

Conclusion: The Creative Use of History

The biographies of holy men of Late Antiquity were literary celebrations of the virtues of certain eminent individuals, and they accomplished their goals by seeing their heroes through ideal traits, images that tended to cluster around two basic models of holiness. Biographers saw their heroes, not “through a glass *darkly*,” but through prisms of divine sonship or god-likeness. In Chapter 4, a detailed study of one of these biographies showed that the prism of the character model worked to distort the historical situation of the hero so that the ideal facets of his life might be emphasized. In Chapter 5, we took the refracted historical situation for granted, and looked instead at how the riddle of a man’s life comes to expression in a biography’s images. Both of the biographers considered in these two chapters looked *through* a glass *into* darkness. For both authors, it was an imaginative looking whose light figured the darkness.

We have described what they saw through this glassy divine-man prism as “faces” (Eusebius’ Janus-faced Origen) and as “phantoms” (Porphyry’s daemonic Plotinus), which are literary elements in a biographical structure presented as a faithful journey through a life’s meaning. Biographers present their works as true stories, and Plotinus’ dictum about the metaphoric reality of language—“everywhere we must read ‘so to speak’”—does not break into either Porphyry’s or Eusebius’ biographical speech. Their biographies presume to be faithful tellings. Yet, as we have tried to show in a variety of ways, these “faithful” tellings are reflected, refracted, shadowed, and ghosted, and we must now ask, in a pointed way, what the impulses for this prismatic biographical looking might be.

Underlying the present study is the conviction that these biographies were not exercises in literary dexterity; the biographers were not manip-

ulating their prisms—the cluster of ideals that defined their models—simply to rewrite history. For if the prisms worked to distort the actual lives of the biographers’ subjects, they also worked to reflect the motivations and historical concerns of the biographers themselves. Biographies were personal statements, statements which, though couched in religious and philosophical terms, addressed sociopolitical and cultural concerns as well.

The view that biographies reflected the personal convictions of the biographers brings up the issue of intent. If these works functioned not only to recall the significance of the life of a hero of the past but also to make sense of contemporary life, we must attempt to describe the historical context of the authors in order to discover situations that may have prompted their literary activity. This will be, of course, a speculative journey, yet as the history of biography writing in Chapter 1 showed, biography was from its inception a genre that found its home in controversy. Biographers like Aristoxenus were self-conscious mediators of specific traditions, and their works had both apologetic and polemical aims, apologetic in defending, affirming, and sometimes correcting opinion about a hero; polemical in suggesting by the strength of the defense, and sometimes by outright attack, the unworthiness of other traditions by comparison. The social sphere of early biographies was one in which the biographers sought to promote specific philosophical traditions by elaborate confirmations of past representatives of those traditions. It was a battle of school against school. The writers of biographies of holy men were also engaged in a battle, yet theirs involved not only philosophical conviction but religious belief as well. We could say that their heroes had become emblems in a holy war.

But it is not only the cultural, cultic context of these biographies that will interest us in this chapter. Earlier we remarked that the divine man who was “a mere toy in the hands of the Fates” was not for Eusebius a very impressive figure.¹ What, then, of the divine man who is a toy in the hands of his biographer? By discussing biographies as vehicles for the social and political concerns of the biographers, we might ourselves be guilty of suggesting that Plotinus and Origen were mere toys in the hands of their biographers. In order to avoid the idea that an author’s impulse to write is a conscious manipulation of his material merely for objective, sociopolitical ends, we will look at an author’s intent not only as a way of imagining his

1. See chapter 4, p. 80.

work's context, but also as a reflection of the author's deep sense of himself. With this perspective, we need not think of biographers as manipulative puppeteers. For puppets are lifeless and opaque things, whereas Plotinus and Origen were translucent presences who lived, not in the misty past, but in the creative moment of their biographers' imaginations. In that creative moment, it is not only the depths of cultural situations that are sounded, but also the soulful depths of the author.

In what follows, we will consider first how the biographers' idea of the holy man can be seen as ways of understanding and organizing the cultural situations in which they were embroiled. Our particular interest will be to show how Eusebius and Porphyry have used images of other lives to express their own immediate concerns. Further, we suggest that not only does the biographer look *through* a prism, but in a way he might himself *be* the prism through which he is looking. Prisms do not create light, they reflect it; and by their reflecting, images are produced. And if the reflected images sometimes look like shadowed distortions, we have learned from the mirror of Dionysus that the altered image is often the true one. In other words, as he creates, the author is himself created; his reflections are shadings of his own soul.

