

# The *Life* of the Author in the Letters of “Euripides”

Johanna Hanink

IN 1694, Joshua Barnes, the eccentric British scholar (and poet) of Greek who the next year would become Regius Professor at the University of Cambridge, published his long-awaited *Euripidis quae extant omnia*.<sup>1</sup> This was an enormous edition of Euripides’ works which contained every scrap of Euripidean material—dramatic, fragmentary, and biographical—that Barnes had managed to unearth.<sup>2</sup> In the course of preparing the volume, Barnes had got wind that Richard Bentley believed that the epistles attributed by many ancient manuscripts to Euripides were spurious; he therefore wrote to Bentley asking him to elucidate the grounds of his doubt. On 22 February 1693, Bentley returned a letter to Barnes in which he firmly declared that, with regard to the ancient epistles, “tis not Euripides himself that here discourseth, but a puny sophist that acts him.” Bentley did, however, recognize that convincing others of this would be a difficult task: “as for arguments to prove [the letters] spurious, perhaps there are none that will convince any person that doth not discover it by himself.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On the printing of the book and its early distribution see D. McKitterick, *A History of Cambridge University Press I Printing and the Book Trade in Cambridge, 1534–1698* (Cambridge 1992) 380–392; on Joshua Barnes see K. L. Haugen, *ODNB* 3 (2004) 998–1001.

<sup>2</sup> C. Collard, *Tragedy, Euripides and Euripideans* (Bristol 2007) 199–204, rehearses a number of criticisms of Barnes’ methods, especially concerning his presentation of Euripidean fragments (for which he often gave no source, and which occasionally consisted of lines from the extant plays).

<sup>3</sup> Bentley did ask Barnes not to cite him in the imminent edition, “for I do

In his *Euripides* of the following year, however, Barnes not only printed the letters as authentic Euripidean artefacts, but also committed so grave a breach of gentlemanly decorum that Bentley's biographer, James Henry Monk (a Regius Professor himself), claimed to have felt "almost ashamed" in recounting the details, nearly 140 years later.<sup>4</sup> Barnes had neither responded to nor even acknowledged Bentley's cordial letter, but in his *Argumentum* to the epistles he obliquely referred to the correspondence (without naming names) by countering some of the arguments that Bentley had made to him against the epistles' genuineness.<sup>5</sup> Here too Barnes pointedly declared that he did not know who could be "so boldfaced and wanting in judgment as to pronounce the letters unworthy of our Euripides, or to suspect that they were written by another Euripides, or are the products of another author of a less pure age."<sup>6</sup>

Thanks, perhaps, to Barnes' provocation, the letters of Euripides would become one of the secondary targets of the *Dissertation on the Epistles of Phalaris* that Bentley contributed to William Wotton's *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning*, which also appeared in 1694. Bentley's *Dissertation* included appendices on other corpora of epistles (as well as on the fables of Aesop) that he considered just as spurious as those letters which his contemporaries were touting as "classical" masterpieces by the Sicilian tyrant Phalaris. Bentley opened the section entitled *Of Euripides' Epistles* with a tongue-in-cheek reference to Barnes'

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not pretend to assert, but only to believe, [the epistles] are shams." The letter is reprinted in Alexander Dyce's edition of *The Works of Richard Bentley* (London 1836) II 210–213.

<sup>4</sup> J. H. Monk, *The Life of Richard Bentley, D. D.* (London 1833) II 54.

<sup>5</sup> Barnes, *Euripidis quae extant omnia* (Cambridge 1694) 523: "Scio equidem a Nonnullis dubitatum fuisse, utrum Euripidis fuerint, necne; imo sunt, qui Sophistarum haec opera & lusus affirmant ... Nec nescio, quem Authorem harum Epistolarum nonnulli voluerint; viz. Sabirium Pollonem ..."

<sup>6</sup> Barnes, *Euripidis* 523: "nescio quis adeo sit perfrictae frontis, aut Judicii imminuti, qui illas vel Euripide hos nostro indigna pronuntiet, vel ab alio Euripide scriptas, vel ab ullo alio Aetatis minus purae Authore, confictas suspicetur."

recent edition: “Tis a bold and dangerous venture to attack Euripides’ *Letters*; since a very learned Greek professor has so passionately espoused them”;<sup>7</sup> he then endeavored to lay bare what he perceived to be the many flaws in logic and errors of fact that the anonymous “puny sophist” has committed in forging letters by the great tragedian. Like his more substantial work on *Phalaris*, Bentley’s essay on the epistles of “Euripides” was so effective at shaming and silencing any of the letters’ would-be champions and scholars that it remained essentially the last, damning word on the text until the twentieth century.<sup>8</sup>

This intellectual row between Richard Bentley and Joshua Barnes, like the pseudo-Euripidean epistles themselves, marks one of the many moments of debate in the long reception-history of Euripides’ life. Throughout that history a number of individuals—beginning at least with Aristophanes<sup>9</sup>—have either presumed to understand or have exercised themselves in imagining who Euripides *the man* was, inferring information about his personality from his works and then using those inferences as hermeneutic tools for deciphering his poetry. Bentley and Barnes’ clash over the letters and the question of their authenticity may therefore serve as an opportune and relatively modern inroad into appreciating this essential quality of the Euripidean biographical tradition, namely the fact that it has, since antiquity, been a highly and hotly contested one, subject on many occasions to tendentious and polemical revision in the hands of its interpreters. Bentley began his 1693 letter to Barnes by stating the conclusion of his own formidable philological intuition: “That the Epistles which are ascribed to Euripides are suppositious, I ever believed since I first read them,

<sup>7</sup> *Works* II 206.

<sup>8</sup> On the legacy of Bentley in the modern study of Greek pseudo-epistolography see P. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions* (Cambridge 2001) 194–196.

<sup>9</sup> See particularly M. Lefkowitz, *Lives of the Greek Poets* (Baltimore 1981), and D. Roselli, “Vegetable-Hawking Mom and Fortunate Son: Euripides, Tragic Style, and Reception,” *Phoenix* 59 (1995) 1–49.

and 'tis likely shall continue to do so still." And yet the strength of Barnes' opposing convictions could be nowhere so evident as in his infamous declaration that anyone who so much as doubted that the letters were by "our Euripides" ("Euripide nostro") was "boldfaced and wanting in judgment": "perfrictae frontis, aut Iudicii imminuti." Joshua Barnes' Euripides, then, must have been a very different man than Richard Bentley's.

This quarrel between two philologists of the "long" eighteenth century also serves to throw into relief a number of questions and problems to do with the pseudo-Euripidean epistles themselves, and this article will use the terms of Barnes and Bentley's debate as a starting point for reconsidering the methods and motivations that guided the creation of this perplexing text. Assuming with Bentley (and nearly all other critics but Barnes) that the letters are not by Euripides, but rather originated in much later (and certainly not "classical") antiquity,<sup>10</sup> the principal question I wish to pose is, which—or perhaps whose—Euripides was the author of these letters attempting to portray? Few attempts have been made in the past either to analyse or to reconstruct the project of this author, despite the fact that it is remarkable merely on the grounds that these letters are the only ones to have been transmitted from Greek antiquity under the name of a well-known poet. We have no other Greek "epistles" which seriously purport to be by Homer or Sappho, or Pindar or Sophocles, for example,

