 1), pp. 79–87.

[12] Lefkowitz, 'Fictions in Literary Biography' (n. 1), p. 185.

[13] Cf. also Parmenides B6, I. 233 D–K; K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 29–30.

[14] D. C. Young, *Three Odes of Pindar* (*Mnemosyne Suppl.* 9; Leiden 1968), p. 13 n. 15. A similar approach is adopted by R. Stoneman, 'The "Theban Eagle"' *CQ* N.S. 26 (1926), 188–97, but cf. R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *A Commentary on Horace: Odes Book 2* (Oxford, 1978) on *Carm.* 2. 20.

[15] On the generalizing function of first person statements, see M. R. Lefkowitz, *The Victory Ode* (Park Ridge, N. J., 1976), p. 155.

[16] Critias, for example, takes poets' first-person statements as literal autobiography; see Lefkowitz, 'Fictions in Literary Biography' (n. 1), 182–83; see below p.463. Cf. the story of how everyone in the theatre looked at Aristides when they heard the complimentary description of Amphiaraus during the performance of Aeschylus' *Septem* (lines 592–4; Plut. *Aristides* 3. 4).

[17] On the conventional content of these lines, see Young, *Three Odes* (n. 14), pp. 6–19; and on the conventions themselves, K. J. Dover, 'The Political Aspect of Aeschylus' *Eumenides*,' *JHS* (1957), 233–5.

when I die I will not fasten to my children a reputation of ill fame. Some ask for gold, others for boundless land, I, when I have pleased my fellow citizens, to cover my limbs with earth, praising the praiseworthy, sowing blame on wrongdoers' (*Nem.* 8. 35–9).[18] As in Xenophanes' elegy, the poet's profession (here defined as giving praise where due) is set apart from other pursuits. At the end of *Pyth.* 3, his concluding professional statement, though more concerned with individual than communal conduct, none the less offers his understanding as a positive example: 'I shall be small among small and great among great. I shall show honour in my mind to the *daimon* that prevails at the moment and keep it according to my skill' (108–11).

Comments like these, along with the many impersonal statements in the odes about due measure and right conduct, mark the poet not only as teacher, but also, because of his isolation, as hero. The pattern can be seen clearly in an ode like *Pyth.* 2 where the poet, by constant use of negative comparisons, characterizes giving due praise as an act of extraordinary difficulty, on account of other men's tendency to be envious. Compared to the greedy Ixion and Archilochus 'fattening himself on heavy-speaking hatred' (54–6), the 'I' of the poem emerges as a model of restraint and self-control.[19]

Although these utterances do not, as ancient critics apparently thought, represent the poet's own feelings about Hieron or anybody else, they do present a consistent pattern of autobiographical *fiction*, which has an analogue in the new heroic morality advocated in the revised myths of odes like *Ol.*1, where Pelops wins without cheating and murdering, through divine aid matched by his own eagerness to strive 'not to be without a share of all that is beautiful' (83).[20] Compare the professional statement in *Pyth.* 11. 50–51: 'may I be passionate for the beautiful that comes from god, striving for what is possible in my life.' By closely involving his own professional goals with the standards of behaviour that he advocates for the victor, the poet implies not only that he practises what he preaches but that what sort of man he is is accurately represented by what he writes. Instead of giving us any direct information about his own feelings or actions, the poet presents us with a self-portrait fully as idealized as the statue of the charioteer at Delphi.

The type of behaviour that Pindar recommends to himself and to his athletes, with its untraditional restraint, reserve, and concern for others, has a direct analogue in popular models of conduct. Minor characters, servants, and choruses in Sophocles and Euripides comment on the benefits of the 'middle' life in terms certainly less metaphorical but ultimately comparable in content to Pindar's. Such reflections about self-control and the consequences of exaggerated ambition are termed 'philosophy' when attributed to the sophists, e.g. Democritus 'do what is within your means; don't try to do what is impossible' (B 3, II. 132–3 D–K), or Antiphon 'expectations have brought many people into incurable trouble' (B 58, II. 363–4 D–K). The slave's effective disapproval of the drunken Heracles in *Alc.* 753–60 sets the basic framework for the sentimental praise later

[18] See also C. Carey, 'Pindar's Eighth Nemean Ode,' *PCPS* 22 (1976), 33–4. Cf. the poet's wish 'may I be sought after by the city and all its people' (lines 21 ff.) in H. Lloyd-Jones, 'The Seal of Posidippus,' *JHS* 83 (1963), 81.