The Holy War

In an article devoted to exposing the "strictly apologetic historiography" practiced by Eusebius in his *Ecclesiastical History*, Robert Grant remarked that Eusebius was "far too ready to find the judgments of God clearly imposed within the historical process to vindicate saints and crush sinners."² This observation has particular significance for Book 6, the "Life of Origen," since there the battle lines between saints and sinners are clearly drawn, and two apologetic concerns, both with polemical overtones, can be identified. One of the apologetic themes is directed inward to the Christian community; the other is addressed to the pagan community.

The "Life of Origen," as Eusebius himself intimated,³ was based on an *Apology for Origen* that he wrote in conjunction with his friend, the Caesa-

2. Robert Grant, "The Case against Eusebius, or, Did the Father of Church History write History?," *Studia patristica* 12 (1975): 418, 413.

3. See *HE* 6.23.4, 6.33.4, 6.36.4.

rean presbyter Pamphilus, sometime between 308 and 310, the period of the latter's confinement in prison during the Great Persecution.⁴ The *Apology* was dedicated to Christian confessors who as a result of the persecution had been condemned to the copper mines in Phaeno in southern Palestine.⁵ This dedication, plus the *Apology's* setting during the persecution, provide clues to the meaning of the biography's apology directed to Christian insiders. For in the *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius remarked at one point that he and Pamphilus had composed their *Apology* "because of the fault-finders."⁶ That the "fault-finders" were Christians is clear both from the context of Eusebius' remark in the biography, where he is emphasizing Origen's position as a standard-bearer of orthodoxy, and from the dedication of the *Apology* to the Christians in Phaeno, a group of rigorist confessors from Egypt who had been relegated to the mines for their refusal to sacrifice. These martyrs had organized themselves into a "Church of the Martyrs"⁷ and were critical of philosophical theologians and of people who were not martyrs.⁸ The memory of Origen was subjected to bitter attacks, perhaps because of the tradition, reported by Epiphanius, that Origen had sacrificed during one of the persecutions of his own day,⁹ but certainly because of his infamous excommunication and the speculative nature of his theology.

The *Apology*, which consisted of a life of Origen followed by a detailed defense of his theology,¹⁰ was, as an answer to the rigorists' attacks on Origen, motivated by self-preservation, since Pamphilus and Eusebius were both adherents of an Origenist theology and had attended the school that Origen founded in Caesarea. In an interesting and, I think, quite plausible reconstruction of the situation that prompted the writing of the *Apology*, Nautin has suggested that the opposition of the martyrs in Phaeno was in fact inspired by one or more of Pamphilus' episcopal enemies in Caesarea, who detested his theological stance and feared the veneration that might develop for him as a result of his martyr's life in prison. By exposing his unorthodox theological views, especially since they stemmed from a man who had incurred the wrath of the ecclesiastical establishment, Pamphilus'

4. Photius *Bibl.* 118: the *Apologia* written while Pamphilus was in prison; Eusebius *Martyrs of Palestine* 7.4–6, 11: on Pamphilus' imprisonment.

5. See Nautin, *Origène*, p. 135. 6. Eusebius *HE* 6.33.4.

7. Epiphanius *Panarion* 68.3.6.

8. See Grant, "Early Alexandrian Christianity," pp. 133–34.

9. Epiphanius *Panarion* 64.2.1–6.

10. Nautin, *Origène*, p. 107.

enemies could thereby separate him from authentic confessors and thus stem the tide of admiration.¹¹ A look at the charges against Origen in the *Apology*,¹² which were presumably directed against his intellectual heir Pamphilus as well, shows that the instigators of the opposition at Phaeno knew well what kind of theological opinion was likely to arouse furor in a situation in which a high premium was being placed on the various forms of Christian martyrdom. The force of the attack fell in large part on the supposed subordinationist tendency in Origen's Christology; the rigorists objected strongly to the idea that the Son was not complete in his Godhood. Coming from a group of martyrs, this objection seems especially revealing, since to diminish the divinity of Christ would be to diminish the quality of the martyr's own *imitatio Christi*.¹³ Two other telling features of the attack dealt with Origen's repudiation of the resurrection of the flesh and of eternal punishment, which in the context of the martyr's fervor to witness for the faith could be interpreted as denying the martyr his "crown" and white-washing the persecutor's evil. In the situation in which the Christians in Phaeno found themselves, the serene world of allegory simply had no place.