<sup>10</sup> Extraordinarily, there is an ancient testimonium which explicitly impugns the letters' authenticity: one of the *vitae* of the poet Aratus cites Apollonides of Nicaea as saying that the letters in circulation under Aratus' name are really by "Sabirius Pollo," the same man responsible for the letters attributed to Euripides (Arat. *Vit.* I, p.10.18–19 Martin). On the near-impossibility of the letters' authenticity see (besides Bentley) L. Tudeer, "Some Remarks on the Letters of Euripides," *Annal.Acad.Scient.Fennicae* Ser. B 11 (1921) 3–35 (a linguistic analysis); H.-U. Gößwein, *Die Briefe des Euripides* (Meisenheim am Glan 1975) 6–9 and 15–29, esp. §1.3.6.1 ("Indizien der Unechtheit"); and F. Jouan and D. Auger, "Sur le corpus des *Lettres d'Euripide*," in *Mélanges Edouard Delebecque* (Aix-en-Provence 1983) 183–198, at 187–188.

and this particular uniqueness of the Euripidean case is one to which I shall return. What is more, in spite of Euripides' enormous popularity both in the ancient world and amongst classical scholars, the corpus of epistles attributed to him is not a large one, nor does the relevant modern bibliography run very long. The text, which survives in thirty-four manuscripts,<sup>11</sup> consists of five letters ranging from about 160 to 740 words in length; these have been gathered and edited with commentary in one modern critical edition, by Hans-Ulrich Gößwein (1975).<sup>12</sup> The reviews of Gößwein's edition, together with a small handful of scattered articles,<sup>13</sup> constitute the bulk of the modern published scholarship which engages critically and substantially with the epistles.<sup>14</sup>

And yet, in the last generation or so the study of ancient literary biography—a generic category in which the letters certainly participate—has seen two significant shifts in agenda:

<sup>11</sup> These have been collated by Gößwein (listed *Briefe* 62), who was able to reconstruct a *stemma codicum* that diverged into two main branches sometime in the eleventh or twelfth century.

<sup>12</sup> On the manuscripts and early editions of the text see Gößwein, *Briefe* 63–65, and Jouan and Auger, in *Mélanges Delebecque* 188–190. The letters are now also handily available with facing English translation in D. Kovacs, *Euripidea* (Leiden 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Tudeer, *Annal.Acad.Scient.Fennicae* B 11 (1921) 3–35; E. W. Walton, “Prose Rhythm in the Letters of Euripides: A Computer-Assisted Analysis of Style,” *Pacific Coast Philology* 12 (1977) 72–81; and Jouan and Auger, in *Mélanges Delebecque* 183–198. Tudeer's piece is a linguistic and stylistic study, Walton analyses the prose rhythm of the letters in an (inconclusive) attempt to determine their authenticity, and Jouan and Auger provide a general overview and account of the text (transmission, content, etc.). See also N. Holzberg, “Der griechische Briefroman. Versuch einer Gattungstypologie,” in N. Holzberg (ed.), *Der griechische Briefroman: Gattungstypologie und Textanalyse* (Tübingen 1994) 1–52, at 13–17 (largely a comparison of the Euripidean and Platonic epistles).

<sup>14</sup> R. Knöbl, *Biographical Representation of Euripides: Some Examples of their Development from Classical Antiquity to Byzantium* (diss. Durham Univ. 2008), includes a section on the letters, as does J. P. Christy, *Writing to Power: Tyrant and Sage in Greek Epistolography* (diss. Univ. Pennsylvania 2010).

in the 1970s and early 1980s Janet Fairweather and Mary Lefkowitz did much to demolish the credibility of ancient biographical traditions for poets by demonstrating that much of literary “biography” either derived from comedy or coalesced around and according to certain commonplaces.<sup>15</sup> More recently, however, Barbara Graziosi has shown that, in at least the case of the Homeric biographies, “the fictionality and popularity of the ancient material on Homer’s life does not warrant our ‘disregard’”: she makes the compelling argument that, to the contrary, this material is still of value in that it “must ultimately derive from an encounter between the poems and their ancient audiences.”<sup>16</sup> In order to pursue the question Whose Euripides?, I shall here be adopting a form of Graziosi’s reception-oriented approach, with reference in this case to a tragedian whose surviving ancient *vita*-tradition consists in a sizable body of fragmentary, contradictory, and fanciful testimonia. Although the letters—like the poetic *vitae* themselves—may shine little to no real light on the fifth century, they are (again like the *vitae*) still of interest to students of antiquity in that they attest to at least one ancient reader’s experience of the poet. In particular, these epistles constitute evidence of that reader’s encounters and interactions with the already widely-circulating body of Euripidean biographical material.

If an essential tendency of Euripides’ earliest biographers was to reconstruct the figure of the playwright from the body of his work (an ancient saying about poets tells us that “As are his characters, so is the man”<sup>17</sup>), the author of the Euripidean

<sup>15</sup> J. Fairweather, “Fiction in the Biographies of Ancient Writers,” *AncSoc* 5 (1974) 231–275; Lefkowitz, *Lives*. The study of ancient literary biography as a category had been inaugurated by F. Leo in his *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer literarischen Form* (Leipzig 1901).

<sup>16</sup> B. Graziosi, *Inventing Homer* (Cambridge 2002) 3.

<sup>17</sup> ο[ἷ]α μὲν π[ο]εῖ λέγε[ι]ν | τοῖός ἐστιν: so “Aristophanes” in Satyrus’ *Life of Euripides* F 6 fr.39 col. IX 25–28 (= *PCG* III.2 F 694). This dictum also captures the guiding biographical principle of what is now commonly known as the “Chamaeleontic method” (so-named for the Peripatetic writer Chamaeleon).

epistles appears to have been most directly engaged in a process of reading, resisting, and rewriting the earlier life-traditions. In fact the Euripides of the letters is in many ways remarkably unlike the Euripides of either of the two major ancient biographical sources, both of which are largely structured around anecdotes: these are the *Γένος καὶ βίος Εὐριπίδου* (*Vit.Eur.*) transmitted with manuscripts of Euripides' plays,<sup>18</sup> and a dialogue by the Hellenistic biographer Satyrus that is preserved fragmentarily on papyrus.<sup>19</sup>

In attempting to account for the ways in which the author of these epistles responds to and rewrites Euripides' biographical tradition, I begin by offering a brief account of the general character and narrative arc of the letters (§1). Next I examine some of the ways in which these letters engage (and at some points polemically refuse to engage) with certain known strands of Euripides' ancient biographical tradition (§2). I then go on to argue that crucial to understanding this text is recognition that the character of Euripides developed in it represents an elaboration of the tragedian's largely post-classical reputation as the "philosopher of the stage" (§3). It is, I suggest, Euripides' role as a kind of sage in these letters that largely accounts for the nature of (and perhaps even the reason for) their transmission from antiquity. Finally, by way of conclusion I discuss the way in which these letters also appear to mark their author's attempt at imposing a plausible (if still tendentious) narrative onto the unruly corpus of Euripidean biographical anecdotes.

To borrow, then, from the last line of Barnes' notorious introduction to the text: *Nunc ad ipsas Epistolas festinamus.*

<sup>18</sup> *TrGR* V.1 T 1. On the development of Euripides' biography specifically in the Hellenistic period see J. Hanink, "Literary Politics and the Euripidean *Vita*," *CCJ* 54 (2008) 115–135.

<sup>19</sup> *P.Oxy.* IX 1176. The newest edition is S. Schorn, *Satyros aus Kallatis: Sammlung der Fragmente mit Kommentar* (Basel 2004); see also G. Arrighetti, *Satiro: Vita di Euripide* (Pisa 1964).

