

The Euripides *Vita*

Mary R. Lefkowitz

I. Introduction

BIOGRAPHY can serve as a convenient aid in literary interpretation, explaining puzzling emphases, accounting for an author's choice of subject. It offers a chance to spy on the intriguing mysteries of the creative process and somehow, though perhaps only partially, to reveal its workings. Because biography informs so well about literature since the eighteenth century, readers of ancient literature instinctively search for information about authors' lives to interpret Greek and Latin texts, particularly for complex *œuvres* like Euripides' which seem to drift until some biographical or historical framework is brought in to anchor them.¹

For example, Bernard Knox, reviewing for non-specialist readers Cacoyannis' film *Iphigenia in Aulis*, begins not by discussing the drama but by speaking of Euripides the man.² He first relates an anecdote from the ancient *Vita* of Euripides to show how much the Athenians respected him: when Sophocles heard that Euripides was dead, he put on mourning and brought his actors out at the *proagon* without their ceremonial crowns, and the audience wept. But then Knox tells another anecdote from the *Vita* that expresses the hostility experienced by the poet in his lifetime: how Euripides was attacked and killed by a pack of hunting dogs. Knox warns about the dubious authenticity of such sensational stories about the deaths of poets. But he adds: "anyone who has been chased on a Greek hillside by shepherd dogs will not dismiss the story out of hand. It has in any case a symbolic rightness."³ Even though all that safely can be said about Euripides' death is that it is not impossible, Knox needs the

¹ e.g., T. B. L. Webster, *The Tragedies of Euripides* (London 1967); L. Méridier, *Euripide I* (Paris 1925) xi ff; A. Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature* (New York 1966) 462–63 [hereafter, LESKY].

² *NYRB* 6 Feb. 1978.

³ Cf. the vicious dogs in *Od.* 14.29–36, with Stanford's note; also U. v. Wilamowitz, *Euripides Herakles I*² (Berlin 1895, repr. Darmstadt 1969) 17.

anecdotes to express in narrative form the violent emotional effect of Euripides' dramas.

Recently I have tried to show that these anecdotes about poets develop from a special autobiographical mythology that finds its fullest expression in the fifth century, in works like the victory odes of Pindar.⁴ Poets establish themselves in first person statements as isolated figures in a hostile world, who set models of ethical behavior. The stance gives their poetry authority and excitement. In the fifth century also anecdotes began to be told that preserved the essence of the fictional autobiography, but in trivializing ways that reduced the poets' stature to a more ordinary level. I wish to show now in some detail how this process produced Euripides' biography. In part my motives are cautionary: no conclusions about the impact of Euripides' poetry or about his popularity in Athens ought to be drawn on the basis of such fictional material.⁵ But also I shall describe the forces this mythology was intended to mediate, and to identify the kind of audience it was meant to serve.

I begin with the *Vita* that serves as preface to the Byzantine manuscripts of Euripides' plays, because it is ostensibly the principal source of information about his life.⁶ This *Vita* is of particular interest because we can trace at least in part the course of its development: anecdotes about Euripides were known to Philochorus in the fourth century: papyrus scraps preserve a sense of the contents and organization of Satyrus' third-century biographical dialogue about the poet.⁷ Scholarly comment has concentrated on these earlier sources. But since they survive only in fragments, more can be learned about the general nature and function of the fictions that comprise Euripides' biography from the later but complete *Vita*.

Close analysis will show that virtually all the information in the *Vita* derives from comedy or Euripides' own dramas (§II); that anecdotes endow the poet with both heroic capabilities and degrading

⁴ "The Poet as Hero: Fifth-Century Autobiography and Subsequent Biographical Fiction," *CQ* 28 (1978) 459–69 [*hereafter*, LEFKOWITZ, "Poet"].

⁵ See P. T. Stevens, "Euripides and the Athenians," *JHS* 76 (1956) 87–94.

⁶ On other derivative sources see esp. M. Delcourt, "Biographies anciennes d'Euripide," *AntCl* 2 (1933) 272–76 [*hereafter*, DELCOURT].

⁷ See esp. the commentaries of G. Arrighetti, *Satiro, Vita di Euripide* (Studi Classici e Orientali 13, Pisa 1964) [*hereafter*, ARRIGHETTI]; C. F. Kumaniecki, *De Satyro Peripatetico* (Krakow 1929); F. Leo, "Satyros, *Bios Euripidou*" (1912) in *Ausgewählte kleine Schriften* II (Rome 1960) 365–82 [*hereafter*, LEO]; Delcourt 276–87.

weaknesses (§III); and that over time these weaknesses gradually receive more emphasis, in order to make the poet's achievement seem more comprehensible and accessible (§IV). In the translation of the *Vita* below, I have followed Méridier's text: a chronological account (1–49), a set of anecdotes (50–113); then a second short biography with comments on the poet's style (114–35).⁸ For the reader's convenience footnotes mark correspondences with earlier sources.⁹ Duplication and inconsistency suggest that the *Vita* has undergone a long and deteriorating process of condensation.

EURIPIDES THE POET was the son of Mnesarchides, a storekeeper, and of Cleito, a vegetable-seller.¹⁰ He was an Athenian. He was born in Salamis while Calliades was archon in the seventy-fifth Olympiad, the year when the Greeks fought the naval battle against the Persians.

[5] At first he practiced for the pancration or boxing, because his father had understood an oracle to mean that he would win at contests in which crowns were awarded. And they say that he won a victory in games at Athens. Once he understood the oracle's meaning he turned to writing tragedy; he introduced many innovations, prologues, philosophical discourses, displays of rhetoric and recognition scenes, [10] because he attended lectures by Anaxagoras, Prodicus and Protagoras. Socrates [the philosopher] and Mnesilochus appear to have collaborated with him in some of his writings;¹¹ as Teleclides says: "that fellow Mnesilochus is cooking up a new play [15] for Euripides, and Socrates is supplying him with firewood" [fr. 39, 40]. Some authorities say that Iophon or Timocrates of Argos wrote his lyrics.¹²

They say that he was also a painter and that pictures of his are shown at Megara, that he was a torchbearer in the rites of Apollo Zosterius and that he was born on the same day as Hellanicus, [20] which was the day that the Greeks won the naval battle at Salamis, and that he began to compete in dramatic contests at the age of twenty-six. He emigrated to

⁸ Delcourt 271–72; Méridier, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) 1 n.1.

⁹ Text of Satyrus from *P.Oxy.* IX 1176, on the advice of S. West, *Gnomon* 38 (1966) 546–50, though with some modifications to Hunt's translations. For *Vita* 1–44, *cf.* also the translation of F. A. Paley, *Euripides I*² (Cambridge 1872) lx–lxii.

¹⁰ *Cf.* *FGrHist* 328 F 218: "It isn't true that his mother was a vegetable-seller, for it happens that both his parents were well-born, as Philochorus demonstrates."

¹¹ *Cf.* Satyr. fr.39 col.ii 8–22, citing two lines of dialogue from a drama: "When this is done in secret, whom do you fear?" "The gods, who see more than men". Such a conception of the gods will be Socratic; for in truth what is invisible to mortals is to the immortal gods easily seen. . . ."

¹² *Cf.* Satyr. fr.39 col.xvi 17–29: "The verses have the appearance of being by one of his competitors, as you say. But here too the comic poet's attack on Euripides is mischievous."

Magnesia and was awarded the privileges of a *proxenos* there and freedom from taxation. From there he went to Macedonia and stayed at the court of Archelaus. [25] As a favor to him he wrote a drama named for him, and he made out very well there because he was also appointed to an administrative post. It is said that he wore a long beard and had moles on his face; that his first wife was Melito, his second Choirile. He left three sons: the oldest [30] Mnesarchides, a merchant; the second, Mnesilochus, an actor; the youngest, Euripides, who produced some of his father's dramas.

He began to produce dramas when Callias was archon in the first year of the eighty-first Olympiad [456 B.C.]. First he put on the *Peliades*, with which he won third prize. He wrote a total of ninety-two dramas, [35] of which seventy-eight are extant. Of these three are spurious: *Tennes*, *Rhadamanthys* and *Peirithous*. He died, according to Philochorus, when he was over seventy years old [*FGrHist* 328 F 220], according to Eratosthenes, seventy-five [*FGrHist* 241 F 12], and he was buried in Macedonia. He has a cenotaph in Athens, with an inscription on it either by Thucydides the historian or by the lyric poet Timotheus: "[40] All Hellas is Euripides' memorial, but the land of Macedonia holds his bones, for it took in the end of his life. His fatherland was the Greece of Greece, Athens. Having brought great pleasure with his poetry he also won many men's praise [*AP* 7.45]." [45] They say that both monuments were struck by lightning. They say that Sophocles, when he heard that Euripides had died, went before the public in a dark cloak and brought his chorus and actors on stage without crowns on their heads in the ceremonial parade preceding the dramatic competition, and that the citizens wept.