Eusebius and Pamphilus' *Apology*, then, consisted mostly of defenses of Origen's orthodoxy and was addressed to a group of Christian dissidents, a powerful group of martyrs which, because of its esteemed status, threatened to create a serious rift within the Church. Based on the *Apology* and also published during the Persecution,¹⁴ the "Life of Origen" takes its place within this context. It can be read not only as a defense of the Origenist tradition but also as an attempt to close the rift, to heal internal wounds in order to present a united front to the pagan enemy. In the biography, the defense does not argue specific theological points, but presents the Origenist tradition as the only tradition representative of, and present in, the Alexandrian-Caesarean area. As we discussed in chapter 4, Eusebius' picture of Origen's school activities used the biographical "pars pro toto" technique to create the guise of unity and continuity; the bishop Demetrius—the voice of opposition with which he was forced to deal—he simply con-

11. *Ibid.*, pp. 133–34.

12. See the Greek texts and translation in Nautin, *Origène*, pp. 108–33.

13. In *HE* 8.10.3, Eusebius quotes a letter of one of the martyrs of the Great Persecution which refers to martyrs as *Christophoroi*. Ironically, Origen himself saw martyrs as imitators of Christ. See his *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 14, 35, and especially 42.

14. For a discussion of the date of the first edition of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, see Jean Sirinelli, *Les vues historiques d'Eusèbe de Césarée durant la période pré-nicéenne* (Dakar: Université de Dakar, 1961), p. 23.

demned as a sinner, a Satanic aberration whose opposition stemmed only from personal spite. Origen and his latter-day supporters then appear as the true saints within the Christian community; and Eusebius' emphasis on Origen's orthodoxy, his lifelong desire for martyrdom, and his proselytizing teaching activities begins to make good apologetic sense. This mode of apology represents the most basic orientation of the biography's appeal to Christian insiders. However, the biography can also be read as an attempt, once the defense was achieved, to create a hero figure around whom all Christians could unite. Here the persecution context is especially important, for as one scholar has remarked, the *Ecclesiastical History* as a whole views the history of Christianity as the history of a spiritual nation engaged in battling demonic forces;¹⁵ it was a history marked by a continual overcoming of odds, as Eusebius' careful recounting of the history of persecution in the *History* makes clear. If the history of the Church in this sense can be viewed as an historical paradigm, then Origen's own life, as Eusebius tells it, represents a personal imitation of the ecclesiastical model. For as we have seen, Origen was constantly overcoming obstacles, or being saved from disaster by providence. In the biography he is a kind of symbol of courageous survival and so could serve Christians in a time of trouble as a sign of hope, a reminder that providence would not abandon the saints.¹⁶

This context suggests further a second kind of apologetic intent, one aimed at the pagan opposition. In Eusebius' eyes, the pagan opponents of Christianity found their chief philosophical spokesman in Porphyry, the "false one" whose attack on Origen was refuted as "calumny" in the biography.¹⁷ That in a later work Eusebius could refer to Porphyry not by name but simply as "our enemy" suggests the infamy, as well as the danger, of this person's writings.¹⁸ Porphyry's *Against the Christians* was a monumental exposé of the alien nature of the Christian religion. Not only was Christianity neither Greek nor Barbarian, it relied on faith rather than rational demonstration and even managed to pervert its one claim to antiquity, the

15. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Pagan and Christian Historiography in the 4th c. A.D.," in Momigliano, ed., *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 90.

16. See *Martyrs of Palestine* 13.13–14 for Eusebius' remarks on providential guidance of Christians through the persecution.

17. *HE* 6.19.11.

18. Eusebius *Demonstratio evangelica* 3.6. Eusebius in fact devoted a treatise of twenty-five books to a refutation of Porphyry's *Contra Christianos*, but it is no longer extant. See Sirinelli, *Les vues historiques d'Eusèbe de Césarée durant la période pré-nicéenne*, pp. 27–28.