### 1. *Overview of the Epistles*

If the groups of ancient letters attributed to Phalaris, Themistocles, and Chion of Heraclea may be construed as ancient “epistolary novels”<sup>20</sup> (or what Rosenmeyer has preferred to call “epistolary novellas”<sup>21</sup>), the relatively brief case of the pseudo-Euripidean letters would constitute something more like an epistolary short story.<sup>22</sup> Bentley pronounced that “without doubt there were formerly more” letters ascribed to Euripides,<sup>23</sup> and while it is entirely plausible that other letters circulated in antiquity under the tragedian’s name, the short single set that has been transmitted does indeed display an internal coherence and unity, as well as a clear sense of chronological progression (far more so than the set of letters attributed to Chion of Heraclea and Themistocles, for example).

Three different addressees appear among the five letters: Euripides’ controversial patron King Archelaus of Macedon (*Ep.* 1, 3, 4), the tragedian Sophocles (2), and Cephisophon (5), whom we encounter in plays of Aristophanes as Euripides’ preferred actor.<sup>24</sup> According to Euripides’ *Vita*, there were certain individuals whose *φθόνος* (envy) led them to charge that Cephisophon had collaborated with Euripides on his tragedies (the verb used is *συμποιέω*);<sup>25</sup> a different section of the *Vita* also alleges that Cephisophon was a slave guilty of an affair with Euripides’ wife (*Vit.Eur.* IV.1). Here in the fifth epistle “Eu-

<sup>20</sup> See esp. Holzberg, in *Der griechische Briefroman* 1–52.

<sup>21</sup> On descriptive terms for the genre(s) see Rosenmeyer, *Fictions* 48–49.

<sup>22</sup> For an overview of the letters and their epistolary types (*μικτή, ἀποφαντική, παρακλητική*, etc.) see also Gößwein’s section “Inhalt und Typologie” (*Briefe* 17–19).

<sup>23</sup> *Works* II 206.

<sup>24</sup> Aristophanes mentions the actor Cephisophon as the source of some of Euripides’ poetry (likely the source of the *Vita*’s information), at *Ran.* 944 and 1408. On Cephisophon’s association with Euripides see A. H. Sommerstein, “Cuckoos in Tragic Nests? Kephisophon and Others,” *Leeds Intern. Class. Stud.* 3.1 (2003/4).

<sup>25</sup> *Vit.Eur.* III.3 (= *TrGF* V.1 T 1 III.3, cf. IA.3).



ripides” addresses Cephisophon as an old friend and trusted confidant.

The first letter opens with Euripides rejecting money offered to him by King Archelaus (the first instantiation of the collection’s persistent *Geldmotiv*<sup>26</sup>), but also requesting that the king release from prison certain unnamed “young men of Pella” (1.2). In the third letter we then find Euripides thanking Archelaus for doing him this favor and describing the warm reception in Athens of the newly-freed young men and their overjoyed father.<sup>27</sup> Nowhere else in the surviving testimonia for Euripides’ life is there notice of the event, nor do there seem to be any clues as to the identity of the young men from Pella or the nature of their offense; it may however be the case that the episode derives from or is loosely associated with the story that Euripides won forgiveness from Archelaus for a group of Thracians fined a talent for accidentally eating one of the king’s Molossian hounds.<sup>28</sup>

The second letter, the only one that does not refer in any way to Archelaus, also alludes to an otherwise unattested event:

<sup>26</sup> Holzberg, in *Der griechische Briefroman* 13–17.

<sup>27</sup> Diogenes Laertius (8.85) records that Plato secured the release of a young man, a disciple of the philosopher Philolaus, from the prison in which he was being held by Plato’s own tyrant-patron Dionysius II of Syracuse. This story is offered as a possible explanation as to how Plato obtained the one book by Philolaus, from which he supposedly plagiarized his *Timaeus*. For the epistolary *topos* of a wise man begging the freedom of a prisoner held by a tyrant see also [Aristippus] *Ep.* 11 (ed. A. J. Malherbe, *The Cynic Epistles: A Study Edition* [Missoula 1977]): in the epistle “Aristippus,” the Cyrenaic philosopher, asks Dionysius of Syracuse to free certain jailed Locrians.

<sup>28</sup> *Vit. Eur.* II; cf. Satyrus F 6 fr.39 col. XXI which after a lacuna resumes with the words ὁ δὲ παρητήσατο (and he “begged their pardon”?). For an illuminating case-study in the transformation and evolution of such biographical anecdotes over time see M. Corradi, “L’origine della tradizione sul processo di Pitagora,” in M. Erler and S. Schorn (eds.), *Die griechische Biographie in hellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin 2007) 295–302, who traces the story of Pythagoras’ supposed trial for impiety.

this is a consolation piece on the occasion of a shipwreck that Sophocles supposedly suffered en route to Chios, which perhaps places its dramatic date in about 440 B.C., when Sophocles, as elected general together with Pericles, led the Athenian expedition against Samos.<sup>29</sup>

The fourth epistle is an almost entirely paraenetic piece, consisting in advice from “Euripides” to Archelaus as to how the Macedonian king should conduct his rule; the fifth, final, and longest letter is then the one addressed to Cephisophon. In it Euripides describes his arrival and kind treatment at Archelaus’ court and defends his decision to relocate to a “barbarous land” (5.3), although he never fully explains this decision.<sup>30</sup> Importantly, this last letter affords “Euripides” an opportunity for reflection on the nature of his relationships with the two addressees of the previous four letters, Sophocles and Archelaus. As readers of the epistolary “short story” that is developed and recounted over the course of these five letters, we infer that Euripides has moved to Macedon between his composition of the last two.

One of the most prominent characteristics of the epistles is thus the shifting geographies of the letter-writer and his addressees. “Euripides” himself changes location from Athens to Macedon, while the destination of the letters swings from Macedon to Chios, back to Macedon, and finally to Athens, in a complete reversal of the original circumstance (now Euripides writes from Macedon home to Athens, whereas his first letter

<sup>29</sup> Thuc. 1.115.1; cf. Jouan and Auger, in *Mélanges Delebecque* 185. On Sophocles and Chios see D. Kagan, *The Fall of the Athenian Empire* (Ithaca 1987) 175–176. Athenaeus preserves Ion of Chios’ account of Sophocles’ witty banter at a banquet that he supposedly attended in Chios at the time of this expedition (603E–604D, *FGrHist* 392 F 6).

<sup>30</sup> Euripides’ “Macedonian exile” (for the sources see *TrGF* V.1 T 112–128) has been a matter of some debate in recent years: see esp. S. Scullion, “Euripides and Macedon, or the Silence of the *Frogs*,” *CQ* 53 (2003) 389–400, and the response in Hanink, *CCJ* 54 (2008) 115–135. The story is nevertheless attested already by Aristotle (*Pol.* 1311b; cf. n.81 below) and was in wide circulation at least by the early third century B.C.

had been dispatched from Athens to Macedon): the curtain of the epistolary tale falls with our hero living out his last days at the court of a barbarian king. Ranja Knöbl has therefore rightly observed that the author of the letters evokes a “lively atmosphere of the literary past” by sending the text’s readers on an imaginary journey through the Hellenized world.<sup>31</sup> But what is perhaps most striking about the letters’ construction of that past is the way in which they elaborate—but also oppose and revise—the dominant version of it that has otherwise managed to survive.