Euripides died in the following manner.¹³ [50] There was a town in

¹³ Cf. Satyr. fr.39 col.xx 22–35: "(A) Well, these were the events of Euripides' life. The death he met was very violent and peculiar, according to the version of the oldest Macedonian story-tellers. (Diodor.) What was their account? (A) There is in Macedonia. . ."; fr.39 col.xxi: ". . . and he begged them off. Some time afterwards Euripides happened to be alone by himself in a grove at a distance from the city, while Archelaus went out to the chase. When they were outside the gates the huntsmen loosed the hounds and sent them on in front, while they themselves were left behind. The dogs fell in with Euripides unprotected and killed him, the huntsmen arriving on the scene later. Hence they say the proverb is still in use among the Macedonians, 'There is such a thing as a dog's justice'." Cf. Hermesianax 7.61–68 Powell: "I say that that ever watchful man, who from all. . . developed a hatred of all women from the depth of his soul, struck by Eros' bent bow could not get rid of nocturnal agonies but wandered down the back alleys of Macedonia pursuing Archelaus' housekeeper, until Fate found a death for Euripides when he encountered Arrhibius' hateful dogs" (reading ἐξ ὀνύχων at 62 with Jacobs; see A. Cameron, "Tener Unguis," *CQ* n.s. 15 [1965] 83). Also the *Suda*, s.v. Eur.: "He died as a result of a plot by Arrhibius of Macedon and Crateuas of Thessaly, who were poets and envied him and persuaded Lysimachus, who was bought for ten minas, to release on Euripides the royal dogs which he had raised."

Macedonia called the village of the Thracians because Thracians had once settled there. At some point a female Molossian hound belonging to Archelaus had strayed into the village. This dog the Thracians, as is their custom, sacrificed and ate. Accordingly Archelaus fined them one talent. Since they did not have the money, they asked Euripides to get them released from their debt to the king. [55] Some time later, when Euripides was resting by himself in a grove near the city and Archelaus came out to hunt, his dogs were released by their keepers and fell on Euripides. The poet was torn to shreds and eaten. [60] These dogs were the descendants of the dog that was killed by the Thracians. This is the origin of the Macedonian proverb, "a dog's justice."

The story is that in Salamis he furnished a cave that had an opening on the sea and that he spent his days there in order to avoid the public. Because of this he drew most of his comparisons from the sea.¹⁴ [65] His looks were melancholy, thoughtful and severe; he hated laughter and he hated women.¹⁵ On that account Aristophanes found fault with him: "to me [Euripides] seems sour to speak to."

They say that after he married Mnesilochus' daughter Choirile and realized that she was unfaithful [70] he first wrote the play *Hippolytus*, in which he exposes women's immorality, and then he divorced her. When her next husband said: "she is chaste in my household," Euripides replied: "you're a fool if you think the same woman will be chaste in one man's house but not in another's." [75] He took a second wife, but when he found she tended to be unchaste, he was more readily encouraged to slander women. The women planned to go to his cave where he spent his time writing and to kill him.¹⁶

He was accused (enviously) of having Cephisophon as coauthor of his tragedies. [80] Hermippus [fr.94 Wehrli] also says that after Euripides' death Dionysius the tyrant of Sicily sent a talent to his heirs and got his harp, his tablet and his stylus; and when he saw them, he ordered the people who brought them to dedicate them as offerings in the temple of the Muses, and he had his own and Euripides' names inscribed on them. [85] For this reason he said he was considered a great friend of foreigners since foreigners particularly liked him, while he was hated by the

¹⁴ Cf. *FGrHist* 328 F 219: "Philochorus says that he had on the island of Salamis a foul and wretched cave (which we have seen) in which Euripides wrote his tragedies." Satyr. fr.39 col.ix: "He was the owner of a large cave there with the mouth towards the sea, and here he passed the day by himself engaged in constant thought or writing, despising everything that was not great and elevated. Aristophanes at least says, as though summoned as a witness for this very purpose, 'He is like what he makes his characters say'. But once when witnessing a comedy he is said . . ."

¹⁵ Cf. *infra* n.17.

¹⁶ Cf. *infra* n.19.

Athenians. When a boorish youth said enviously that Euripides had bad breath, Euripides said: "don't criticize me; my mouth is sweeter than honey and the Sirens."¹⁷

[90] Euripides made fun of women in his poetry for the following reason. He had a home-bred slave named Cephisophon.¹⁸ He discovered his own wife misbehaving with this boy. At first he tried to dissuade her, and when he couldn't convince her, he left his wife to Cephisophon. [95] Aristophanes too refers to this: "O best and darkest Cephisophon, you lived with Euripides in a lot of ways, and you wrote his poetry (so they say) along with him [fr.580]." [100] They also say that women lay in ambush for him at the Thesmophoria because of his criticisms of them in his poetry.¹⁹ They wanted to destroy him, but they spared him first because of the Muses and then because he promised never again to say anything bad about them. For example, [105] this is what he said about women in the *Melanippe*: "In vain men shoot their criticism at women. The bow twangs and misses. Women—I say—are better than men!"

¹⁷ Cf. Arist. *Pol.* 1311b30f (tr. Jowett): "In the conspiracy against Archelaus, Dechamnichus stimulated the fury of the assassins and led the attack; he was enraged because Archelaus had delivered him to Euripides to be scourged; for the poet had been irritated at some remark made by Dechamnichus on the foulness of his breath." Cf. Satyr. fr.39 col.xx 1-15: "... his mouth is... and extremely malodorous'. 'Hush, boy', he interrupted, 'what mouth has there been such or could be sweeter than that from which issue songs and words like his?'" Also Alex.Aetol. 7 Powell: "Anaxagoras' student of chaos looks sour to me and as if he hates laughter, and he hasn't learned to joke even in his cups; but whatever he might write had been made of honey and of the Sirens."

¹⁸ Cf. Satyr. fr.39 col.xii 16-35: "You have clearly comprehended my meaning and absolved me from developing it. He was embittered against the sex for this reason. He had, it seems, in his house a homebred slave named Cephisophon; and he detected his wife in misconduct with this person"; fr.39 col.xiii: "... bearing the outrage [calmly], as is related, directed the woman to live with the young man. When he was asked 'What is the meaning of this?', he said, 'In order that my wife may not be his, but his mine—for that is just—if I wish'. And he continued to oppose the whole sex in his poetry. (Di.) Quite absurdly! For why is it more reasonable to blame women because of a seduced woman than men because of the man who seduced her? As Socrates said, the same vices and virtues are to be found in both."

¹⁹ Cf. Satyr. fr.39 col.x: "Everyone disliked him, the men because of his unsociableness, the women because of the censures in his poems. And he incurred great danger from both sexes, for he was prosecuted by Cleon the demagogue in the action for impiety mentioned above, while the women combined against him at the Thesmophoria and collected in a body at the place where he happened to be resting. But notwithstanding their anger they spared the man, partly out of respect for the Muses..." ; fr.39 col.xi: (a long quotation about women from Euripides' *Melanippe*; the lines quoted in the *Vita* are not included in the surviving papyrus); fr.39 col.xii: (several lines quoted from Ar. *Thesm.* 374-75, 335-37, parodying the style of a decree) "... Lysilla was the secretary, Sostrate proposed it'. 'If there be a man who is plotting against the womenfolk or who, to injure them, is proposing peace to Euripides and to the Medes...'"

[fr.499 N.]” and so on. Philemon was so devoted to Euripides that he dared to say the following of him: “[110] If it’s true the dead have feeling, as some men say, then I would hang myself so I could see Euripides [fr.130 Kock].”

EURIPIDES was the son of Mnesarchides. He was an Athenian. The writers of Old Comedy made fun of him in their plays by calling him the son of a woman who sold vegetables. [115] Some say that at first he was a painter but that after he had studied with Archelaus the natural philosopher and with Anaxagoras he started to write tragedies. For this reason presumably he was also somewhat arrogant and kept away from ordinary people and had no interest in appealing to his audiences. [120] This practice hurt him as much as it helped Sophocles. The comic poets too attacked him and tore him to pieces in their envy.