Jewish Scriptures, by false and inharmonious interpretation. The picture of Jesus presented by the gospels is constantly ridiculed not only because of its inconsistencies but also for absurd statements like Jesus' Eucharistic command, which Porphyry says could never be accepted by anyone with a liberal education.¹⁹ It was to this attitude that Eusebius responded in his "Life of Origen." By defending Origen's Greek philosophical erudition, by showing the value of his allegorical interpretation of Scripture, and by developing an image of Origen the rational schoolman, Eusebius was in fact answering Porphyry's charges against the Church. Although it is not known whether Porphyry himself participated in the "war council" that immediately preceded the outbreak of the Great Persecution,²⁰ one of those who did participate, Sossianus Hierocles, carried on the Porphyrian assault with a treatise "The Lover of Truth." Eusebius answered this with his *Against Hierocles*, an attack on the heroic picture of the pagan hero Apollonius, favored by Hierocles, which is certainly indicative of Eusebius' recognition of the persuasive power and danger of pagan propaganda.

Finally, Eusebius' biography should also be seen in the light of Porphyry's own biographical activity. The *Life of Plotinus* and the *Life of Pythagoras* were written before Eusebius' work, and Eusebius had definitely read

19. For representative texts from the *Contra Christianos* see Adolph Harnack, *Porphyrius 'Gegen die Christen'* (Abhandlungen der preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Philosophisch-historisches Klasse, 1916), no. 1, fragments 1, 73, 43, and 69. See also Robert L. Wilken, "Pagan Criticism of Christianity: Greek Religion and Christian Faith," in *Early Christian Literature and the Classical Intellectual Tradition*, ed. by William R. Schoedel and Robert L. Wilken (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1979), pp. 117–34, for a suggestive discussion of Porphyry's *Philosophy from Oracles* as an attack on the foolishness of Christian interpreters who elevate Jesus (truly a Hero) above the rank possible for a human being to attain.

20. This council was a meeting of Diocletian's *consilium principis* during the winter of 302/3 in Nicomedia, the result of which was the first edict of persecution against the Christians. See Lactantius *De mortibus persecutorum* 11–12. Porphyry's participation is based on an ambiguous phrase in his *Ad Marcellam* 4, which mentions a journey undertaken at this time on behalf of "the affairs of the Greeks." See Chadwick, *Sentences of Sextus*, pp. 142–43, and Walter Pötscher, "Porphyrios *Pros Markellan*," *Philosophia antiqua* 15 (1969): 66. It has been argued recently that Porphyry's *Against the Christians* was published just before the beginning of the persecution and so might have been an influence on it. See T. D. Barnes, "Porphyry *Against the Christians*: Date and Attribution of the Fragments," *JTS*, N.S., 24 (October, 1973): 424–42. See also Joseph Bidez, *Vie de Porphyre* (Ghent: n.p., 1913; reprint ed. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964), p. 105, n. 5, who felt that Hierocles, then *praeses* of Bithynia, might actually have been one of Porphyry's students.

the latter.²¹ Both of those biographies claimed for their heroes the usual qualities one would expect in a Graeco-Roman holy man. In this context it is intriguing that Eusebius' biography presents the Christian theologian Origen in Graeco-Roman dress as a typical ascetic philosopher full of wisdom and virtue, and I would suggest that Origen's Greek dress represents one of Eusebius' apologetic attempts to counteract the propaganda of the pagan intelligentsia.

Eusebius' biography is best understood in its social sense as a response to the time of persecution in which he lived, a persecution that had aroused antagonisms both within and without the Christian circle. Ironically, the prophet of the persecution was himself enmeshed in a threatening situation, for if, in a benevolent mood, Porphyry could simply "pity the folly" of those who had fallen into the error of the Christians,²² he could also bemoan their loss to his own tradition. What we call the Great Persecution of Christians actually took place within a series of three pagan religious revivals spearheaded by the emperors Diocletian, Galerius, and Maximin Daia, whose reigns spanned the years from 284–313.²³ The need for revival, especially when it went to the extreme of outlawing and then killing those in other religious traditions, points to the fact that the pagan camp was in disarray.²⁴ The Christian movement had made serious inroads, the old allegiances were failing, and, as much of Diocletian's legislation shows, thoughtful pagans feared the loss of the favor of the immortal ancient gods.²⁵ It is within Neoplatonism, and especially in the work of two of its chief exponents, Porphyry and Iamblichus, that one can best see how paganism responded to its own plight.