## 2. *Euripidean Biography and Tradition*

Euripides’ fame as a poet in Greco-Roman antiquity was second only to Homer’s, and (perhaps accordingly) his *vita*-tradition is the second-most extensive of that which survives for any Greek poet. In addition to the two principal surviving biographies already mentioned we also have a number of anecdotes about, epigrams upon,<sup>32</sup> and comic depictions of him. The abundance and nature of the testimonia would seem to indicate that a passion for Euripidean tragedy gripped the Hellenized, and particularly the Hellenistic world,<sup>33</sup> and Euripides’ own *vita* even takes certain lines by the New Comedy poet Philemon as a barometer for the fervor: Philemon is said to have “loved Euripides so much that he dared (*ἠγάπησεν ὡς τολμηῆσαι*) to say, ‘If it were true, as some people say, that the dead still had their senses, I would have hanged myself to see Euripides.’”<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> R. Knöbl, in an unpublished paper (“Athens, Macedonia, Chios and Rome: The Function of Imaginary Spaces in the Pseudo-Euripidean Novel in Letters”) delivered at the 4<sup>th</sup> International Conference on the Ancient Novel (Lisbon, July 2008).

<sup>32</sup> See esp. *TrGF* V.1 T 232–240.

<sup>33</sup> Aspects of Euripides’ Hellenistic-era popularity are eloquently and incisively demonstrated by P. Bing, “Afterlives of a Tragic Poet: Image and Hypothesis in the Hellenistic Reception of Euripides,” in F. Montanari and A. Rengakos (eds.), *Language—Text—Literature: Archetypes, Concepts, and Contents of Ancient Scholarship and Grammar* (forthcoming).

<sup>34</sup> *Vit. Eur.* IV.3 = Philemon *PCG* VII F 118. In *The Birth of Tragedy from the*

The pseudo-Euripidean epistles, however, constitute a unique contribution to the biographical tradition not only for the otherwise unattested episodes which they relate, but also for what they omit. In the letters we find, for example, scarcely a suggestion of the Euripides who was a sullen and anti-social woman-hater, a man who never smiled<sup>35</sup> and was driven away from Athens by the merciless abuse of the comic poets: this is the character-sketch of Euripides with which we are most familiar thanks to the other biographies.<sup>36</sup> Nowhere else in the relatively broad and often repetitive surviving tradition is there so methodical a depiction of the poet as a social, sympathetic, and even compassionate personality as that which we encounter in the letters, where “Euripides” claims to be particularly concerned with the welfare of his native Athens and of his friends (5.2). In fact in the epistles he appears rather more like the man we only just glimpse in one anecdote preserved by two other ancient sources: when Timotheus the dithyrambist was booed off the stage by philistine audiences who rejected his musical innovations, Euripides is said to have encouraged him by telling him not to give up and that the public would eventually come around.<sup>37</sup> The image of a kinder and gentler

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*Spirit of Music* (1872) Nietzsche took this fragment of Philemon as indicative of the “passionate affection” (“leidenschaftliche Zuneigung”) that the poets of New Comedy felt for Euripides (§11); the *Euripidis Vita* is however the only source for the fragment, and we do not know in what context, play, or by what (kind of) character the words were pronounced.

<sup>35</sup> “He was regarded as sullen and pensive and stern, a hater of laughter and of women” (*Vit. Eur.* III.1, transl. Kovacs); cf. *Suda* Εὔ.3695; Satyrus F 6 fr.39 cols. X, XV, XVI, XVII; Gellius 15.20 (= *TrGF* V.1 T 2). On Euripides’ putative misogyny see T 108–111; cf. Lefkowitz, *Lives* 95–98. See also P. T. Stevens, “Euripides and the Athenians,” *JHS* 76 (1956) 87–94, on how the image of Euripides as persecuted by his countrymen has been too-readily accepted by modern scholars.

<sup>36</sup> Stevens, *JHS* 76 (1956) 87–94, nevertheless convincingly argues that this picture of Euripides is exaggerated by the ancient (as well as by certain modern) sources.

<sup>37</sup> Satyrus F 6 fr.39 col. XXII, Plut. *Mor.* 795D (= *TrGF* V.1 T 87a–b). The

Euripides conveyed by the letters works to challenge the more “hostile” and dominant branches of the Euripidean biographical tradition (at least as we know it) in two particularly notable instances: first in the portrayal of the friendship between Euripides and Sophocles, and second in the depiction of Euripides’ relationship with his patron, Archelaus of Macedon.

After Archelaus and Euripides himself, Sophocles emerges as the most important “character” in the story told by the letters. Not only is he the addressee of the second epistle, in which Euripides offers him consolation for suffering the shipwreck and losing new plays to the sea, but he is also an important subject of discussion and reflection in the fifth and final letter of the collection, addressed to Cephisophon. It is in this last letter that “Euripides” denies the rumors that he has come to Macedon only for bragging rights (*ἀλαζονεία*) or in pursuit of wealth and power. He insists to Cephisophon that throughout his life he has been constant both in his habits (*ἐπιτηδεύματα*) and with respect to his friends and enemies, the single exception being in the case of his attitude towards Sophocles (5.5–6):

*πρὸς γὰρ δὴ τοῦτον μόνον ἴσασι με τάχα οὐχ ὁμοίως αἰεὶ τὴν γνώμην ἔχοντα. ὃν ἐγὼ ἐμίσησα μὲν οὐδέποτε, ἐθαύμασα δὲ αἰεὶ, ἔστερξα δ’ οὐχ ὁμοίως αἰεὶ ...*

People know that it is only in his case that I have not always held the same opinion. I never hated him and I always admired him, but I did not always love him as now ...

“Euripides” goes on to explain that he had once thought Sophocles over-ambitious (*φιλοτιμότερος*), but when Sophocles offered to end their quarrels he gladly received the olive branch. Those men now seeking to renew the rift between the two of them, “Euripides” suspects, must be the same as those spreading rumors that he abandoned Athens for Macedonian luxury.

<sup>1</sup>*Vita* claims that the epigram on his Athenian cenotaph (T 232) was authored by either Timotheus or Thucydides.

Euripides and Sophocles were close contemporaries<sup>38</sup>—Sophocles supposedly outlived Euripides by only a few months—and a small handful of testimonia survive which speculate about the nature of their relationship.<sup>39</sup> Euripides' *Vita*, for example, records that “they say” (λέγουσι) that upon hearing of Euripides' death in Macedon, Sophocles “himself went forth dressed in a dark-grey cloak and brought on his chorus and his actors in the *proagon* [of the Great Dionysia] without garlands, and that the *demos* wept.”<sup>40</sup> At the news of Euripides' death Sophocles is also said to have declared that “the whetstone of my poetry has perished,”<sup>41</sup> a statement that is perhaps illuminated by an intriguing scholion to Euripides' *Phoenissae*. This note hints at how Euripides and Sophocles might have acted as “whetstones” for each other: legend (δόξα) had it that Sophocles advised Euripides against retaining the first two lines of the *Phoenissae*, whereas Euripides disapproved of the opening to Sophocles' *Electra*<sup>42</sup> (neither, of course, acceded to the other's aesthetic). Elsewhere, however, we find suggestions of what looks to be a more antagonistic rivalry between the two: a few testimonia preserve snide remarks which they are said to have made about each other's writing and lifestyles,<sup>43</sup> while another anecdote implies that this rivalry was not confined to the tragic contests: Athenaeus preserves an epigram which a jealous Sophocles supposedly wrote so as to defame Euripides after the

<sup>38</sup> The *Parian Chronicle* allows us to reconstruct dates: Sophocles 498/7–406/5, Euripides ca. 485–407/6.

<sup>39</sup> *TrGF* V.1 T 71–78; 77–78 are culled from the pseudo-Euripidean *Epistles*.

<sup>40</sup> *Vit.Eur.* IA.11.

<sup>41</sup> ἀπόλετο ἡ τῶν ποιημάτων ἀκόνη, *Gnomol.Vatic.* 517 (= *TrGF* IV T 57, V.1 T 72).