He disregarded all this and went away to Macedonia to the court of King Archelaus,²⁰ and when he was returning there late one evening he was killed by the king’s dogs. He began to produce dramas around the eighty-first Olympiad, when Calliades was archon.

[125] Because he used the middle style he excelled in expression and used reasoning perfectly on either side. In his lyric poetry he was inimitable, and he elbowed virtually all the other lyric poets aside.²¹ But in dialogue he was wordy and vulgar and [130] irritating in his prologues, most rhetorical in his elaboration and clever in his phrasing and capable of demolishing previous arguments.

He wrote a total of ninety-two dramas, of which sixty-seven are extant and three in addition that are falsely attributed to him; also eight satyr plays, among these one that is falsely attributed to him. He won five victories.

²⁰ Cf. Satyr. fr.39 col.xvii: “These then, as I said, in their expression of views sought popular favor. He however, after putting in, so to speak, an obstructive plea, renounced Athens. (Di.) What was the plea? (A) It was entered in the following choral ode: ‘I have put wings of gold on my back, and the Sirens’ winged sandals; lifted high into the wide upper air, I shall go to Zeus. . .’” [fr.911 N.]; fr.39 col.xviii: “. . . began the songs. Or do you not know that it is this that he says? (Di.) How then? (A) In saying ‘to mingle my flight with Zeus’ he metaphorically designates the monarch and also magnifies the man’s power. (Di.) What you say seems to me to be more subtle than true. (A) Take it as you like. Anyhow, he migrated and spent his old age in Macedonia, being held in much honor by the sovereign; and in particular the story is told that. . .”

²¹ Cf. Satyr. fr.8: “. . . in emulation of the beauties of Ion, he developed and perfected [tragedy] so as to leave no room for improvement to his successors. Such were the man’s artistic qualities. Hence Aristophanes wishes to measure his tongue ‘by which such fine expressions were polished’.”

II. Sources

Euripides' biography is based on poetry about and by Euripides. Explicitly, the source of information about his mother's profession is "the writers of Old Comedy who made fun of him in their plays by calling him the son of a woman who sold vegetables" (115). Three examples of the joke survive: "give me the herbs your mother gave you" (*Ach.* 479; also *Ran.* 840; *Thesm.* 387).²² Aristophanes is also the source of several other uncomplimentary anecdotes: (a) other people helped him write his plays (11–17, 99; when Euripides in the *Frogs* describes how he put Tragedy on a diet, Dionysus says "mixing in Cephisophon for flavor," 944);²³ (b) Euripides had a long beard (27, a detail from a costuming scene in *Thesm.* 190, where Euripides says "I'm gray-haired and have a beard"); (c) Euripides had moles (28; Dionysus in the *Frogs* talks about the sties on Euripides' eyes, 1246); (d) Euripides was unpleasant to talk to (67; the play from which this line is quoted is lost—perhaps the speaker was describing a picture);²⁴ (e) Euripides hated women and the women wanted to kill him (70–71, 91, 100–04), but they spared him when he promised not to say anything else bad about them—this is simply a summary of the plot of Aristophanes' *Thesmophoriazousae*.²⁵

By a similar process of inference and simplification, Euripides' dramas provide biographical data for the *Vita*. Deceptively, the anecdote is told first, and then the lines from which it is derived are cited as 'evidence'.²⁶ Dionysus in the *Frogs* teases Euripides for writing plays about adulterous women like Phaedra and Stheneboea

²² Also cf. *Ach.* 457, *Ran.* 947, *Eq.* 19; Méridier, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.1) iii. Criticism of social background is a standard mode of invective; R. G. M. Nisbet, *Cicero In Pisonem* (Oxford 1961) 194. C. A. P. Ruck supposes the herbs were aphrodisiacs; "Euripides' Mother," *Arion* n.s. 2 (1976) 14–32. But it is a mistake to take at face value what Aristophanes says in comedies about his friends. A member of his *thiasos* (*IG* II² 2343), Simon, is portrayed in *Nub.* 351 as a harpy and in 399 as a perjurer; Amphitheos, another member, boasts in *Ach.* that he is immortal, descended from Demeter. See S. Dow, "Some Athenians in Aristophanes," *AJA* 73 (1969) 235–45. Th. Gelzer, "Aristophanes," *RE* Suppl. 12 (1970) 1398.

²³ In *Thesm.* 1060ff Aristophanes accuses him of self-plagiarism; there is also Cratinus' notion of *ἐὐριπιδαρικροφανίλειον* (fr.307 Kock); cf. schol. *ad* Pl. *Apol.* 19c.

²⁴ Cf. the note on Alex.Aetol. 7.1 (p.126 Powell); n.17 *supra*. Charges of sternness and ugliness are standard in invective; Nisbet, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.22) 195–96.

²⁵ Cf. Lesky 361; Leo 377; Arrighetti 126.

²⁶ On the technique in general see Leo 369; Lefkowitz, "Poet" 466; "The Influential Fictions in the Scholia to Pindar's *Pythian* 8," *CP* 70 (1975) 176–77; "Pindar's Lives," *Classica et Iberica (Festschrift Marique, Worcester [Mass.] 1975)* 76. Cf. how schol. Pind. *Nem.*

(1043–44, 1080–81). In the *Vita* we are told that Euripides' wife was unfaithful, on more than one occasion (93–95, 22, 69–74), and that because of her infidelity he wrote *Hippolytus* (70).²⁷ When this wife remarried, Euripides gives her second husband advice in an iambic trimeter line that paraphrases what Electra says about her adulterous mother Clytemnestra in *El.* 923–24: “Poor man (meaning the dead Aegisthus), if he thinks she won't be chaste in other's homes but will be chaste in his.”²⁸ Lines about women's usefulness from *Melanippe* are cited in Satyrus and in the *Vita* as ‘evidence’ of his recantation.²⁹ In Satyrus' dialogue, lines from Euripides' *Ino* about metamorphosis into a bird are cited as evidence that he made “so to speak, an obstructive plea” to the Athenians about his exile.³⁰ A trimeter verse about a mouth sweeter than honey and the Sirens (89–90) becomes the punchline for an anecdote about Euripides' bad breath.³¹ In *Bacchae*, the impious woman-hating Pentheus is torn apart by women led by his mother; in Satyrus and the *Vita* the woman-hater Euripides, friend of Socrates, is killed by a pack of hunting dogs descended from a bitch whose death Euripides had sanctioned.³² In every case the poet and his work are regarded as synonymous.³³

7.94a cites a line from *Pa.* 6 to ‘prove’ that the Aeginetans blamed the poet for what he wrote in the poem.

²⁷ Reading with Schwartz γράψαι πρῶτον τὸ δράμα τὸν Ἰππόλυτον; Méridier follows Kirchhoff's δράμα τὸν πρότερον. See W. S. Barrett, *Euripides Hippolytus* (Oxford 1964) 26.

²⁸ παρ' ᾧ μὲν αὐτὴν κοφρονεῖν, παρ' ᾧ δὲ μὴ (*Life*); cf. δύστηνός ἐστιν, εἰ δοκεῖ τὸ κοφρονεῖν | ἐκεῖ μὲν αὐτὴν οὐκ ἔχειν, παρ' οἷ δ' ἔχειν in Eur. *El.* 923–24.

²⁹ Cf. Stesichorus' palinode; Arrighetti 126–27. The story of Chaucer's repentance at the time of death may be based on his retraction at the end of *The Canterbury Tales*; M. M. Crow and C. C. Olson, edd., *Chaucer Life Records* (Austin/Oxford 1966) 547. Cf. the idea that the writer of the novel *Aethiopica* later became Heliodorus bishop of Trikkia; B. E. Perry, *The Ancient Romances* (Berkeley 1967) 107–08.

³⁰ The anecdote may have influenced Horace; see R. G. M. Nisbet and M. Hubbard, *Commentary on Horace Odes Book II* (Oxford 1978) 334.

³¹ A stock insult; cf. R. Brecht, *Motiv und Typengeschichte der griechischen Spottepigramme* (*Philologus* Suppl. 22, 1931) 95. But no such anecdote evolves from Ar.'s similar line about the well-loved Sophocles, fr.580 A./*Vit.* 22.