Olympiodorus summed up the movement within Neoplatonism in this

21. See Grant, "Eusebius and his Lives of Origen," p. 8, and Barnes, "Porphyry *Against the Christians*," p. 431.

22. Porphyry *On the Philosophy of Oracles*, quoted by Eusebius *Demonstratio evangelica* 3.7.

23. Robert M. Grant, "The Religion of Maximin Daia," in *Christianity, Judaism, and Other Greco-Roman Cults, Studies for Morton Smith at Sixty*, ed. Jacob Neusner, 4 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 4: 143.

24. The best treatment of this topic is W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1965), especially ch. 4: "The Triumph of Christianity 260–303."

25. See Diocletian's "Edicts" on marriage, maximum prices, and Manichaeism, all of which attack dissension from the traditional Roman ethos. For texts of the "Edicts" see Naphtali Lewis and Meyer Reinhold, eds., *Roman Civilization*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), vol. 2: *The Empire*, pp. 455–74.

period when he stated that "some put philosophy first, as Porphyry and Plotinus; others the priestly art, as Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus, and all the priestly school."²⁶ The revival within Neoplatonism took the form of a new religious orientation that found redemption less and less in Plotinian *theōria* and more and more in cultic *theourgia*.²⁷ However strongly Porphyry might protest the Christian emphasis on belief, the fact is that in his own tradition authority had begun to replace reason. Plato the hierophant replaced Plato the rationalist, and his authority was augmented by revelatory knowledge from Pythagorean, Hermetic, and Chaldean materials.²⁸ Like the very group they opposed, the pagan intelligentsia began to expound upon and collate sacred texts, and "to neutralize Christian miracles" with miracles of their own.²⁹ As Dodds has remarked, Neoplatonism was transformed from its abstract philosophical character in Plotinus' day into "a religion with its own saints and miracle-workers,"³⁰ a movement that resulted from "the desire to create a single Hellenic philosophy which should supersede the jarring warfare of the sects" and "to construct within the framework of traditional Greek rationalism a scheme of salvation capable of comparison and rivalry with those offered by the mystery religions."³¹

Porphyry's writings provide a revealing example of this shift within Neoplatonism, for the same man who wrote a scathing critique of theurgy in the *Letter to Anebo* also wrote a commentary on the Chaldean Oracles and in *On the Return of the Soul* even recommended the purificatory, though not the salvific, powers of theurgical practices.³² His biographies especially illustrate Porphyry's midway position between Neoplatonism as a philosophical

26. Olympiodorus *In Phaed.* 123. 3, quoted by E. R. Dodds, *Proclus: The Elements of Theology*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. xxiii.

27. Dodds, *Proclus: The Elements of Theology*, p. xx.

28. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, p. 122; R. E. Witt, *Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937), p. 123.

29. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Popular Religious Beliefs and the Late Roman Historians," *Studies in Church History* 8 (1972): 11.

30. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, p. 109.

31. Dodds, *Proclus: The Elements of Theology*, p. xviii. See also Joseph Bidez, "La liturgie des mystères chez les Néoplatoniciens," *Académie Royale de Belgique, Bulletins de la classe des lettres* (June 1919): 417–18.

32. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 287. What Dodds called Porphyry's "incurable weakness for Oracles" seems to have been held in abeyance during his years of tutelage in Plotinus' school. See Robert M. Grant, "Porphyry among the Early Christians," in *Romanitas et Christianitas*, ed. W. Den Boer et al. (Amsterdam: Northern Holland Publishing Company, 1973), pp. 181–83.

school and as a religion; for the *Life of Plotinus* is concerned above all to emphasize the rational, philosophical calm of Plotinus' school, whereas the *Life of Pythagoras* is a good example of the turn toward saints and miracles. The *Life of Plotinus* was, of course, written as the preface to Porphyry's edition of the master's works and can thus be seen as an attempt to show the harmony between the hero's life and his thought. But I would suggest, further, that Porphyry's emphasis in this biography on school and disciples shows that he, like Eusebius, was concerned to create a scholastic tradition that might serve as a solid foundation for uniting his peers. For we know that in Porphyry's day the idea of a single school was an illusion; there were factions within Neoplatonism just as there were within Christianity.³³ The creation of a school tradition also entailed, of course, the creation of a revered founder. Plotinus' godlike image in the *Life* might be interpreted as Porphyry's apologetic statement to fellow pagans whose commitment was flagging; it reminded them that disciples are measured by the greatness of their founder.

Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras* tells quite a different story, for here, as we have seen, Porphyry has created a son of god for the Neoplatonic tradition.³⁴ This biography is a kind of sacred text that relates uncritically the god's miracles, healing powers, philosophical tenets, and ascetic program for daily living and ends with an account of the strength and friendliness of the Pythagorean community through several generations. If Plotinus was the historical founder, Pythagoras has become for Neoplatonists the spiritual revealer. Porphyry's biographies appear to answer conflicting needs within the paganism of his day. One addressed its philosophical heritage; the other is a witness to Neoplatonism's attempt to respond to Christianity's encroachment by showing that it did not lack what the other tradition claimed.

Porphyry's biographies show him as a middle man, caught between two tendencies within the Neoplatonic community. Such was not the case for his onetime pupil Iamblichus, an exact contemporary of Eusebius who studied first with the Aristotelian philosopher Anatolius, then with Porphyry, and later set up his own school in Apamea.³⁵ Iamblichus' works show him to have been a decided partisan of *theourgia*, not *theōria*; he took the step that

33. See John Dillon, ed. and trans., *Iamblichi Chalcidensis: In Platonis dialogos commentariorum fragmenta* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), p. 8–14.

34. See chapter 2, pp. 34–36, 40.

35. Dillon, *Iamblichi Chalcidensis*, pp. 5–12.

Porphry did not take and combined the scholastic with the cultic, revelatory tendency within Neoplatonism. Even though his philosophical system was "essentially an elaboration of Plotinus' Platonism,"³⁶ he thought that Plato was a Pythagorean; he composed at least two treatises on the Chaldean Oracles and wrote a four-volume commentary on Pythagorean materials, one volume of which consisted of his *Pythagorean Life*.³⁷ One of his most important works, *On the Mysteries*, was a detailed refutation of Porphyry's critique of theurgy. Called by one scholar a "manifesto of irrationalism" because it finds the key to salvation "in ritual rather than in reason,"³⁸ *On the Mysteries* envisions a priestly order of theurgists whose communication with the gods comes not through philosophical contemplation but through ritual acts. The philosophical master has here been transformed into the priest who is the sole interpreter of divine knowledge.³⁹

Iamblichus' *Pythagorean Life* was, like Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, an introduction to the philosopher's thought. But we know that in his school Iamblichus interpreted Neoplatonic philosophy through Pythagorean eyes.⁴⁰ Hence the biography itself is an exposition of Iamblichus' own thought and goes far beyond Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras* in its detailed and sympathetic portrait of the Pythagorean community and its successors and in its magnification of Pythagoras' status as a son of god. It is interesting that, unlike Porphyry, Iamblichus was not much of a polemicist, though in *On the Mysteries* he does refer to the *atheoi* who revile worship of the gods, probably a reference to Christians.⁴¹ His efforts were devoted to building the cult, and his biography, over half of which discusses the range of virtues promoted by Pythagoras and continued, in his eyes, by Neoplatonists, can best be read as a clarion call to waning paganism that its tradition was worthy of adherence.

As Herbert Musurillo once remarked, "It is frequently difficult to deter-

36. *Ibid.*, p. 28.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 18–25, for a list of Iamblichus' writings. See also Eduard Des Places, "La Religion de Jamblique," in *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 21: *De Jamblique à Proclus* (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1975), p. 70.

38. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, p. 287.

39. L. W. Leadbeater, "Aspects of the Philosophical Priesthood in Iamblichus' *De mysteriis*," *Classical Bulletin* 47 (1971): 91. On the official establishment of pagan priesthoods see Grant, "The Religion of Maximin Daia," pp. 157–60.