[19] See esp. Lefkowitz, *The Victory Ode* (n. 15), pp. 30–2.

[20] On the revised myths of *Ol.* 1, see Lefkowitz, *The Victory Ode* (n. 15), pp. 86–9 and T. C. W. Stinton, 'Si Credere Dignum Est,' *PCPS* 22 (1976), 68–9.

lavished on Spartan temperance by oligarchical Athenians like Critias, who tediously advocates 'drinking in moderation in order to be able to think and work' (B 6, II. 378 D–K).[21]

Euripides' pacifist drama *Suppliants* provides an even clearer example of popular standards. There five of the savage Seven against Thebes from Aeschylus' drama are eulogized by their leader Adrastus as exemplars of moderation. For example, Capaneus, boastful and hybristic in Aeschylus, in the *Suppl.* says 'due measure was sufficient for him. He was a true friend to his friends, present and absent. The number of such men is not great. He was by nature honest; his speech courteous. He never made false promises to his household or his countrymen' (866–71). Even the violent hero Tydeus, who in the traditional myth killed his uncle (or brother), married his own daughter, and lost his immortality because he ate the brain of his Theban opponent raw, emerges in Adrastus' speech as 'a character rich and ambitious, with a mind that matches his deeds, not his words' (907–8).[22] Eulogies of course by nature convert the most unredeemable human features into archetypal virtues, but we may see in these remarkable lines, with their emphasis on simplicity, self-control, and benevolence, basic popular notions of heroism in the late fifth century B.C.[23]

The same standards of moderation and social utility were applied by fifth-century writers to their poetic predecessors.[24] The trend begins with Xenophanes and Heraclitus in their criticism of the immoral content of Homer and Hesiod's stories about the gods (B 56, 57, I. 163 and B 11, I. 132 D–K). But the idea of content as a criterion for professional evaluation first becomes more explicit in Pindar, in his favourable comparisons of his own work to Archilochus' poetry in *Pyth.* 2. 54–6 (see above, p. 462), or to his predecessor's account of the story of Pelops at the banquet (*Ol.* 1. 36, above, p. 462), or again in his own unfalsified account of the story of Ajax, compared to Homer's distorted sweet speaking about Odysseus and Homer's winged and deceptive skill (*Nem.* 7. 20–2).

By the end of the fifth century, the comparisons within a poem to a predecessor take the form of full dramatic contests between poetic combatants. In Aristophanes' *Peace* the son of Lamachus the general recites martial lines from the *Iliad* and some other epics, which the play's hero Trygaeus rejects because the boy speaks of 'nothing but wars' (1288). He is equally unsatisfied with the next boy, Cleonymus' son, who sings Archilochus' epigram about the abandoned shield. What is being judged in this absurd scene is content, and the content is considered directly representative also of its speaker. The second boy is told, 'you've disgraced your parents' (1301).

The rather primitive notion that a man is what he writes or even recites turns up in non-comic contexts as well. Critias, carrying on the tradition started by Pindar in *Pyth.* 2. 54–6, condemns Archilochus for giving himself a bad reputation

[21] Cf. also the universally applicable advice attributed to Chilon the Wise by Critias, 'nothing to excess. All good things come at the right time' (B 7, II. 380 D–K).

[22] Apollodorus 1. 8. 5, 3. 6. 8.

[23] On the relation of these portraits to later biographies, see A. Dihle, *Studien zur griechischen Biographie* (*Abhand. Akad. Wissen. Göttingen, Phil.-Hist. Kl.* III. 37) pp. 20 ff. On emphasis in popular literature on friendship, see S. Trenkner, *The Greek Novella in the Classical Period* (Cambridge, 1958), pp. 69 ff., with A. W. H. Adkins's observations about using drama and philosophy as evidence, 'Problems in Greek Popular Morality', *CP* 73 (1978), 144–5.