³² W. Nestle, “Die Legenden vom Tode des Euripides,” *Philologus* 57 (1898) 141–44. The term διακύροντες (‘tore him apart’ 122) also retains the metaphor; cf. ἵκτινος ὡς . . . παρεύρας κρέας, Soph. fr.767. The story in the *Suda* that Lucian was killed by dogs because he was “rabid against the truth” appears to be based on *Peregr.* 2: “I was almost torn apart by Cynics as Acteon was by dogs or his cousin Pentheus by women.” The phrase “which he raised himself” (ἄς ἐθρέψατο) describes Archelaus' servant Lysimachus in the *Suda* biography (οὐκ αὐτὸς ἔτρεφε, n.13). On dog sacrifice, see C. H. Greenewalt, *CPCP* 17 (1978) 31.

³³ Lefkowitz, “Poet” 463–64.

But the process of generating biographical data from poetry is best illustrated by the anecdote in Philochorus and the *Vita* about Euripides' cave (62–65). As in the case of the quotations from drama, what is given as the result of the story is in fact its origin: in order to explain why so many of Euripides' most beautiful lyrics describe the sea, it seemed logical to assume that he may have lived near the sea.³⁴ Other tragic poets speak of the sea; its random violence is an effective metaphor for the course of human fate.³⁵ But the same stories are not told about Aeschylus and Sophocles because they are not reported like Euripides to have hated other people (65–66, 118–20). Satyrus provides as documentation of his misanthropy a conveniently apt line from Aristophanes about Euripides being like the characters in his plays.³⁶ Hence the assumption that he would have lived in isolation, like the Cyclops in *Odyssey* 9 or Timon the misanthrope (Plut. *Ant.* 70).³⁷

Since the most intriguing details in the biography are based on his own poetry or contemporary literature, one suspects the remaining anecdotes may derive from myth rather than history.³⁸ What happens to Euripides happens with remarkable frequency and symmetry to other poets. For example, Euripides' future promise was recognized early by an oracle, which his father at first misinterpreted and so had his son train first to be an athlete (4–7).

³⁴ e.g., *IT* 392–420, with S. Barlow, *The Imagery of Euripides* (London 1971) 26–27; *Hel.* 1451–64, with R. Padel, “‘Imagery of the Elsewhere’,” *CQ* n.s. 24 (1974) 240.

³⁵ e.g., Aesch. *Eum.* 550–57, *Sept.* 758–61; Soph. *Ant.* 586–92, with P. E. Easterling, in *Dionysiaca* (Festschr. Page, Cambridge 1978) 145.

³⁶ Leo 382; J. A. Fairweather, “Fiction in the Biographies of Ancient Writers,” *Ancient Society* 5 (1974) 234–35. Cf. the modern deduction that Shakespeare had boils because he wrote about them; see S. Schoenbaum, *Shakespeare's Lives* (Oxford 1970) 756.

³⁷ Cf. also Phrynichus' *Monotropos*, fr.18 Kock: “I am called the solitary; I lead the life of Timon, without wife or mate, quick to anger, unapproachable, humorless, won't talk with anyone, prefer my own opinions.” On the attractiveness of the cave story and scholars' credulousness, see Jacoby, *FGrHist* IIIB (text) 586–87; Lefkowitz, “Poet” 466; Lesky 361. Cf. Wilamowitz, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 6 n.1. The cave apparently was a tourist attraction, like his tomb in Macedonia (*infra* n.69), or Pindar's house in Thebes or Homer's schoolroom in Colophon; Fairweather, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.36) 251–52. Guides pointed out to Pausanias the figure of the poet Aeschylus in the Stoa Poikile painting; see “Poet” 465. Euripides' pictures were shown (*Vit.* 18); his lyre, tablet and stylus were on display in Syracuse (80–85).

³⁸ Lefkowitz, “Poet” 469; A. Momigliano, “Second Thoughts on Greek Biography,” *MededAmst* n.s. 34 (1971) 14–15. With the exception of *didaskaliai* (n.55), a characteristic of literary biography, cf. Leo 393. For political figures other sources were available; Leo 382 n.2.

Sophocles, according to his biographers, also studied wrestling along with poetry (*Vit.Soph.* 3 Radt). Archilochus' father was told that his son would be immortal. But the boy's calling was revealed by accident. He was on his way to market to sell a cow, but instead he ran into nine women (the Muses in disguise) who suddenly replaced the cow with a lyre.³⁹

Euripides, we are told, had a second profession, painting (17–18). Aeschylus, according to his biographer, was an exemplary soldier (*Vit.Aesch.* 4 Page).⁴⁰ Euripides' wife prefers the poet's slave to her husband (92–96). The wife of Aesop's master Xanthias also prefers his more capable slave (*Vit.Aesop.* 75, p.95 Perry). Euripides was hated by his fellow Athenians but prospered in exile (87, 117–20). The same thing happened to Aeschylus, at least according to his biographers (*Vit.Aesch.* 8–10), and to Apollonius of Rhodes (*Vit.Ap.Rhod.* A p.1.10–12, B p.2.7–11 Wendel).⁴¹ Euripides was worshipped as a hero after his death. So were Aeschylus (*Vit.Aesch.* 11) and Sophocles (*Vit.Soph.* 17).⁴² In the light of these recurrent events, it is no coincidence that Euripides was born on a significant occasion, the day of the battle of Salamis, like Hellanicus, whose name means 'victory for the Greeks' (19–21).⁴³

Only two incidents in the *Vita* sound unique and therefore possibly of historical significance. But here again we may suspect they found their origin in some literary source. Both are favorable to the poet. (1) Euripides acted as a torchbearer in the rites of Apollo at Cape

³⁹ M. R. Lefkowitz, "Fictions in Literary Biography: the New Poem and the Archilochus Legend," *Arethusa* 9 (1976) 183–84; M. L. West, "The Muses Buy a Cow," *CR* 14 (1964) 141–42.

⁴⁰ Plato was said to have been a wrestler, painter and poet; see A. S. Riginos, *Platonica* (Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition 3, Leiden 1976) nos. 12–14. Socrates was said to have been a sculptor; Diog.Laert. 2.19, Paus. 1.22.8; cf. W. M. Calder III, "Kalamis Atheniensis," *GRBS* 15 (1974) 274. Tisamenos misinterprets an oracle about winning contests in Hdt. 9.33.

⁴¹ On exile, Lefkowitz, "Poet" 467; R. Syme, "The Patria of Juvenal," *CP* 74 (1979) 1–15. Cf. the stories about Pindar's being fined by the Thebans for praising Athens and about the motives for his and Simonides' visits to Hieron; "Pindar's Lives" (*supra* n.26) 80–83. On Apollonius, M. R. Lefkowitz, "Callimachus' Quarrel with Apollonius" (forthcoming).

⁴² Apollonius returned to Alexandria and was buried next to Callimachus, the man responsible for his exile, *Vit.Apoll.* B p.2.11–14; see Lefkowitz, "Callimachus' Quarrel" (*supra* n.41).

⁴³ But remarkable coincidence does not in itself constitute disproof; the second and third presidents of the United States, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, both died on 4 July 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration of Independence.

Zoster; stories about Pindar's poetry are offered as aetiologies of his hymns.⁴⁴ Was a passage from some play now lost cited to counter charges of Euripides' atheism, in the way that Satyrus describes how Euripides "admirably incites the youth to valor and courage?"⁴⁵ The story also could be used to counter the jokes about his ancestry: Sophocles' biographer observes that Sophocles would not "have been thought worthy of generalship along with Pericles and Thucydides" if his father had been an artisan as Aristoxenus and Istrus alleged (*Vit.* 1).⁴⁶ (2) That Euripides was awarded the privileges of a *proxenos* in Magnesia after his emigration there (22–23) could easily have originated from literal interpretation of a metaphorical expression of friendship: the scholia to Pindar offer concrete explanations for references in the *Odes* to *proxenia* with foreigners.⁴⁷ Similar privileges were awarded by Rhodes to Apollonius, but the story of his exile can be shown to be an aetiology for his epithet 'Rhodian'.⁴⁸ Custom would have located a commemorative inscription of Euripides' *proxenia* in Magnesia.⁴⁹ But since ancient biographers did not travel to pursue their research and did not have access to accurate descriptive geographies, they were no more likely to have seen it *in situ* than Themistocles' tomb.⁵⁰

But why in all this fictional material do so few anecdotes seem suitable for a great poet? Contemporary standards would lead us to

⁴⁴ Lefkowitz, "Pindar's Lives" (*supra* n.26) 74–75.

⁴⁵ Fr.39 col.iv 33ff, omitted in the *Vita*; see *infra* n.83.