<sup>42</sup> Schol. Eur. *Phoen.* 1 (*TrGF* IV T 56, V.1 T 73). Cf. M. van der Valk, “Euripides *Phoenissae* 1–2 and Sophocles *Electra* 1—Again,” *GRBS* 23 (1982) 235–240.

<sup>43</sup> *TrGF* V.1 T 71b, 74c, 76.

two had shared a young lover (*ἐρώμενος*).<sup>44</sup>

The fifth Euripidean letter, however, offers something far different from these other floating testimonia, the kind that so often constitute the surviving biographical “evidence” for ancient poets. Exceptionally, the letter provides a narrative that describes, rather than pithily and suggestively illustrates, a relationship between the two tragedians. Thus while the variegated anecdotal tradition for Sophocles and Euripides’ association may seem at odds with itself on the count of whether the two might have been friends, by positing a relationship that began with suspicion but ended with declarations of mutual admiration and friendship, the epistolary narrative implicitly accounts for—or at least renders plausible—all of these other stories. This strategy of building narrative out of a body of anecdotes and not merely listing a series of disjointed stories and sayings, as the *Vita* and Satyrus tend to do, lies at the heart of the epistolary author’s methodology, and it is a feature to which I shall return below.

The fifth letter is also the one in which “Euripides” reflects at greatest length upon the rumors that he presumes are circulating in Athens about his reasons for leaving his native city, as well as upon his reception in Macedon by King Archelaus. This letter therefore serves the function of concretising the unity of the collection by tying together the two main threads of the epistolary story which has unfolded thus far: the previous addressees of the letters have been Archelaus and Sophocles, but here we find Euripides openly contemplating his relationships with both his royal patron and fellow tragedian.

One of the most persistent themes to be traced in the testimonia for Euripides’ life is the honor and delight with which Archelaus received him at his court in Macedon.<sup>45</sup> This honor has long been recognized as a thematic foil within the *vita-*

<sup>44</sup> Athen. 604D (*TrGF* IV T 75, V.1 T 75).

<sup>45</sup> Cf. esp. Satyrus F 6 fr.39 col. XVIII and *Vit.Eur.* IA.6; the theme recurs in all later biographies of the same tradition: Hanink, *CCJ* 54 (2008) 123.

tradition to the envy and hostility which Euripides supposedly encountered from the Athenians,<sup>46</sup> since the biographies explicitly report that Euripides was driven from Athens by the insults of the comic poets, as well as by the jealousy of his fellow citizens<sup>47</sup> (in the letters “Euripides” denies ever having paid any attention to the insults of Aristophanes: 5.2). Yet the Macedonian king does not seem to have been universally viewed in Athens so sympathetically:<sup>48</sup> for example, Polus, a character in Plato’s *Gorgias*, names Archelaus as one of the many practitioners of injustice (the ἀδικούντες) who are nevertheless fortunate (εὐδαίμονες, 470D); Socrates himself was also said by Aristotle to have refused an invitation by Archelaus on account of the king’s *hybris*.<sup>49</sup> It does not, moreover, demand too far a stretch of the imagination to see the relationship between Euripides and Archelaus as lurking behind the claim made by the Socrates of the *Republic* that tyrants are wise for keeping company with tragedians. Euripides, Plato’s Socrates explains, “sings the praises (ἐγκωμιάζει) of tyranny as something godlike and says many other such things” (568B).<sup>50</sup> It is in his very next breath that Socrates expels the tragedians from his ideal city, precisely because they glorify tyrants.

Although the fourth Euripidean letter does indeed imagine a politicized tyrant-tragedian relationship, rather than fawn over Archelaus “Euripides” uses the epistle as an opportunity to advise him that he should rule by bestowing benefactions liberally and wisely. The letter thus calls to mind other instances of

<sup>46</sup> See esp. Arrighetti, *Satiro* 141–142; for an overview of the envy/honor binary in the Euripidean tradition see Hanink, *CCJ* 54 (2008) 122–124.

<sup>47</sup> E.g. *Vit.Eur.* IB.3 and III.4; Satyrus F 6 fr.39 cols. XV and XIX.

<sup>48</sup> The Athenians had however awarded Archelaus the titles of *proxenos* and *euergetes* in 407/6 for providing timber for the construction of Athenian ships: *IG* I<sup>3</sup> 117 = Meiggs and Lewis 91.

<sup>49</sup> Arist. *Rhet.* 1398a15–27.

<sup>50</sup> Euripides wrote a play, the *Archelaus*, for his patron, in which he traced the Macedonian royal family’s descent from the gods: ed. A. Harder, *Euripides’ Kresphontes and Archelaos* (Leiden 1985).



ancient hortatory and paraenetic epistle collections in which philosophers and sages offer advice to the king, an epistolary tradition whose points of contact with the “Euripidean” letters I discuss in the next section. In the same letter Euripides also encourages Archelaus to continue sending for and supporting Greek writers and artists at his court, and in general to surround himself with these sorts of people rather than with “flatterers and buffoons” (*κολάκων καὶ βωμολόχων*, 4.4). This advice strongly recalls the counsel that, for example, Isocrates (2.13) gave the Cypriot tyrant Nicocles: the young tyrant should equip his mind by listening to and learning from poets and sages.

In recommending that Archelaus avoid associating with flatterers, however, the author of this letter also engages with a strand of the Euripidean biographical tradition that cast Euripides himself not only as a flatterer of the Macedonian king (the idea of the *κόλακος* here is perhaps not too distant from the Socratic notion of the “encomiastic” tragedian) but even as a stereotypical parasite. In Lucian’s dialogue *On the Art of the Parasite*, the character Simon lists for Tychiades a number of historical examples of “philosophers eager to play the part of the parasite.”<sup>51</sup> When Tychiades asks Simon about his sources for Plato’s “sponging” off of the Sicilian tyrants (Simon’s first and most developed example), he confidently replies with a list of precedents for the phenomenon:<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Luc. *Par.* 31, *φιλοσόφους παρασιτεῖν σπουδάσαντας*, cf. 36.

<sup>52</sup> *Par.* 35. For a discussion of Euripides’ appearance in this passage see H.-G. Nesselrath, *Lukians Parasitendialog* (Berlin 1985) 384–386. The Plato of the second Platonic epistle similarly lists a number of philosopher-ruler pairings, not to illustrate the philosophical penchant for freeloading, but rather to warn Dionysius II that such relationships are long remembered and that the two must therefore look to improving their association; examples cited by “Plato” include Hiero and Simonides, Periander and Thales, Pericles and Anaxagoras, Croesus and Solon, and Cyrus and Croesus (Pl. *Ep.* 2, 311B). For instances in New Comedy in which Euripides is presented as a parasite *avant la lettre* and a hero of “spongers” everywhere see Diphilus *PCG* V *Synoris* F 74 and *Parasite* F 60.

πολλοὶ μὲν καὶ ἄλλοι, Ἀριστόξενος δὲ ὁ μουσικός, πολλοὺ λόγου ἄξιος. Εὐριπίδης μὲν γὰρ ὅτι Ἀρχελάω μέχρι μὲν τοῦ θανάτου παρσίτει καὶ Ἀνάξαρχος Ἀλεξάνδρῳ πάντως ἐπίστασαι.

There are many other [authorities for ancient parasites], but it's worth mentioning Aristoxenus the musician: Euripides acted as parasite to Archelaus until he died, as did Anaxarchus to Alexander, as you certainly know.