[24] On the reasons for competition with great poets of the past, see H. Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 5–14.

by telling us in his poems that he was the son of a slave, an exile from Paros, an unwelcome emigrant to Thasos, an adulterer, and (worst of all in the eyes of an admirer of Sparta), that he threw away his shield (295W/ B 44, II. 396 D–K).[25] Aristophanes exploits to great advantage in a number of plays the notion that poetry and poet are interchangeable, particularly in the *Frogs*, where the angry Aeschylus is even addressed at one point as the hero of his drama the *Myrmidons*, 'shining Achilles' (991).[26] In the *Frogs*, Euripides is persuasive, elusive, and immoral like his poetry; Aeschylus is weighty, traditional, pious, and has the manner of the professional poet, isolated from other poets, particularly eschewing contact with his opponent Euripides. He is the courageous underdog in the contest which Dionysus had already prejudged in favour of Euripides, and he realizes that his songs do not tell people what they *want* to hear, but what they *should* hear.[27]

The stance resembles Pindar's in *Nem.* 8. 35: 'may my character never be like that' (i.e. like the deceptive people influenced by 'hateful misrepresentation, fellow traveller of flattering tales, crooked thinking, evil-doing reproach that does violence to the glorious and holds up the rotten honour of the obscure' (32–4); see above, p.461). Aristophanes represents himself in a similar role in the *parabasis* to the *Acharnians*, where he tells how he has survived slanderous criticism by giving his fellow citizens the best advice (628–32, 655–8), and in the revised *parabasis* of the *Clouds*, where he compares his work to that of other poets (518–26, 545–62). In the *Frogs* Aeschylus wins the contest because his practical political advice coincides with what Aristophanes suggests to the city in the *parabasis*, to discard the new and use the old (718–37; cf. 1454–9).[28] Again the model poet has a special concern for the public good.

Aristophanes (i.e., the heroic politician mentioned at the beginning of this article) may in fact provide the primary source material from which the prose biographies of Aeschylus and Euripides were drawn. His characterization of Aeschylus as warlike, on the basis of the content of his martial choruses, may in fact be the origin of the perfectly reasonable assumption that Aeschylus fought at Marathon (p.331. 10): n.b. Dionysus' quip, 'was it from Marathon or where,/ that you got together those chanties of the rope-walk' (*Ran.* 1296).[29] The *Frogs* is the principal source of the important biographical data in this section of the *Life*: the summary description of his artistic innovation, which quotes the chorus's account in the *Frogs* of Aeschylus' style, immediately precedes the description of Aeschylus' military career (p.331.37); the description of Aeschylus' style, following that of his military career, again cites the *Frogs*, in particular the

[25] See above, n. 16.

[26] Achilles' resentment was vividly portrayed in the *Myrmidons*, see *P. Oxy.* 2163. Cf. also the comic ellipsis, 'Lycis and Ameipsias carry baggage (σκεύη φέρουσ') each time in their comedies' (*Ran.* 14–15) for 'the put baggage carriers in every play'; see R. Kassel, 'Kritische und exegetische Kleinigkeiten, Nr. 15', *RhM* 109 (1966), 8–10.

[27] e.g. 1038–42; cf. Thuc. 1. 22. 1, 'to speak particularly what *should* be said about events occuring at the moment'.

[28] Perhaps also 1446–50; see T. F. Higham *in* D. A. Russell and M. Winterbottom, edd., *Ancient Literary Criticism* (Oxford, 1972), p. 11; also K. J. Dover, 'Ancient Interpolations in Aristophanes', *ICS* 2 (1977), 150–1.

[29] Tr. Higham (n. 28); citations of Aeschylus' *Life* are from the *O.C.T.* ed. D. L. Page.

cases of the silent Niobe and Achilles that Euripides makes such fun of (pp. 331.13–332.5).[30]

It would be reassuring if we could produce, as we can for Sophocles, epigraphical evidence that Aeschylus actually participated in that famous battle: unfortunately we cannot trust his epitaph (which is quoted at the end of the *Life*), because that, like so many others of its kind, was composed by a biographer.[31] Nor can we be sure that Pausanias actually saw a portrait of Aeschylus himself at Marathon in the Stoa Poikile painting (Paus. 1. 21.2), since none of the figures there appears to have been named.[32] Ion of Chios, who says he actually met Aeschylus, is reported to have said that Aeschylus fought at Salamis (*FGrHist*, fr.7). It is tempting to trust this testimony because Ion is a contemporary. But the surviving fragments of his *Epidemiai* provide little reassurance that he is a historian in our sense: they consist of dinner-table conversations, comparisons of generals and poets with one another, famous name-dropping.[33] It is important to remember that *eikos*, likelihood, would have been for him, as it was for other historians of the time, sufficient confirmation.