⁴⁶ Wilamowitz, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.3) 5 n.8. As if unaware of some of what Istrus' (*FGrHist* 334 F 33) and Aristoxenus' (fr.115 Wehrli) sources would ultimately have depended on, Sophocles' biographer adds, "nor would he have gotten off without abuse from the comic poets"; but *FGrHist* 334 F 6, 30 may refer to Aristophanes. Cf. Fairweather, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.36) 247. The *Suda* biography of Euripides begins by citing Philochorus (n.10) about his noble ancestry.

⁴⁷ *Nem.* 7.95b, III 129–30 Dr.; *Ol.* 9.123c, I 296 Dr., accepted by Farnell, see H. Lloyd-Jones, *JHS* 93 (1973) 135. Cf. Isoc. 15.166 on Pindar as Athenian *proxenos* at Thebes; "the statement is unsupported and such traditions are somewhat suspect," M. B. Wallace, *Phoenix* 24 (1970) 205–06, 203 no.19.

⁴⁸ *Vit.* B 11 Wendel. Strangely, Praxiphanes of Mytilene is also called 'Rhodian'; see K. O. Brink, "Callimachus and Aristotle," *CQ* 40 (1946) 20. Cf. also Hannibal nicknamed 'the Rhodian', Polyb. 1.46.4, with Walbank's note.

⁴⁹ Cf. the stele in Athens designating certain Selembryani as *proxenoi* of the Athenians, *IG* I² 116 (409/408 B.C.). Thus Macedonian court historians could have had access to the decree of Philip's *proxenia* for Aristotle; cf. I. Düring, *Aristotle in the Ancient Biographical Tradition* (Goteborg 1957) 235.

⁵⁰ Lefkowitz, "Influential Fictions" (*supra* n.26) 180–81. Tombs of Themistocles were identified at Magnesia (*infra* n.61) and at Athens; Plut. *Them.* 32.

expect more evidence of affection, if not of respect or veneration. By drawing on source material from both tragedy and comedy, the *Vita* presents a perplexing mixture of forcefulness and triviality. Why was such an unglamorous biography created for so important an artist, starting in his own lifetime? Why was it retold enthusiastically even by learned men like Satyrus, and why was a collection of such anecdotes faithfully preserved throughout antiquity?

III. Purpose of the Mythology

Certainly the ancients, like ourselves, thought it necessary somehow to account for extraordinary creative talent. Biographers today tend to explain accomplishment in positivistic ways: genes, education, encouragement, influence; the Romantics derived creative power from an external inspiration, created by solitary confrontation with nature, or in Coleridge's case, with opium. But the ancient Greeks dealt with poetic achievement in the way that they coped with other unusual occurrences, by describing them in narrative form, telling myths of power, social isolation, exile, violent death. The pattern of events in Euripides' *Vita* follows at least the general outline of stories about the Greek heroes, both of legendary figures like Theseus or Heracles and of historical heroes like Themistocles or Alcibiades.⁵¹

(1) *Early recognition of talent.* Euripides' father receives an oracle that his son will be a victor in contests where crowns are awarded (4–7). He was also born on a significant day, the occasion of the Greek victory at Salamis (2–4). Dionysus appeared to Aeschylus (who was guarding grapes) in a dream and told him to write tragedy (Paus. 1.21.2). Pindar, according to his biographers, also learned of his calling as a boy by means of special omens. (a) He fell asleep on Mt Helicon and a bee built a honeycomb in his mouth (*Vit.* fr.1.6–9 Dr.). (b) He had a dream “in which his mouth was full of honey and wax, and then he decided to write poetry” (1.1.9–11).⁵² Archilochus suddenly discovers a lyre at his feet and faints.⁵³ The warrior heroes of myths discover their calling early by performing special tasks.

⁵¹ G. Nagy suggests that a ritual pattern underlies the deaths of heroes and certain poets, *The Best of the Achaeans* (Baltimore 1979) chs. xvi, xvii. To Euripides being torn apart by dogs cf. the Lycaon werewolf ritual; W. Burkert, *Homo Necans* (Berlin 1972) 127–30. On the importance of hero worship in the fifth century, see also Lloyd-Jones, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.47) 136–37.

⁵² Lefkowitz, “Pindar's Lives” (*supra* n.26) 74.

⁵³ *Vit. Archilochi* τ 11a.35–36 Lasserre/Bonnard; *supra* n.39.

Theseus moves a stone which hides the sword and sandals hidden for him by his father (Plut. *Thes.* 3); the infant Heracles strangles the two snakes sent by Hera to kill him (Apollod. 5.4.8). But while these men establish themselves as heroes by deeds of strength, the poets discover their calling passively or accidentally.

(2) *Versatility*. Even though Euripides' father misinterpreted the oracle, Euripides manages to be successful in the wrong field by winning a victory in games at Athens (7). He was also a recognized painter and served as a torchbearer in the rites of Apollo at Cape Zoster (18–19). Sophocles studied wrestling as a boy and led the chorus in the celebration of the victory at Salamis (*Vit.* 3). Later Sophocles was elected general (1, 9); there is some semblance of truth in this: an inscription establishes that he was State Treasurer in 443/442.⁵⁴ Sophocles was noted for his piety (11, 12). Aeschylus fought “heroically” in all three of the important battles against the Persians (*Vit. Aesch.* 4). To these physically talented Athenian poets we might compare the poetically talented Athenian lawgiver Solon, the Athenian general Themistocles, with his many pithy sayings, and Theseus, who is celebrated as a founder of lawful government as well as a fighter and a general (Plut. *Thes.* 25). All follow the epic ideal “to be both an orator of stories and a doer of deeds” (Phoenix’s aim for Achilles, *Il.* 9.443).

(3) *Accomplishments*. The great tragic poets can be distinguished from their colleagues simply by the quantity of their output. Euripides wrote 92 dramas, Sophocles 123, Aeschylus 70; Aeschylus’ predecessor Phrynichus nine, Sophocles’ contemporary Ion of Chios forty (at most; it might have been only thirty, or twelve), Euripides’ successful rival Nicomachus eleven.⁵⁵ Heroes in art are distinguished from ordinary mortals by their size. They are heroes not because they have done one exemplary thing but because they have committed

⁵⁴ *ATL* I 567=τ 18 Radt; M. H. Jameson, “Sophocles and the Four Hundred,” *Historia* 22 (1971) 541. Cf. Lesky 272–73; T. B. L. Webster, *An Introduction to Sophocles* (Oxford 1936) 11. Schol. *ad Arist. Rhet.* 1384b16 says that Euripides was a member of an embassy to Syracuse; Stevens, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 91. But his presence there may simply have been inferred by an ancient commentator from Aristotle’s text, which mentions only “Euripides’ reply to the Syracusans”; cf. Jameson pp.533–34. On scholiasts’ historical deductions, see Lefkowitz, “Influential Fictions” (*supra* n.26) 176–77.

⁵⁵ This information from the *Suda* (*s.v.*) may derive from Aristotle’s *Didaskaliai* (Diog. Laert. 5.26); W. Jaeger, *Aristotle: Fundamentals of the History of his Development* (Oxford 1934) 326–27; Fairweather, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.36) 253–54.

many, and usually violent, acts. Heracles confronts a series of monsters; Theseus kills off a series of robbers. Each hero pursues repeatedly a special type of adversary; in Oedipus' case, it is his own family, father, mother-wife and sons.⁵⁶

Historical heroes also are worshipped for having committed extraordinary damage, even though magnitude makes power indiscriminate and immoral.⁵⁷ In the early fifth century Cleomedes, who went mad and killed sixty boys in their schoolroom, was worshipped in Astypalea on the advice of the Delphic oracle as the "last hero," an immortal.⁵⁸ Euripides' work, according to the biography, draws violent responses from his audiences, especially the women (77–80). Aeschylus' *Eumenides* so frightened the audience that "children died and fetuses were aborted" (*Vit. Aesch.* 9, *cf.* 7).⁵⁹

(4) *Isolation, Exile.* The Greek attitude toward extraordinary achievement is ambivalent. Though it seems strange to us, Greeks celebrated victory by both praising and blaming.⁶⁰ They would compare the victor to the gods but then assure him of the dangers he had risked by winning: the gods' jealousy, man's hatred, the certainty of eventual failure. Greek tragedy too celebrates this ethic of simultaneous love and hate. In drama a man of great stature, of singular ability like Oedipus or Heracles, confronts great challenge and fails. As a result he is banished from society, often by literal exile. In the biography, Euripides considers himself superior to other people: "he spent his days in Salamis in a cave by the sea in order to avoid the public" (62–64). Euripides "presumably was somewhat arrogant and kept away from ordinary people and had no interest in appealing to his audiences" (118–20). But, as in the case of Olympic victors and of war heroes, a superior stance invites envy and hatred (the Greek word *φθόνος* essentially means both). "The comic poets

⁵⁶ See C. Levi-Strauss, "The Structural Study of Myth" in *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. T. Sebeok (Bloomington 1968) 88–91; E. Leach, *Claude Levi-Strauss* (New York 1970) 80–82.