In the fifth letter, however, we encounter “Euripides” insistently reprising his denials that he seeks material gain from Archelaus, and even complaining that he “feasts me every day more splendidly (*λαμπρότερον*) than I like” (5.1).<sup>53</sup> The Euripidean “I” of the epistles is a voice that vehemently and repeatedly denies wealth as his motive for association with the king, and Gößwein, the one modern commentator on the text, even sees the desire to defend Euripides on this count as the dominant *Tendenz* of the text.<sup>54</sup>

Thus while the letters to and about Archelaus reinforce the commonplace that the king showered honors and gifts upon his favorite poet, they also categorically reject the idea that Euripides played either a sycophantic or parasitic role in the relationship. If Lucian's character Simon light-heartedly classifies Euripides among the hypocritical “philosophers” who leached off of their royal patrons, the author of Euripides' letters more

<sup>53</sup> On the complaint cf. [Aristippus] *Ep.* 9 (in Malherbe, *Cynic Epistles*), where “Aristippus” (and ironically, given his pleasure-seeking ways) laments that he is being feasted too well by his tyrant patron. The anecdotal tradition also preserves accounts of *bons mots* uttered by Euripides at feasts hosted by Archelaus in Macedon (*TrGF* V.1 T 79a–d, 81); these anecdotes all relate to Euripides' purported desire for the poet Agathon.

<sup>54</sup> Gößwein, *Briefe* 23, defines this *Tendenz* as “die Rechtfertigung des Euripides, der wegen seiner Emigration den Unwillen nicht nur der Zeitgenossen, sondern auch der Nachgeborenen erregt hatte.” The “apologetic” *Tendenz* of the letters may even constitute the texts' very *raison d'être*: we know, for example, of a rhetorical exercise in which a student wrote a defence of Euripides on the charge of impiety (see n.74 below), and it is plausible that the “assignment” of the anonymous letter-writer was to defend Euripides' decision to leave Athens.

earnestly discredits any notion that the tragedian simply pandered to and praised the king. When, however, this author seeks to accomplish his aim by crafting the fourth epistle according to the subgenre of pseudepigraphy marked by paraenetic letters written by wise men of the “classical” past to foreign princes, he implicitly and importantly accepts a fundamental assumption of Lucian’s Simon, namely that Euripides belongs to the Greek “philosophical”—and not only poetic—heritage. This Euripides is not unlike the Simonides who appears as a wise counselor in Xenophon’s dialogue *Hiero*, the second part of which “is devoted to Simonides telling the tyrant how he can gain the most *charis* from his rule”:<sup>55</sup> a man whose reputation for wisdom and wise counsel matched, and in some contexts perhaps even eclipsed, the celebration of his poetry.

### 3. *The “Philosopher of the Stage”*

Euripides’ reputation for wisdom was in fact widespread in later antiquity, and he is called the “philosopher of the stage” by Vitruvius (who attributes the nickname to “the Athenians”) as well as in a number of relatively late Greek authors.<sup>56</sup> Citations of Euripides are common in philosophical works beginning at least with Plato, where despite Socrates’ “exile” of the tragedians the majority of the Euripidean quotations issue from Socrates’ own mouth.<sup>57</sup> A treatise by the third-century Stoic Chrysippus was even said to be so packed with lines from Euripides’ *Medea* that someone referred to it as the “*Medea* of Chrysippus.”<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> R. Hunter, *Theocritus and the Archaeology of Greek Poetry* (Cambridge 1996) 98. Hunter calls this part of the dialogue (§§8–11) “a recipe for an enlightened despotism.” See also V. J. Gray, “Xenophon’s *Hiero* and the Meeting of the Wise Man and Tyrant in Greek Literature,” *CQ* 36 (1986) 115–123, on the dialogue’s “Socratic form of presentation.”

<sup>56</sup> Athenaeus, Sextus Empiricus, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, and Eusebius: *TrGF* V.1 T 166a–g.

<sup>57</sup> D. Sansone, “Plato and Euripides,” *ICS* 21 (1996) 35–67.

<sup>58</sup> Diog. Laert. 7.180. On Chrysippus’ use of the play see C. Gill, “Did Chrysippus Understand *Medea*?” *Phronesis* 28 (1983) 136–149.

Some scholars have discussed how the pseudo-Euripidean epistles (and particularly the fourth and fifth) display certain philosophical motifs and characteristics, and the collection does certainly appear to engage directly with other traditions of Greek pseudepigraphy, and in particular with the tradition of letters written by famous philosophers to kings.<sup>59</sup> Jouan and Auger, for example, pointed out that the letters bear a resemblance to other collections of Stoic and Cynic epistles and even serve to cast Euripides in the role of the prototypical Cynic-Stoic sage: “Par sa noblesse d’esprit, sa *φιλανθρωπία*, son détachement des richesses, le ‘nouvel Euripide’ [of the letters] apparaît comme une sorte de sage, un héros cynico-stoïcien avant la lettre, ami et conseiller du souverain.”<sup>60</sup> In the wake of their observation, Knöbl has also suggested that in presenting Euripides as a kind of proto-Cynic the letters “reflect popular philosophy,” and she draws attention to the fact that the theme of the philosopher refusing money from his wealthy patron—the subject of the first Euripidean letter—is an epistolary *topos* that also appears in the Cynic epistles attributed to Diogenes and Crates.<sup>61</sup> It is also the case that the very same motif occurs in the first Platonic and the first Socratic letters as well.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Holzberg, *Der griechische Briefroman* 15, goes so far as to claim that the fifth letter is structurally and thematically equivalent to the *Seventh Letter* attributed to Plato. I understand that O. Polterra of the University of Fribourg is engaged in a project which examines how the pseudo-Euripidean epistles play a kind of game of resposion with the Sicilian narrative arc in the Platonic epistles.

<sup>60</sup> *Mélanges Delebecque* 194.

<sup>61</sup> Knöbl (n.32 above).

<sup>62</sup> “Plato” writes to Dionysius II that he is sending back with a certain Baccheius the gold given to him by the tyrant (*Ep.* 1, 309C), while in the first line of the first letter “Euripides” informs Archelaus that he is sending the king’s money back with the messenger Amphias. “Socrates” *Ep.* 1 (609–611 Herscher) writes to an unnamed addressee explaining that he will never be persuaded to leave Athens nor to accept money for teaching and practicing philosophy.

While, then, it is true that on the whole the letters are oriented more towards apologetic (auto)biography than serious philosophical discussion,<sup>63</sup> the arresting “exception” represented by the precept-filled fourth letter<sup>64</sup> can be better understood in the light of the fact that throughout the text the author actively assimilates Euripides to the figure of philosopher or sage to whom ancient letter collections are so often attributed.<sup>65</sup> Greek poets had long displayed a clear penchant for offering advice to their tyrant-patrons,<sup>66</sup> but it is by depicting Euripides as a more “prosaic” advisor of Archelaus—and certainly not as a sponging sycophant—that this author seeks to achieve that which Gößwein has argued to have been the principal goal of the letters, the exoneration of Euripides for his association with a barbarian king.

But although certain vague similarities and a general generic connection between the pseudo-Euripidean letters and other philosophical letters, and particularly the “Cynic epistles,” have already been identified, there may be a more concrete explanation as to why the author of Euripides’ epistles chose to write about (or really to write as) Euripides in this way. This author’s thorough familiarity with the material constituting Euripides’ biography would have meant that he was also aware that a strong theme in this biography was Euripides’ own association

<sup>63</sup> Gößwein, *Briefe* 22.

<sup>64</sup> The text “ist mehr biographisch als philosophisch orientiert, wovon nur der vierte Brief eine Ausnahme macht; sonst noch vorkommende Sentenzen und Topoi sind selten und nicht sehr spezifisch”: Gößwein, *Briefe* 22.

<sup>65</sup> On epistle collections fashioned as correspondence between poets/wise men and tyrants see esp. S. Merkle and A. Beschormer, “Der Tyrann und der Dichter. Handlungssequenzen in den Phalaris-Briefen,” in Holzberg, *Der griechische Briefroman* 84–115.