We should note too that there is a suspicious symmetry in the account in the *Life* that Aeschylus fought successively at Marathon, Salamis, and Plataea, the first two battles each with a brother of his. Herodotus tells us that the first of these brothers, Cynegirus son of Euphorion, died at Marathon, but this isolated fact does not prove anything about Aeschylus, nor, as Wilamowitz observed, about the second brother, Ameinias.[34] We might compare the way that the *Golden Legend* accounts for the coexistence of the three Marys in the Resurrection story. Each is a child of St. Anne by previous husbands, who successively (and/or conveniently) died before she married Joachim, father of a fourth Mary, Jesus' mother.[35] To return to Aristophanes' *Frogs*, one wonders also if the idea that Aeschylus comes from the deme of Eleusis might not have had its *aition* in Aeschylus' prayer to Demeter at the formal beginning of the poetic contest in the *Frogs* (886–8).[36]

The influence of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazusae* on Euripides' biography, both in Satyrus and in the *Life* that derives from his work, has long been recognized.[37] The most egregious example of its effect is, of course, the comic story of women's animosity toward him, which becomes a serious incident in his life (pp.137–8. 95–6; Satyrus x).[38] The *Acharnians* (478) and the *Frogs*

[30] For an evaluation of this criticism, see O. Taplin, 'Aeschylean Silences and Silences in Aeschylus', *HSCP* 76 (1972), 58–64.

[31] On poets' epitaphs, see Fairweather (n. 1), p. 254. The presence of such an epitaph in Alcidamas' *On Homer* indicates that they were considered a necessary feature of literary biography in the fourth century; see below pp. 467 f.

[32] F. Jacoby, *FGrHist* 392, Comm. p. 197. A lyre-player in this painting was identified as Sophocles, 'a piece of bluffing on the part of an imaginative gallery guide;' Fairweather (n. 1), pp. 252–3. See also U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Aischylos: Interpretationem* (Berlin, 1914), p. 16.

[33] Jacoby, *FGrHist* 392, Comm. p. 193; Wilamowitz (n. 32), p. 15; cf. Fairweather (n. 1), 243.

[34] Wilamowitz (n. 32), 25; Hdt. 4. 114.

[35] M. Warner, *Alone of All her Sex* (London, 1976), pp. 344–5.

[36] There was an Eleusinian Aeschylus in the fourth century; see J. K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families* (Oxford, 1971), pp. 6–8.

[37] For bibliography, see Fairweather (n. 1), p. 245.

[38] All citations are to the editio princeps, *P. Oxy.* 1176, on the advice of S. R. West, *Gnomon* 38 (1966), 546–50. On Satyrus' use of comedy as source material, see L. C. St. A. Lewis in *New Chapters in the History of Greek Literature*, edd. Powell and Barber (Oxford, 1921); Dihle (n. 23), pp. 106–7.

(840) provide the 'information' that his mother was a vegetable seller (p.113.2). The notion that he had warts on his face may thus also be seen to derive from Dionysus' quip in the *Frogs* about the *lekythia* in his prologues: 'the flasklet grows on your prologues like warts (σῦκα) on *your* eyes' (1246). Presumably the *Thesmophoriazusae* (190) was the source of the intriguing detail in the *Life* that Euripides had a long beard (p.134.24–5).

Repeated jokes about Cephisiphon and Euripides' portrayals of lustful females like Phaedra and Stheneboea (*Ran.* 1043–4, 1080–1) provide the basis for stories about his own wayward wife (p.136.58–67; Satyrus xii): 'when he found out about her impurity he wrote the first version of the *Hippolytus*' (p.137.87). The comment he is said to have made about his wife's remarriage (p.137.91–3) is based on what Electra says about Clytemnestra in his *Electra*: 'poor man, if he thinks she won't be chaste elsewhere, but will be chaste in his house' (923–4). The *aition* offered in Satyrus (ix) and in the *Life* (p.137.81–4) that most of his comparisons were taken from the sea is of course itself the source of the beloved story that he lived and worked in a cave that looked out on the sea at Salamis.[39] What an ancient biographer gives as explanation, i.e. *as a result of* his having a cave at Salamis he drew most of his comparisons from the sea, usually turns out to be the actual *source* of the anecdote it purports to explain.