⁵⁷ A. Brelich, *Gli eroi greci* (Rome 1958) 313–14; *cf.* Ar. fr.58.4–5 Austin, "heroes. . . stewards of good and of evil." Nilsson, *GGR*² 189–90; W. Burkert, *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche* (Stuttgart 1978) 318.

⁵⁸ Paus. 6.9.6–8; *cf.* Plut. *Rom.* 28. U. v. Wilamowitz-Moellendorf, *Der Glaube der Hellenen* II (Berlin 1932, repr. Darmstadt 1955) 37 with n.2; B. M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper* (Berkeley 1964) 56–57; Brelich, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.57) 320; M. R. Lefkowitz, "Pindar's *Pythian* 8," *CJ* 72 (1977) 213–14.

⁵⁹ *Cf.* O. Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus* (Oxford 1977) 438 n.2.

⁶⁰ M. R. Lefkowitz, *The Victory Ode* (Park Ridge 1976) 33.

attacked him and tore him to pieces in their envy" (*φθόνῳ* 121–22). Euripides was accused "enviously" (*ὑπὸ φθόνου*) of having Cephisophon serve as coauthor of his tragedies (78–80). "He was hated (*ἐφθονεῖτο*) by the Athenians" (87).⁶¹ "A boorish youth said enviously (*ὑπὸ φθόνου*) that Euripides had bad breath" (88).

When Euripides because of this attitude won few victories, he left Athens for Macedonia (118–24). Similarly, when Athenian audiences began to prefer Sophocles or Simonides, Aeschylus left Athens for Sicily (*Vit.Aesch.* 8).⁶² We are told that the Athenians loved Sophocles, but in one anecdote in his *Life*, even he briefly assumes the angry character of one of his most celebrated heroes, Oedipus at Colonus, who curses his son Polyneices. Sophocles quarrels with his son Iophon, who is envious (*φθονοῦντα*) of his half-brother. Sophocles calls attention to his uniqueness in the quotation that concludes the anecdote: "if I am Sophocles, I'm not out of my mind; if I am out of my mind, I am not Sophocles" (*Vit.Soph.* 13).⁶³

(5) *Violent death.* The heroes of tragedy die violent deaths in exile. The Theban Oedipus is swallowed by the earth at Colonus outside of Athens. Heracles (another native Theban) has himself burned alive on Mt Oeta in Thessaly. Euripides is torn apart by dogs in Macedonia (57–59). Aeschylus is killed in Sicily by being struck on the head by a tortoise dropped by an eagle (*Vit.Aesch.* 10). Sophocles died in Athens, but abruptly. He either choked on a grape or ran out of breath reciting *Antigone* or was overcome by joy at winning first prize with that same play (*Vit.Soph.* 14). Every way in which Sophocles dies is sudden and externally induced: he cannot die quietly in bed.⁶⁴

⁶¹ The Athenians' envy of greatness was proverbial; cf. Diodorus on Aeschylus (*AP* 7.40=*Garl.Phil.*, 13 G.-P.) and on Themistocles (*AP* 7.74=*Garl.Phil.*, 14 G.-P.), also Antipater of Thessalonica on Themistocles (*AP* 7.236=*Garl.Phil.*, 115 G.-P.).

⁶² Lefkowitz, "Poet" 467; Stevens, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 90; Nagy, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.51) ch.xvii. The practice of ostracism provided limited social sanction for these feelings; see H. Schoeck, *Envy* (New York 1970) 205–09.

⁶³ Possibly based on a quotation from Old Comedy; see Radt *ad loc.* and R. Jebb, *Sophocles* II (Cambridge 1900) xxxix–xliii.

⁶⁴ On poets' deaths, see Fairweather, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.36) 270–71. Cf. Sotadea 15.5ff Powell: "all who wanted to make a great discovery or an artful poem or a clever bit of learning, all these have come to a bad end in their deaths and have suffered at the hands of the world's creator"; a list of the tragic poets' and philosophers' deaths follows. Here again what one writes may determine how one dies; Aristophanes simply dies without any special notoriety.

The explanation lies once again in the Greeks' ambivalent attitude toward extraordinary achievement. A great man, envied, hated and feared at the height of his power, becomes loved and respected once he has fallen.⁶⁵ The heroes Oedipus and Amphiaraus were worshipped where the earth had swallowed them. The Athenians offered yearly sacrifices to Sophocles (*Vit.Soph.* 17).⁶⁶ Aeschylus had a hero's shrine in Sicily and was honored by the Athenians after his death (*Vit.Aesch.* 11–12).⁶⁷

Euripides, once dead, is treated like a hero. Sophocles, his actors and the audience openly mourn for him (45–49). Dionysius the tyrant sent for his stylus and lyre and had them dedicated in the temple of the Muses (80–85). Like Amphiaraus and Themistocles, he has shrines in more than one place, the monument in Athens and a tomb in Macedonia.⁶⁸ Both were struck by lightning (14; *AP* 7.48). At the Macedonian tomb there were said to be two springs, one sustaining, the other destructive, as at Trophonius' shrine in Lebadeia.⁶⁹ Hellenistic epigrams locate this tomb both at Pella (*AP* 7.44, 49; *Suda s.v.*) and near Arethusa on the frontier, far from the Macedonian court (*AP* 7.51 = *Garl.Phil.* Adaeus 3 G.-P.).

Euripides' biography follows the general pattern of a tragic hero's life, but only in *outline*. The actual events that comprise the poet's life are too trivial to allow him heroic stature. Because many of the anecdotes derive from comedy, the poet often appears ludicrous and undignified. He is ugly, with moles on his face, unpleasant (28); he is set upon by women (100–02); he is sexually inadequate (92–96). Nor do the circumstances of his death enhance his stature; its

⁶⁵ Cf. Hor. *Ep.* 2.5–14; E. Fraenkel, *Horace* (Oxford 1957) 386 n.2; cf. Pind. *Pyth.* 1.84, 2.55–56.

⁶⁶ According to *Et.Mag.* 256 a *heroon* was built for him, and he was called Dexion because of his reception (*δεξιωσις*) of Asclepius. But 'receiving' denotes a general quality of heroism; cf. the name Hypodektes *IG* II² 2501.

⁶⁷ Wilamowitz, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.58) II 222 n.1. Cf. the cults of Homer at Smyrna (where like Pindar at Delphi he shares in Apollo's sacrifice), Sappho at Lesbos and Aristotle at Stagira; L. R. Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults* (Oxford 1921) 367, 421–26. Parmenides built a *heroon* for his teacher Ameinias the Pythagorean, Diog.Laert. 9.21; see W. Burkert, "Das Prooimium des Parmenides," *Phronesis* 14 (1969) 27–28.

⁶⁸ Farnell, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.67) 58–61; *supra* nn.50, 61.

⁶⁹ Nestle, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.32) 145–49; Vitruv. *De arch.* 8.16; Plin. *NH* 31.28. Cf. the springs of pleasure and grief at the site of the contest between Midas and Silenus, Theopompus *FHG* I 289; Ael. *VH* 318. The presence of two springs also at Trophonius' shrine (Paus. 9.39.4) suggests that at Euripides' tomb they mark the ambivalence of a hero's power, not as Nestle suggested (p.149), the "double nature" of Euripides' poetry.

accidental character makes him seem more pathetic than heroic (56, 118–19). Aeschylus is degraded by being hit on the head by a tortoise, Sophocles by choking on a grape or on a line of *Antigone*, or even by dying of joy.

IV. The Form and Purpose of the *Vita*

In emphasizing Euripides' ineptitude and human failings, the biographers appear to be working in a tradition of narrative realism that began in the fifth century in the plays of Euripides himself.⁷⁰ As Sophie Trenkner observed, the character types and plots of Greek short stories virtually all have analogues in the exciting plots and naturalistic characters of the plays of Euripides.⁷¹ It is Euripides who depicts Orestes as a born killer with incestuous tendencies and not as the noble, pious son who returns in the *Libation Bearers* to avenge his father's death.