<sup>66</sup> See Hunter, *Theocritus* 99, for a discussion of Pind. *Pyth.* 1 in relation to Xen. *Hiero*: “The shared motifs ... have an easy generic explanation in the fact that in both texts ‘a wise man offers political advice to a ruler’, and Xenophon may of course actually be drawing upon lyric poetry (perhaps Pindar and Simonides) in these chapters.”

with philosophers, and I believe that it is around this notion of the “philosophical” Euripides that the persona of the letters is constructed. The decision to prioritize the pre-existing philosophical theme in the biographical tradition therefore constitutes another way in which the letters tendentially highlight some aspects of the standard tradition (and de-emphasize others) so as to formulate a new *imaginaire* of the poet.

Euripides’ *vita*-tradition associates the tragedian with an impressive crowd of contemporary philosophers.<sup>67</sup> He is said, for example, to have been a pupil or at least an acquaintance of the cosmological philosopher Anaxagoras,<sup>68</sup> and the *Suda* even claims that he “turned to writing tragedy”<sup>69</sup> after seeing Anaxagoras exiled for introducing radical new *dogmata* to Athens.<sup>70</sup> Euripides was also remembered as having been a close friend of Protagoras, and according to Diogenes Laertius (9.54) some

<sup>67</sup> See *TrGF* V.1 T 35–48 for testimonia connecting Euripides to Anaxagoras, Archelaus the Milesian, Protagoras, Prodicus, Socrates, and Heraclitus. The bibliography on the relationship of Euripides’ poetry to contemporary philosophy is extensive; a few recent studies include J. Assaël, *Euripide, philosophe et poète tragique* (Brussels 2001); F. Egli, *Euripides im Kontext zeitgenössischer intellektueller Strömungen* (Munich 2003); and J. Dillon, “Euripides and the Philosophy of his Time,” *Classics Ireland* 11 (2004) 47–73.

<sup>68</sup> See Egli, *Euripides* 33. *TrGF* V.1 T 35–38d, esp. 38a (Diog. Laert. 2.10) with J. Diggle, *Euripides: Phaethon* (Cambridge 1970) 178; Diogenes Laertius calls Euripides a pupil (μαθητής; *auditor* in the Latin sources) of Anaxagoras and cites Euripides’ description of the sun as a “golden clod” in *Phaethon* to illustrate the intellectual connection. Cf. also Aristotle’s connection of Euripidean poetry with Anaxagoran doctrine at *Eth.Eud.* 1216a11. Satyrus’ biography of Euripides seems to have included a substantial discussion of Anaxagoras’ influence upon his poetry: F 6 fr.37 cols. I and III.

<sup>69</sup> *Suda* Eῷ.3695. That those disposed towards tragedy also had philosophical inclinations and vice versa may have been a commonplace: Plato is said to have given up his tragic aspirations and turned to philosophy after he heard Socrates lecture at the Theater of Dionysus (Diog. Laert. 3.5).

<sup>70</sup> The biography in Diogenes Laertius (2.12–14) contains a muddled account of Anaxagoras’ prosecution and exile from Athens for impiety. For the testimonia on the life of Anaxagoras see P. Curd, *Anaxagoras of Clazomenae: Fragments* (Toronto 2007).

claimed that Protagoras read out the first of his treatises to an audience gathered at Euripides' house; Philochorus further records that a shipwreck that Protagoras suffered on his way to Sicily was alluded to in Euripides' *Ixion*.<sup>71</sup>

Among the ancient testimonia, however, Euripides' most prominent philosophical associate is undoubtedly Socrates. Plato's Socrates may have banished the tragedians from his ideal city, but the surviving material that attests to a relationship between Socrates and Euripides suggests that these two thinkers were remembered, at least in later antiquity, as friends and admirers of each other's work.<sup>72</sup> The relationship between them was imagined to have been so close that there were those who even charged that Socrates had contributed to Euripides' plays.<sup>73</sup>

This postulation of a personal friendship and even collaboration between Socrates and Euripides may not be entirely surprising, given that the biographical traditions for the two present them both as intellectuals cast off in their own lifetimes by their native Athens. To a certain extent we already witness the Euripidean biographical tradition assimilating the tragedian's life to a philosophical or generically intellectual biographical template when it records that Euripides, too, was tried by the Athenians for impiety (*ἀσέβεια*)<sup>74</sup>—as nearly all of

<sup>71</sup> *FGrHist* 328 F 217 (Diog. Laert. 9.55, *TrGF* V.1 p.456); the testimonium recalls the consolation by "Euripides" of the shipwrecked Sophocles in the fourth epistle.

<sup>72</sup> *TrGF* V.1 T 42–48, esp. T 47a = Ael. *VH* 2.13 (Socrates rarely went to the theater, except when a Euripidean tragedy was premiering) and T 47b = Cic. *Tusc.* 4.63 (Socrates cried out for an encore after the first three lines of *Orestes*). On this material see D. Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis 2002) 148–149.

<sup>73</sup> Diog. Laert. 2.18. Socrates' supposed collaboration with Euripides is the third piece of information mentioned in Diogenes' biography of Socrates (after his parentage and citizenship).

<sup>74</sup> Satyrus F 6 fr.39 col. X. A 3<sup>rd</sup>-cent. A.D. papyrus (*P.Oxy.* XXIV 2400) preserves a list of subjects for rhetorical exercises, and one of these presents the scenario in which Euripides is standing trial for impiety because he de-

Euripides' philosopher-friends are said to have been. In his seminal article on "The Freedom of the Intellectual in Greek Society," Kenneth Dover presented the ancient testimonia for the trials of eight fifth-century Athenian intellectuals other than Socrates on charges of impiety (*vel sim.*),<sup>75</sup> and Euripides is the only poet to appear among these eight. Dover demonstrated the general unreliability and implausibility of the ancient evidence<sup>76</sup> for any of these legal proceedings, but the study does nevertheless usefully illuminate the existence of a certain tendency in the Euripidean *vita*-tradition both to place the poet in the company of philosophers and to suggest that his life was lived according to a "philosophical" model (at least to a far greater extent than in the cases of Aeschylus or Sophocles). Euripides was even said to have travelled to Egypt with Plato on a kind of quest for ancient wisdom,<sup>77</sup> and one philosophical dialogue by Glaucon, the older brother of Plato, was apparently called the *Euripides* (Diog. Laert. 2.124). The biography of no other Greek poet displays so many intersections with the commonplaces of philosopher-*vitae*. Given this particularity, the fact that the one surviving epistolary collection attributed to a Greek poet should belong to Euripides comes to make better sense.

It is, I suspect, precisely the resemblance that the Euripidean letters have to other collections of ancient epistles written by

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picted Heracles as mad in one of his plays (presumably *HF*). For the charge that Euripides was an atheist see esp. Ar. *Thesm.* 448–452 (*TrGF* V.1 T 170) with M. Lefkowitz, "Was Euripides an Atheist?" *StU* 5 (1987) 149–166.

<sup>75</sup> K. J. Dover, *Talanta* 7 (1976) 24–54 (repr. *The Greeks and their Legacy* [Oxford 1988] 135–158): Diagoras, Aspasia, Anaxagoras, Protagoras, Damon, Diogenes of Apollonia, Euripides, Prodicus of Ceos (Plut. *Per.* 32.2 testifies to the decree proposed by Diopethes allowing prosecution of atheists). Except for Euripides and Pericles' partner Aspasia, those tried for impiety are all persons we would now class as philosophers.