However fictional their content, it is important to observe that the total narrative pattern of these biographies expresses in mythic form the autobiographical stance of the fifth-century poets. The contests of comparative poetic utility implied in first-person statements such as Pindar's *Nem.* 8. 35–9 ('May my nature never be such etc.;' see above, p.461), which takes dramatic form in the *Peace* and in the *Frogs*, are represented in the *Lives* by 'actual' competitions with serious consequences for the losers. Aeschylus, either defeated in a tragic competition by Sophocles or in an elegiac competition by Simonides (the notion of *contest* matters more than its subject or the identity of his opponent, pp.332. 6–8), goes into exile in Sicily. Euripides' first efforts win last prize (pp.134–5. 29–31), and he too leaves Athens for Magnesia and Macedonia, where he is better appreciated (p.134.20–5). Heraclitus, Xenophanes, and Pindar draw attention to their isolation, and Aristophanes in the *Acharnians* boasts that the king of Persia understands the value of his work better than his countrymen (a fantasy that, as we saw, is taken seriously in his *Life*, p.157.51–2; above, p.000). The notion of professional remoteness takes the form of exile in mythical narrative, much as in Homer the deranged Bellerophon is represented as 'wandering alone down the plain of Wandering' (*Il.*6.201). Thus both Aeschylus and Euripides leave Athens and die in exile, better appreciated abroad than at home.[40]

The tendency in fifth-century poetry to advocate a new constructive and popular heroism accounts for the many normalizing details related in the *Lives*. If the cannibalistic Tydeus could be converted in Euripides' *Suppliants* to a man of moderation, the creative genius can also be caused to acquire ordinary talents: Aeschylus is a soldier (p.331.1–13); Euripides starts as an athlete (p.133.4–5).

[39] U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, *Einleitung in die Griechische Tragödie* (*Euripides Herakles* i; Berlin, 1899), p. 6. But because of the *Bacchae* he accepts the idea of Euripides' visit to Macedonia, p. 33. On the dangers of psychoanalytic interpretation of the cave incident, see Fairweather (n. 1), p. 239.

[40] The well-liked Sophocles, however, is said to have rejected offers from 'many kings' (p. 128. 40–1/p. xix. 10 Pearson).

They die in accordance with predictions, as do heroes like Oedipus, but in the case of the poets the fulfilment of the oracles assumes an almost degradingly homely form: Aeschylus is killed by a falling tortoise (p.332.17–21); Euripides is torn apart and eaten by the descendants of the Macedonian bitch eaten by his Thracian friends (pp. 135–136. 46–58/ Satyrus xxi).[41] The *Lives* (and Satyrus' biographical dialogue) construct the poets' life stories along the lines of folk tales, with childlike heroes, who find friends in great kings (in Aeschylus' case, Hieron, p.332.6, 16; in Euripides', Archelaus, p.134.21–24), after being rejected in their own country. The kings fully appreciate their achievements, clearly enacting the role the fairy godmother plays in European fairy stories.[42] The social function of these biographies appears to be to make extraordinary accomplishments seem to be anomalous, magical, achieved by anything other than real talent or hard work. Ironically, the trend started by poets like Pindar to make excellence morally acceptable contributes to the tendency to reduce excellence to the lowest common denominator.