40. Dillon, *Iamblichi Chalcedensis*, pp. 14–15.

41. R. E. Witt, "Iamblichus as a Forerunner of Julian," in *Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique* 21: *De Jamblique à Proclus* (Geneva: Fondation Hardt, 1975), p. 40.

mine when a piece of literature has been written primarily for propaganda (the literary characters being mere pawns in the presentation of a thesis), and when its aim is primarily entertainment, though with sharp political overtones. There are no rules for solving such problems: one can only judge by the general tone of the work and by the prominence and definiteness of the political or sociological motives involved."⁴² As we have seen in this chapter, though precise connections are difficult to make, the historical context of holy man biographies is suggestive of the biographers' propagandistic intentions. We know that biography functioned in a literary sense by mythologizing a man's life, that is, by using fiction to convey truth; and we know that as a literary form biography was suitable to the creation of caricatures, portraits so dominated by the ideals imposed by the biographer that history was distorted, if not actually lost.

The writers of the biographies considered here used the images of the holy philosopher current in their time to create ideal portraits of men significant in their own religious traditions. Through those portraits they attempted to interpret what was to them the most momentous event of their time, an increasing antagonism between pagans and Christians that had caused rifts in both communities. The biographies of Porphyry, and Iamblichus as well, can be read both as apologetic efforts to maintain allegiance to the pagan standard and as polemical manifestos, justifications of pagan supremacy based on the virtues inherent in its tradition and hallowed figureheads. Eusebius' biography too is both apologetic and polemical, attempting at once to close the Christian ranks and to refute pagan calumnies. In these biographies, the holy philosopher was depicted not as a passive figure but as a man with a mission. Whatever his historical mission might have been, in the biographies the mission was to a great extent dictated by the biographer himself.

Author as Prism

When we imagine that it is the prism-wielding biographer who dictates the active mission of his hero, it is actually the biographer whose activity we are emphasizing. It is he who has brought the silent mystery of his hero's life into active biographical expression. But from another perspective, it is the

42. Herbert Musurillo, ed. and trans., *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs: Acta Alexandrinorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), p. 275.

biographer who is a silent mystery. He may be seen as the still prism brought to life by the active reflecting of ghostly shadows of his hero within himself. Then, a biography's holy man images would be the author's own faces.

In earlier chapters, we have suggested that for the biographers of Late Antiquity, history had become mythic—anything that could be judged likely or probable could be used as historical data. Eusebius declared himself “quite ready” to accept poetic (“highly colored”) statements as valid history, and Porphyry too opened the doors of history to imaginative reconstruction.⁴³ In the biographers' hands, history had become a mythic in-between zone where the “air of truth” holds sway. From this perspective, the biographical text looks like a strange boundary that sustains a creative tension. This tension is the biography's mythic perspective, which arises from the author's willingness to let himself be a silent threshold through which the biographical elements of fact and fantasy, the text's active presences, move.

The movement of these presences involves a complicated interaction, for when the biographer breaks his silence to speak, what comes forth are images that figure those presences in such a way that fact is seen through fantasy and fantasy is seen through fact. Each is seen through the other in a single image. Eusebius, for example, presents two major images of Origen—the ascetic philosopher and the orthodox teacher—and in both we have seen the fantasy of the holy man and the facts of Origen's life interpreting each other. Porphyry's images of Plotinus as Socrates and Odysseus also depend upon the mutual illumination of historical fact and fantasies of holiness for their success as biographical characterizations. A biography's images give visible face to a process of seeing through.

The biographer dwells in this seeing through. Out of his silent dwelling comes his seeing, and this suggests that “threshold” and “prism” are metaphors that express two aspects of the biographical imagination. Thus when we imagine Eusebius as the one through whom the fantastic and factual aspects of Origen's life moved, we can call the author a threshold that sustains this interior coming and going. But when we read the biographical patterns that give expression to these interior encounters, we can call the author a prism whose work has reflected visible, textual images of the silent dynamic within. The threshold becomes a prism and, like Heraclitus' Lord

43. See chapter 3, pp. 63–64; chapter 4, pp. 73–74.

at Delphi, the biographer neither conceals nor reveals, but gives signs. He creates as he has himself been created by the interactions of factual and fantastic presences within. His biography's flow of “real beings,” the striking image-signs that carry the hero's character, arise from a meditative mystery deep within the author himself. Prodded by the fire of imagination, the biographer breaks into speech, and the depths of his own soul become the matrix for his biographical speaking. As we have said often, the figures who come forth in these biographies are not Origen and Plotinus, but the “Eusebian Origen” and the “Porphyrian Plotinus”: ghosts haunting other ghosts, making the biography a “*mise en abîme* of reflections within reflections.”⁴⁴