Poets, starting with Hesiod in the eighth century, had always described themselves as isolated from and superior to other men.⁷² But it is only in the fourth century, in the first literary biographies, that the poet's original heroic stance appears in completely naturalized form. Euripides is quite literally isolated, by living like a hermit in his cave. Sophocles is not simply 'servant of the Muses' (like Hesiod or Bacchylides) but an actual priest who tends the shrine of a local hero, Halon (*Vit.Soph.* 11).⁷³ The old heroes of myth, like Theseus and Heracles, often had gods for fathers. Homer, in some traditions reputed to be the son of a god, becomes in a fourth-century biography simply an illegitimate child.⁷⁴

In addition to this trend toward naturalism, anecdotes drawn from

⁷⁰ F. Jacoby, "Homerisches," *Hermes* 68 (1933) 10.

⁷¹ *The Greek Novella* (Cambridge 1958) 35ff; Lloyd-Jones, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.47) 137; Lefkowitz, "Poet" 463.

⁷² Lefkowitz, "Poet" 460–62; K. J. Dover, *Greek Popular Morality* (Oxford 1974) 29–30; I. Gallo, "La vita di Euripide di Satiro," *ParPass* 113 (1967) 155.

⁷³ The matter-of-fact tone in the testimonia ("Sophocles welcomed the god in his house and built him an altar," τ 67–68 Radt) has encouraged skepticism on the part of modern scholars. But this is to impute contemporary values; see H. Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley 1971) 193 n.13. Euripides was believed to have participated in rites at Cape Zoster (*supra* n.44); on the cult, E. Meyer, *RE* 10A (1972) 851. On poets as priests, Nagy, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.51) ch.xviii.

⁷⁴ Ephorus, *FGrHist* 70 F 1 = Plut. *Vit.Hom.* 2 p.240 Allen; Trenkner, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.71) 30. Cf. the story that Plato's father was Apollo; Riginos, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.40) no.1.

comedy, once condensed, acquire a hostile tone. Exaggeration is funny only when set against true information; without perspective humor turns into criticism. Philemon's lines about wishing to hang himself to see Euripides become in the *Vita* evidence of excessive hero-worship (109–13). It does not seem to matter which character in which comedy (suppose it was a fanatic?) spoke these lines, or in which context (a trip to Hades?).⁷⁵ Philochorus explicitly contended with the distortions of the comic poets by arguing that Euripides' mother was not a vegetable seller but well-born.⁷⁶ Satyrus' dialogue also preserves a sense of debate over the application of quotations from plays. One of the characters notes that the comic poets had it in for Euripides.⁷⁷ The characters make it clear that it is they, and not the poets themselves, who attribute biographical significance to what they cite ("Aristophanes, as though summoned as a witness"; "what you say seems to be more subtle than true").⁷⁸

But in the *Vita* all sense of debate has disappeared. Quotations are introduced as evidence without qualification or concern about their provenience. Satyrus in his dialogue has discussions of Socratic notions in Euripides; the *Vita* offers instead a statement about literal collaboration.⁷⁹ The *Vita* omits the verbal parallels that Diogenes Laertius cites to 'prove' that Euripides was Anaxagoras'

⁷⁵ e.g., Dionysus in Ar. *Ran.* 66–70. Cf. Callimachus' epigram 53 G.-P.=23 Pf. about Cleombrotus killing himself because he had read Plato's description of life after death in the *Phaedo*. Cicero, for one, took the joke literally; Riginos, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.40) no.132 pp.180–81. "If the dead have feeling" is an oratorical commonplace; Dover, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.72) 243.

⁷⁶ His interest in the chronology of Euripides' death may also derive from concern about the use of poetry as evidence (*FGrHist* 328 F 220; Jacoby IIIB 587 text). Euripides' *Palamedes* had been used as evidence that the Athenians executed Socrates, but Philochorus argued that Euripides had died earlier (*FGrHist* 328 F 221). Cf. the argument about Pindar's birthdate preserved in *P.Oxy.* XXVI 2438 ii 4ff, ed. I. Gallo (Salerno 1968) 25–26; Lefkowitz, "Pindar's Lives" (*supra* n.4) 75. *P.Oxy.* XXIX 2506 fr.98 preserves debate about the timing of Alcaeus' and his brother's deaths.

⁷⁷ *Supra* n.12.

⁷⁸ *Supra* n.14. On the positive qualities of Satyrus' dialogue form, see Leo 274; Arrighetti 23; Gallo, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.72) 158; Momigliano, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.38) 11. S. West's criticisms do not take into full consideration the differences between literary and non-literary biographies (*supra* n.38): "Satyrus: Peripatetic or Alexandrian," *GRBS* 15 (1974) 282–83.

⁷⁹ *Supra* n.11; Arrighetti 112–15. The tendency of biographers to turn inference into fact was noted even in antiquity; Andocides' biographer observes that Caecilius took Thucydides' praise (8.68) as evidence that Alcibiades was Thucydides' teacher (*XOrat.* 832E); cf. Fairweather, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.36) 258–59.

pupil.⁸⁰ Elaborate and appreciative discussion in Satyrus of Euripides' artistic qualities emerges in the short second biography in the *Vita* as a summary negative assessment (126–32).⁸¹ Debate on his attitude toward women survives only in outline; quotation from *Melanippe* is cut to essentials (100–10), and omitted altogether from *Thesmophoriazousae*.⁸² Also missing in the *Vita* are Satyrus' quotations of Euripides' views on wealth, demagoguery, family relations and courage; the story of his championing of the poet Timotheus; the anecdote (also in Plut. *Nic.* 29) about how Athenian soldiers won release in Sicily by reciting verses of Euripides.⁸³ Narrative suffers less attrition than intellectual debate, but even there non-essential detail is pruned away. In Satyrus' account of Euripides' death attention is paid to the rôle of other characters in the story, Archelaus and the hunters who released the dogs. But the *Vita* concentrates directly on the poet, even to the point of losing the full meaning of Satyrus' punchline.⁸⁴

Excerptors also seem to prefer the negative and the sensational. In Satyrus the story of Euripides and Cephisophon ends with each getting the other's wife; in the *Vita* only Cephisophon wins.⁸⁵ Satyrus' account preserved chronological order.⁸⁶ But in the *Vita* the anecdote about Euripides' bad breath, originally set in Macedonia, becomes another instance of the Athenians' hatred.⁸⁷ In Satyrus

⁸⁰ Euripides' "golden clod," Diog. Laert. 2.10=fr.783 N.; Anaxagoras' "molten mass," Diog. Laert. 2.8=A 1, II 26 D-K; Arrighetti 105–07. On collections of Euripides' sayings, A. Dihle, "Das Satyrspiel Sisyphus," *Hermes* 105 (1977) 32.

⁸¹ Arrighetti 101; Delcourt did not recognize the transformation in her overly schematized account of correspondences.

⁸² Leo 376; Arrighetti 126–27.

⁸³ Fr.39 iii, iv (*supra* n.45), vi, xix; to xxii (Timotheus) *cf.* the anecdotes about Plato's consolation and support of the poet Antimachus, Riginos, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.40) nos. 125–26.

⁸⁴ *Supra* n.13. For the meaning of *ἔστι τις* 'there is such a thing as', *cf.* Alcmān 1.36. The verbal correspondence is not "almost word-for-word," *pace* Delcourt 287 and Arrighetti 145.

⁸⁵ *Cf.* n.18. The earlier version sounds like the plot of a comedy; Delcourt 278–79. *Cf.* stories of Socrates' two wives, L. Woodbury, *Phoenix* 27 (1973) 7–25.

⁸⁶ Leo 379; Arrighetti 21.

⁸⁷ *Supra* n.17; Leo 378 n.1; Delcourt 286–87. In a third-century dialogue-biography of Socrates, Xanthippe is shown to be a concerned hostess (*P.Hib.* II 182, p.27); but the scene emerges in Diogenes Laertius as an anecdote critical of Xanthippe (2.34). In the papyrus biography Socrates speaks of agreeable and disagreeable dinner guests; in Diogenes they are "reasonable" and "worthless." But in some cases lack of factual information contributes to the process: Aubrey's notes on Shakespeare (whom he did not know) are malicious; his life of Milton (whose third wife gave him specific information), respectful; *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, ed. O. L. Dick (Baltimore 1972) 360ff, 437ff.

Archelaus defends Euripides with the lines about the sweetness of his mouth, but in the *Vita* Euripides speaks the lines himself. By relating anecdotes out of context and after the poet's death, the narrative in the *Vita* preserves primarily a record of elemental expressions of love and of hate.