Against this background we may more easily understand the intention of *On Homer* by Alcidamas, which appears to be quoted at the end of the first-century A.D. *Contest of Homer and Hesiod*, and the purpose of the *Contest* (and/or its archetype) itself. There is good reason to believe that the papyrus fragment attributed to Alcidamas is authentic, both on the stylistic grounds set out by Renehan, and because, as I hope the preceding discussion has shown, there is no reason why narrative material of this sort could not date from at least the fourth century B.C.[43] Again, as in the case of Aeschylus' and Euripides' *Lives*, a sordid incident is the cause of the poet's death, in fulfilment (as with Aeschylus) of a prophetic riddle. Alcidamas' Homer does not understand what boys killing lice say to him: 'we left behind what we took; we bring what we didn't take' (2–3). But he remembers when they explain their riddle that it fulfils the prophecy about the end of his life and immediately composes his own epitaph (8). Heraclitus, more than a century earlier, associated with Homer the story about the boys killing lice, but for a different reason. He cites the riddle to show that *he* is cleverer than Homer, who like other men (except, of course, Heraclitus) are 'deceived in respect to their understanding of the apparent, particularly Homer, who was the wisest of the Greeks. He was deceived by boys killing lice, etc.' (B 56, I. 163 D–K).[44] In the Alcidamas version the tale acquires a sentimental and homely setting characteristic of the new heroism: 'he went away from there,

[41] On writers' deaths, see Fairweather (n. 1), pp. 269–70 and Riginos (n. 1), pp. 194, 195, n. 5; also J. Fairweather, 'The Death of Heraclitus', *GRBS* 14 (1973), 238–9.

[42] B. Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York, 1976), p. 11. In post-Hellenistic biographies fairy-tale magic is sometimes rationalized, e.g. in the Herodotean *Life of Homer* miraculous birth becomes ordinary illegitimacy (p. 1. 12–13/ p. 193. 12–13 Allen); see Fairweather (n. 1), pp. 272–3.

[43] R. Renehan, 'The Michigan Alcidamas-Papyrus: A Problem in Methodology', *HSCP* 75 (1971), 85–105; all references in this article are to his text, pp. 85–6. See also his 'Linguistic Criteria for Dating and Authorship: The Alcidamas Papyrus', *Studies in Greek Texts* (*Hypomnemata* 43 (1976), 144–59). Aristotle fr. 76 tells story of Homer's mother (Plut. *Vit. Hom.* 3, p. 240 Allen); Trenkner (n. 23), p. 30.

[44] C.f. Allen (n. 7), p. 38; the mendaciously inventive John of Salisbury told this same story about Plato, Riginos (n. 1), p. 197.

and since there was mud, he slipped and fell on his side, and (as they say) died' (13–14).[45]

Also characteristic of the new heroism is Alcidamas' conclusion: 'On this theme we shall try to create our excellence, since we see that historians are especially admired. Indeed Homer because of this both in life and in death has been honoured by all men' (15–19). Alcidamas in his rather inexplicit prose adheres to the the established professional tradition of reminding his audience that he (like other writers) will be identified with what he writes. The final lines of Alcidamas' *On Homer* are particularly interesting: 'let us then offer him thanks for the education, and pass on his Life and other poetry through accurate recollection to the common possession of those of the Greeks who want to be lovers of the beautiful' (19–23). The content of Homer's poetry, like Capaneus' violence in Euripides' *Suppliants*, has been reduced to its most socially functional form, 'education'. His life and poetry are explicitly linked as the subject of their recorder's legacy to posterity, and the purpose of Alcidamas' work is to maintain both 'accurate recollection' and to provide material 'for lovers of the beautiful' (or the noble or good). Applying present-day standards of accuracy and ethics, we might well question whether he has done either, if the rest of his biography were composed of anecdotes like the story about Homer's death in the mud. But if his goals were similar to those of the biographers of Aeschylus and Euripides, such as the third-century Satyrus, Alcidamas seems to be offering his audience just what they wanted to hear: a fairy tale, an entertainment, where Homer's simple goodness offers hope for meaning in the everyday occurences of their own existences.[46]

In Alcidamas' account the story of the boys killing lice may have been preceded by a poetic contest between Homer and Hesiod, as in the Antonine *Contest* that has come down to us. Whether it was in fact part of his *Homer*, there is good reason to assume that a story resembling the *Contest* began to be told as early as the late fifth century. Scholars have inferred that Aristophanes knew it because in both the *Contest* and in the *Peace* the same couplet is cited about stopping for dinner after a day's fighting (*Cert.* 107–8/*Pax* 1282–3). Also in both, martial sentiments are rejected and, as in the *Frogs*, the less popular poet, i.e. Hesiod, unexpectedly wins.[47] But it seems even more likely that the tragic poets' contest in Aristophanes' *Frogs* provided (as for so much other biographical fiction) the model for a contest between epic poets. A fourth-century date seems indicated by the simplistic statement of moral issues in the *Contest*, the literary source of its geographical setting (Euboea, derived from *Op.*650–62), and the redemption of the poet Hesiod at the end of his life, like Aeschylus and Euripides, by a foreign king. But whatever its exact date, we can discern in the ethical nature of the contest itself and in the stories of both poets' deaths (Hesiod is falsely accused of rape) the trivializing process of the new heroism. It is fortunate that the fifth-century poets never saw what became of their idealistically intended revisions and mythologies.