<sup>76</sup> *Talanta* 7 (1976) 138–139 and 148–151 on the case of Euripides.

<sup>77</sup> Diog. Laert. 3.6–7; on the trip to Egypt as a topos of philosophical biography see M. Lefkowitz, "Visits to Egypt in the Biographical Tradition," in Erler and Schorn, *Die griechische Biographie* 101–113.



wise men to rulers that guided the nature of the text's transmission from antiquity. The only evidence for a historical or literary context for the letters lies in the manuscripts in which they have been preserved, and it is notable indeed that this text was not transmitted—as was the *Vita*—alongside any of Euripides' plays. Rather, these letters survive exclusively amidst collections of pseudonymous epistles that were supposedly authored by other wise men and philosophers (as well as by tyrants themselves), and what is particularly striking is that in some cases they have been transmitted with actual philosophical treatises. For example, the manuscript in the Cambridge University Library also contains the letters ascribed to Brutus and Plato, as well as excerpts from a number of philosophical and rhetorical works by Aristotle, Xenophon, Plato, and others.<sup>78</sup> Even the conspicuous absence of a word such as *poetarum* from the title of the 1499 Aldine edition of ancient letters points in a similar direction: *Epistolae diversorum philosophorum, oratorum, rhetorum sex et viginti*. Here Euripides ranks as one among twenty-six philosophers, orators, and rhetoricians.

For the author of the letters it was precisely the philosophical elements of the Euripidean biographical tradition that afforded him the opportunity for “correcting,” in the *ipsissima verba* of the poet, the same tradition's more hostile branches: in this text we find that the philosophical Euripides *suggested* by the biographies has been given a voice, and that this aspect of his character has been developed as a means of “authentically” discrediting the negative material in circulation. On the other hand, however, the nature of the letters' transmission strongly suggests that despite their particular and polemical biographical content, ancient readers were content to accept that this text resided most naturally in the company of the other epistolary collections attributed to philosophers and sages.

<sup>78</sup> *Cantab.* Dd.IV.16. The book's restored binding bears the title *Miscellanea Graeca Philosophia*. On the contents of the MSS. containing the Euripidean letters see Gößwein, *Briefe* 31–39.

*Conclusion*

As part of the introductory material to his edition of the letters, Gößwein submits an “approximate sketch of the personality”<sup>79</sup> of their anonymous author. For him, Bentley’s “puny sophist” was in reality a sophist of some erudition, who not only knew the Euripidean *vita*-traditions well but also displayed a certain sentimental reverence for the poet.<sup>80</sup> It is certainly the case that the Euripides of the letters—that is, the Euripides of the letter-writer—is a more sympathetic character than the majority of the biographical tradition would lead us to believe the tragedian had in reality been.

As we have seen, these letters reveal and develop their less mercenary (and more merciful)<sup>81</sup> Euripides primarily by offering a window into his reflections upon two major events: the mysterious episode concerning the release of the young men from Pella and the shipwreck of Sophocles. Again, these narratives represent the letters’ most radical innovations, as no other testimonia clearly attest to them. The two fabricated events are nevertheless crucial to the project of the letters in that they give rise to the exploration of their primary themes (themes with which the surviving *vita*-tradition certainly is concerned): Euripides’ personal relationships with Sophocles and King Archelaus of Macedon. Another major innovation with respect to the biography, however, can be detected in the letters’ very form, inasmuch as the collection is styled along the lines of other ancient epistle collections attributed to philosophers and other men renowned for wisdom. It is certainly here

<sup>79</sup> “Ein ungefähres Bild von seiner Persönlichkeit”: Gößwein, *Briefe* 29.

<sup>80</sup> “Er wird ein Sophist von einiger Bildung gewesen sein, der über die Lebensgeschichte des Euripides nicht nur relativ gut informiert war, sondern darüber hinaus diesem Dichter eine sentimentale Verehrung widmete”: Gößwein, *Briefe* 29–30.

<sup>81</sup> In *Ep.* 1 “Euripides” asks for the release of “the young men from Pella,” but Aristotle tells of how Archelaus handed a man over to Euripides for flogging: Euripides was enraged that the man had mocked him for bad breath (*Pol.* 1311b31–35).

that the “Euripides as philosopher” notion frequently suggested elsewhere in the tradition most fully develops and explicitly surfaces.

Above (549 ff.) I suggested that the epistolary reflections of “Euripides” upon his relationship with Sophocles serve to make sense of an otherwise unruly and inconsistent anecdotal tradition by alluding to quarrel and reconciliation. This kind of strategy of building new narrative from old anecdotes, however, also characterizes the methodologies behind the letter-collection as a whole. Its “philosophical” voice and form, coupled with the inclusion of two significant but otherwise unattested events, would seem to attest to the author’s desire both to control and to resist aspects of the massive body of Euripidean anecdotes, which he clearly knew very well.<sup>82</sup> Simon Goldhill has recently argued that the anecdote, and especially the biographical anecdote, was the bread and butter of intellectual table talk in later antiquity—the new *mythos* of Imperial literary culture. Anecdotes represented stories that were easily remembered and repeated, but even bodies of anecdotes united by a single theme (such as collections of *chreiai*, or much of Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of the Philosophers* and Philostratus’ *Lives of the Sophists*, for example) still only constituted collections of “discrete stories rather than a continuous tale of growth or development of character.”<sup>83</sup> What we seem to have in the pseudo-Euripidean epistles, then, is an attempt at adopting an

<sup>82</sup> On the tendentious manipulation of the classical past in educational/rhetorical contexts during the Second Sophistic see esp. J. Connolly, “Problems of the Past in Imperial Greek Education,” in Y. L. Too (ed.), *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity* (Leiden 2001) 339–373, esp. 353–358.

<sup>83</sup> S. Goldhill, “The Anecdote: Exploring the Boundaries between Oral and Literate Performance in the Second Sophistic,” in W. A. Johnson and H. N. Parker (eds.), *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Roman* (Oxford 2008) 96–113, at 108. On *chreiai* see e.g. J. F. Kindstrand, “Diogenes Laertius and the *Chreia* Tradition,” *Elenchos* 7 (1986) 219–243, and L. McClure, “The Sayings of the Courtesans in Book 13 of Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistae*,” *AJP* 124 (2003) 259–294.

established genre, epistolography, as a medium for providing a more coherent narrative of a certain chapter in Euripides' life, where this narrative not only accounts for, but also puts a more sympathetic spin upon, the other branches of the *vita* tradition. For the author of these letters, anecdotes alone seem to have been incapable of providing, contrary to Nietzsche's famous pronouncement,<sup>84</sup> an accurate picture of Euripides. At least, that is, not of his Euripides—and evidently not of Joshua Barnes' Euripides, either.<sup>85</sup>

July, 2010

Queens' College, Cambridge  
johanna\_hanink@brown.edu

<sup>84</sup> "Aus drei Anekdoten ist es möglich, das Bild eines Menschen zu geben," in Nietzsche's "Späteres Vorwort" to *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen* (1873). The history and legacy of this kind of idea is discussed in detail by G. Arrighetti in an important overview of the historical development of the theory of biographical anecdotes: "Anekdote und Biographie. Μάλιστα τὸ μικρὸν φυλάττειν," in Erler and Schorn, *Die griechische Biographie* 79–100.

<sup>85</sup> I would like to thank the editorial board and anonymous referee for *GRBS* for extremely helpful corrections to and suggestions regarding this article. I am also very grateful to Richard Hunter, Kurt Lampe, and Shaul Tor for commenting on earlier drafts, as well as to audiences in Lampeter, Cambridge, Durham, Providence, and New York for a number of helpful queries and remarks.