As critic, the reader of these biographies “cannot unscramble the tangle of lines of meaning, comb its threads out so they shine clearly side by side. He can only retrace the text, set its elements in motion once more, in that experience of the failure of determinable reading which is decisive here.”⁴⁵ When, for example, we set the elements of Eusebius' biography of Origen in motion, we found a Janus-faced Origen, but we also found that this “determinable reading” failed to yield us an historical Origen. If we were to read that biography again, this time not from an historical perspective but from the perspective of “interior familiars” used to read Porphyry's biography of Plotinus (or, for that matter, if we were to read Porphyry's biography from the perspective of historical accuracy), we would have other “determinable readings,” and other “failures.”

What characterizes Eusebius' and Porphyry's biographical readings (and our own as well) might be described as a “law of shadowing.”⁴⁶ Biographical myth is the story of a face reflected in many mirrors, the kind of history whose shadings and nuances reveal a divine *telos*, as Eusebius thought.⁴⁷ It is, as Pépin has remarked,⁴⁸ a deformation of historical reality, since its seeing is an imaginal seeing by way of tropes. However, as we have tried to suggest, it is just this tropical deformation that accounts for the success of a biographer's characterization of his hero as holy man. In other words, biographers live in that mythic middle realm peopled by daemonic presences, the tropes of antiquity. It is a place where “we are lived by Powers we

44. J. Hillis Miller, “The Critic as Host” in Harold Bloom, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, et al., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), p. 232.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

47. See chapter 4, pp. 75–80.

48. Pépin *Mythe et allégorie*, p. 481.

pretend to understand," and it is the only place where meaningful discourse between the divine and the human unfolds.⁴⁹

As Plato pointed out, daemonic conversation can happen both "in the waking state or during sleep."⁵⁰ By the time our biographers were writing, however, one theologian could say that "it is to dreams that the majority of mankind owe their knowledge of God."⁵¹ The dream had become the *topos* of daemonic presence, and it was by dreaming that one entered that mythic middle realm where "false words"—daemonic images—"speak the truth" about the relations between the heavenly and the mundane.⁵²

Were biographers dreamers? In an earlier chapter, we saw that many modern scholars have characterized the biographies of Late Antiquity as "aretalogies" because of their attention to the virtues (*aretai*) of their heroes. Their use of this term was based on a study that linked the *aretalogos* with the *oneirokritēs*, the judge of dreams. It was in the daemonic world of dreams that the gods spoke, and the task of the dream judge was to interpret how the gods were present in the dream's images.⁵³ Perhaps we can use the sense of this old cultic title to suggest a way of looking at the biographical imagination. A dream, we could say, names that realm of inner space, the interior geography of myth, where daemonic figures present themselves. It is here that fact and fantasy meet and intermingle, and it is this dreaming that the biographer "judges" when he names the dream's movements with images that give interpretative expression to the dialogue within the dreamer.

All of this suggests that the "dream" is what leads the biographer to give literary voice to what we called earlier a "charged atmosphere in which neither fact nor fiction prevails."⁵⁴ A biography is the biographer's interpretative judgment of his own dream. While he dreams, he is in that daemonic "world between," a threshold over which the magical and the banal, the mysterious and the mundane, cross and recross, interpreting each other and giving to their host his mythic perspective. When the biographer writes, he judges that dreaming by giving it concrete expression. He

49. This quotation, from W. H. Auden, is used by E. R. Dodds to introduce Chapter Two: "Man and the Daemonic World," of his *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*.

50. Plato *Symposium* 202d–203a.

51. The statement is Tertullian's, in *De anima* 47.2, quoted by Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, p. 38.

52. On dreams in Late Antiquity, see Dodds, *Pagan and Christian*, pp. 37–53.

53. See chapter 3, pp. 46–47.

54. Chapter 1, p. 7.

names the patterns of faces that reflect how he has conversed with the gods and with human reality, thus giving his hero's daemonic character a place to dwell.

Long ago, Heraclitus said, "a man's character is his daemon."⁵⁵ Character is daemonic. The biographies of Late Antiquity were living embodiments of the truth of that enigma.

55. Heraclitus fr. 94, Marcovich (119 Diels-Kranz).

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