[45] It is interesting to note that in the *Contest* the corroborative detail 'he died *on the third day*' is added; for a helpful schematic presentation of variants, see G. S. Kirk, 'The Michigan Alcidamas-Papyrus,' *CQ* 44 (1950), 104–5.

[46] On Satyrus' date and works, see S. R. West, 'Satyrus: Peripatetic or Alexandrian', *GRBS* 15 (1974), 279–87.

[47] See esp. E. Vogt, 'Die Schrift vom Wettkampf Homers und Hesiods', *RbM* 102 (1959), 219–21 and also *Gnomon* 33 (1961), 697–703.

In this survey I have tried to show that some of the worst traditions that have come down to us, as well as some of the best, had their origins in the fifth century. We ought not blame biographers of the fourth century and after for the lowered standards of quality, when the patterns they were following were well established in the fifth, partly through the agency of some of the very authors whose works we most admire, Hesiod, Pindar, Aristophanes, Euripides. It also seems clear that, at least in the case of the *Lives* of the poets, no one from the late fifth century onward expected what we call 'biography' to be historical in our sense of the word history, but that rather the work and the man defined and re-presented each other.[48] The worst products of this phenomenon are the *Lives* of literary figures, which by their nature can tell us none of the things literary critics, with their keen interest in the psychology of art, now want to know.

Unfortunately the influence of this biographical methodology did not stop with the lives of poets or with the trivial tales told of philosophers by Diogenes Laertius and his predecessors. We should ask more critically than we often do, to what extent Plato's account of Socrates' life in the *Apology* has been shaped by the mythology of the isolated professional working for the common good, asking for nothing other than the recognition of his moral goals.[49] The Plato of the *Seventh Epistle* is also an isolated figure, rejected at home and abroad, in spite of his good advice. The letter, with its practical philosophy helpfully condensed from the *Dialogues*, bears some resemblance to the spurious Second Letter to Timothy in the New Testament, with its many familiar sentiments about the difficulties of life at present and the glories of the life to come, and with its author also doubting the sincerity of his fellow workers, but yet remaining vitally concerned with the good of his dependents, down to the execution of many convincingly itemized little chores.[50]

I do not want to make exaggerated claims for the *direct* influence of the fifth-century poet who told his audience that he was unique, and who, without always saying what he was doing, set a pattern of behaviour in his poetry that he wanted others to follow. Yet however noble his intentions, by suppressing what he did not wish to be heard and by covertly reconstructing tradition, he was at least participating in a process that later encouraged historians to report facts selectively and with strong ethical intent. Pindar's poetry in more than one way was highly representative of his times, and even his professional statements (however they were meant to be taken) were at least reflective of what was later to become a pervasive, though ultimately anti-intellectual, trend.[51]

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[48] On fictional techniques in Herodotus, see D. Fehling, *Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot: Studien zur Erzählkunst Herodots* (*Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur und Geschichte* 9; Berlin, 1971), pp. 67–125. More, however, needs to be said about what Herodotus and his contemporaries regarded as 'true;' see J. Cobet's review of Fehling, *Gnomon* 47 (1974), 737–46.

[49] On mythical patterns in the *Apol.*, see Bieler (n. 8) ii. 86; and on fiction in Xen. *Mem.*, Dihle (n. 23), p. 32.

[50] For criteria, see R. Syme, 'Fraud and Imposture', *Pseudepigrapha* i (*Ent. Hardt* 18), 5–6. N. Gulley, 'The Authenticity of the Platonic Epistles', ibid. 105–30. On fiction in the N.T., see M. Dibelius, *Studies in the Acts of the Apostles* (New York, 1951), pp. 26–77.

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