The writings of Heraclides Lembos suggest that works like Euripides' *Vita* were being produced as early as the second century B.C.; collections of anecdotes about Socrates were circulating in the first century.⁸⁸ Heraclides epitomized Satyrus' *Lives*, Hermippus' *Lives of the Lawgivers*, of the Seven Wise Men, and of Pythagoras.⁸⁹ We can get a sense of Heraclides' methodology and of his audience's interests from his excerpts of Aristotle's *Athēnaion Politeia*. He reduces an extensive discussion about Solon's laws with long citations of Solon's poetry (v–xiii) into two sentences: Solon cancelled debts, but because of criticism of his reforms he left Athens for Egypt.⁹⁰ All that remains of Aristotle's account is a general statement of what Solon did and its unpopularity.

Selection of detail in the *Vita* conveys the impression that Euripides was a lonely misfit, hated in his own home and in his own city. Of the several accounts of his death, it picks the one that emphasizes his isolation; no reference is made (as in the *Suda*) to a plot against Euripides by other poets, or to a love affair with Archelaus' housekeeper (Hermesianax 7.66), or to dying of old age (Adaeus *AP* 7.51 = *Garl.Phil.* 3 G.-P.).⁹¹ His life has been made sufficiently unpleasant that readers can be content that they have not accomplished as much as he. By emphasizing that he wrote his dramas in reaction to particular events, the *Vita* represents Euripides' achievement as a process requiring no special talent other than emotions like anger or fear. His gifts become at once accessible and comprehensible. Centuries later an Arab biographer portrayed Plato as a

⁸⁸ I. Gallo, "L'Origine e lo sviluppo della biografia greca," *QUCC* 18 (1974) 182.

⁸⁹ Gallo, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.72) 157; Arrighetti 14–15; A. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1971) 79.

⁹⁰ Heracl.Lemb. 1.5; see M. R. Dilts, ed. *Heraclidis Lembi Excerpta Politiarum* (*GRBM* 5, Durham 1971) 9.

⁹¹ On the various traditions, see Gow-Page II p.5; Arrighetti 145–50. Adaeus attempts to rationalize the mythology, like the writer of Sophocles' *Vita* (n.46). To the story of the jealous poets, *cf.* the scholiasts' tales about Pindar's rivalry with Bacchylides; Lefkowitz, "Pindar's Lives" (*supra* n.26) 79–85.

Muslim ascetic who loved to be alone in the wilderness and wept so loud one could hear him crying two miles away.⁹²

In Aristophanes' *Frogs* the poet was regarded as a teacher; Alcidas' *On Homer* offers the poet's life and minor works as "education" for "lovers of the noble and good"; Satyrus provides examples of Euripides' moral teachings.⁹³ But clearly Euripides' poetry served no such ethical purpose for the readers of his *Vita*. The portrait of the poet suggests that drama is tangential to their lives and perhaps even morally dangerous. Unfortunately this attitude gives no indication of date or religious ambience. In the third century B.C. Antigonus of Carystus reduced the sceptic Pyrrho's style of life to a parody of his philosophy, attributing no value to physical dangers, surviving only through the efforts of his friends.⁹⁴ One suspects that his audience was not interested in the complexities of philosophical inquiry, and only patient enough to grasp a general outline of essentials.⁹⁵ Whether school children or masters or civil servants, they were better entertained by the actions than by the words of drama; like Trimalchio they might best enjoy their Homer in live performances of epic battle scenes.⁹⁶

V. Conclusions

The Euripides *Vita* is made up of anecdotes created in or soon after the poet's lifetime, which derive from his own works or comic poetry about him. Stories of his early recognition and versatility, the magnitude of his accomplishments, his isolation, exile and death suggest that in the fourth century at least he was regarded as something of a hero. But by the time the *Vita* was compiled the process of condensation and excerpting made his stature comfortably unenviable. Though precise dating is impossible, the basic format of the *Vita* could have been set as early as the second century B.C. In its present form it would seem best to serve the interests of an audience

⁹² F. Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (Berkeley 1969) 28–29; Riginos, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.40) no.107, p.152; J. Dillon, *JAOS* 98 (1978) 483–84.

⁹³ On Alcidas, Lefkowitz, "Poet" 468; R. Renchan, *HSCP* 73 (1971) 85–86.

⁹⁴ Diog.Laert. 9.62.

⁹⁵ Cf. L. Carroll, *The Hunting of the Snark*, Fit ii 5–8: "He had bought a large map representing the sea, | Without the least vestige of land; | And the crew were much pleased when they found it to be | A map they could all understand."

⁹⁶ Petron. *Sat.* 59.3–7; Artem. 4.2.

with some ambition but without the leisure or persistence seriously to acquire culture, and which accordingly would have derived reassurance from the *Vita's* condescending tone.

The instinctive desire for biography may make it hard to accept the negative conclusions of this study. But it is unlikely that historically accurate information will ever be found to replace the attractive fictions that we must resolutely discard. Turning back to the plays can offer no sure remedy. Euripides' use of sophistic arguments provides evidence of his audience's interests as well as of his own.⁹⁷ Psychoanalytic methods, like ancient anecdotes, will tend to reproduce their authors' preoccupations rather than Euripides', *e.g.*, the discovery in dreams from his tragedies of concern with the primal scene.⁹⁸ That Euripides won fewer victories than Sophocles says only that audiences liked Sophocles' plays better at the moment; the archon still never denied Euripides a chorus.⁹⁹

Great care must also be taken in trying to trace the development of Euripides' interests, or in seeing in his dramas direct reflection of contemporary events. Any dating based on the biography must be questioned: according to the scholia on Aristophanes' *Frogs* 67, the *Bacchae* was produced after Euripides' death along with *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Alcmeon*. References in the play to Pieria (409–11) and the Lydias valley (568–75) might suggest that he wrote the play while he was in Macedonia.¹⁰⁰ But it is equally possible that the notion of his exile in Macedonia was created to explain the presence of these unusual references in the play, as the scholium to *Nubes* 272 says Aristophanes was born in Naucratis, to explain a single reference to the river Nile.¹⁰¹ The *Bacchae* is the source also of the story about the poet's violent death in Macedonia.¹⁰² Thus Greek tragedy may in

⁹⁷ See esp. J. H. Finley, *Three Essays on Thucydides* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1967) 94–101.

⁹⁸ Cf. G. Devereux, *Dreams in Greek Tragedy* (Berkeley 1976) 311; on limitations of the methodology, M. R. Lefkowitz, *AJP* 98 (1977) 305–07.

⁹⁹ Stevens, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.5) 92.

¹⁰⁰ E. R. Dodds, *Euripides Bacchae*² (Oxford 1969) xxxix.

¹⁰¹ Heliodorus, *FGrHist* 373 F 4 = Athen. 6.16, 229E; cf. Gelzer, *op.cit.* (*supra* n.22) 1398. On scholiastic methodology, W. J. Slater, "Pindar's House," *GRBS* 12 (1971) 150–52.

¹⁰² *Supra* n.32. The story about Sophocles and Iophon's quarrel (τ 81–84a Radt) is taken as proof that Sophocles composed *OC* toward the end of his life (it was produced by his grandson in 401); yet the anecdote appears to be based on comedy (*supra* n.63). But the story of Sophocles dying as the result of winning first prize with *Antigone* (*Vit.* 14) is not used as evidence for dating of that play to 406/5. Aristophanes' hypothesis suggests *ca* 441;

fact not end where it began, with Dionysus.¹⁰³ The actual date of Aeschylus' *Suppliants* indicates that the course of literary history is less easily charted than scholars or their pupils would prefer.¹⁰⁴

WELLESLEY COLLEGE

March, 1979

but one wonders if the characterization of Creon in *Antigone* might not be the source of Aristophanes' anecdote: "they say that Sophocles was awarded the generalship in Samos because of his direction of the *Antigone*" (lines 15–17; *cf. Vit.* 1, 9; *supra* n.54). A Creon served with Sophocles as one of the ten generals in 441/0, Androtion, *FGrHist* 324 F 38; but *cf.* L. Woodbury, "Sophocles among the Generals," *Phoenix* 24 (1970) 209–24.

¹⁰³ *Cf.* Lesky 400.

¹⁰⁴ See H. Lloyd-Jones, "The 'Suppliants' of Aeschylus: the New Date and Old Problems," *AntCl* 33 (1964) 256–74. The present essay incorporates many helpful suggestions from colleagues at Hunter College and at the University of California at Berkeley, at Santa Barbara and at Los Angeles. I am particularly grateful also to W. M. Calder III, H. Lloyd-Jones, C. W. MacLeod, R. Padel and J. Zetzel.