poets who 'go down Homer's worn wagon-road' and that men who do not compose poetry have 'blind hearts' (11ff., 19–20). Callimachus in his adaptation speaks of finding a path that is not only untrodden but narrow; then he describes *himself* in terms of his art, as the 'slight one, the winged' (23ff.). He prefaces his characterisation of himself by describing what his envious enemies the Telchines, 'ignorant men, no friends of the Muses' say against his kind of poetry and what he replies in defence (1–20).[50] Pindar describes envious slanderers in *Pyth.* 2 in order to illustrate the dangers of ingratitude, but the scholia interpret his lines as a defence of his poetry against criticism by his political and poetic rivals.[51]

[50] Pp. 118, 123–4 below.
[51] Pp. 57–8 above.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Aeschylus

The lives of archaic poets derive from the 'autobiography' of their first-person statements, supplemented by 'facts' gathered from their poetry. The primary source material for the lives of the tragic poets are the dramas themselves; but since tragic poets do not speak directly in their own persons, stories about the tragic poets derive from impressions about their style and 'representative' verses in their poetry.

Anecdotes about the tragic poets were told by the comic poets; Aristophanes in the *Frogs* refers to Phrynichus (910) as well as to Aeschylus and Sophocles. Euripides appeared as a character in the *Thesmophoriazousae* and *Acharnians* while he was still alive and in the *Frogs* after his death. Biographers today draw on jokes and parody selectively; but ancient biographers, and more particularly their excerptors, reported the comic anecdotes as if they were serious judgments. They also had access to anecdotes about poets included in the *Visits* of Ion of Chios, a contemporary of Sophocles. Ion told an anecdote about Sophocles' conversation at a dinner party on his island (*FGrHist* 392F6 = Soph. T75 Radt); Plutarch recounts a conversation between Aeschylus and Ion at the Isthmian games (*FGrHist* 392F22). But these need not have been more accurate transcripts than the anecdotes preserved by Aristotle and by Xenophon about dinner-table repartee of Simonides and Hieron (or Hieron's wife).[1] Aeschylus is portrayed discussing discipline and courage, Sophocles seducing a young boy at a dinner party; the story shows him to be a more successful strategist in private life than on the battlefield, witty and urbane in social situations. Since the original context is lost, it is impossible to say whether Ion meant the anecdotes to have

[1] Cf. p. 53 above. On Ion, Fairweather 1974, 213.

any bearing on the composition of particular dramas. As they stand they provide a contemporary assessment of the poets' styles: Ion's portrayal fits in generally with Euripides' characterisation in the *Frogs* of Aeschylus as inspiring the Athenians to fight for their country (1016ff.) and of Sophocles as 'easy-going' (*eukolos*, 82, cf. Phryn., *Muses* fr. 31; Ar., *Pax* 696).

Aeschylus in the *Frogs* has a character like his poetry, and speaks in his own style, with complex compound adjectives (841ff.). His hostility toward popularisation and immorality makes him sound like the 'well-born people' he says drank hemlock because they were disgraced by Euripides' Bellerophons (1050–1, cf. 1031); the *Vita* states that 'his family was aristocratic' (1.2). In the *Frogs* Aeschylus is distinguished from Euripides by his piety; he begins the contest by praying to Demeter 'who has nourished my mind; may I be worthy of your mysteries' (886–7). The *Vita* says that Aeschylus came from the deme of Eleusis. This sounds plausible, because there was an Eleusinian Aeschylus in the fourth century.[2] But it is also significant that Aeschylus wrote about the Mysteries in his poetry, in dramas like the *Eleusinioi*. An anecdote told by the unreliable Heraclides Ponticus[3] says he was put on trial for profaning them, and then let off because he and his brother had fought and been wounded at Marathon (fr. 170 Wehrli = T 44 Wil). Heraclides' source may have been a scene in comedy; Chamaeleon (or his source) deduced from Aeschylus' portrayal of drunkards in his satyr play *Cabiri* that 'what the tragedian did himself he has fastened on to his heroes—he wrote his tragedies while he was drunk'; he quotes Sophocles as saying, 'You write what you ought to write but without knowing it' (fr. 40ab Wehrli). Euripides in the *Frogs* accuses Aeschylus of babbling about whatever came into his head and confusing the audience by breaking in in the midst of the action (945).[4]

In the *Frogs* Aeschylus acts as warlike and angry as Achilles (992); he embodies the sophist Gorgias' characterisation of his

[2] Davies 1971, 6–8.
[3] See pp. 172–3.
[4] Cf. Dioscorides *EG* 2852ff., '[Aeschylus] carved letters not chiselled but as washed out by rain torrents'; Gabathuler 1937, 84; Gow-Page 1965, on 1594.

Seven against Thebes as 'full of Ares' (82B24 DK; *Ran.* 1021); he cites his war plays the *Seven* and the *Persians* as evidence of his patriotism (1091ff.). Dionysus suggests that he modelled his lyric verses on 'rope-twisting songs from Marathon' (1296–7). His *Vita* reports: 'They say that he was heroic and that he fought in the battle of Marathon along with his brother Cynegirus, and in the naval battle at Salamis along with his younger brother Ameinias, and also in the infantry battle at Plataea' (1.9ff.).[5] Herodotus records that Cynegirus son of Euphorion lost an arm and died at Marathon; Euphorion is given in the Suda as the name of both Aeschylus' father and son (T41 Wil).[6] But Ameinias, a hero of the battle at Salamis, according to Herodotus comes from Pallene, not Eleusis (vii. 84). He appears to have been linked with Aeschylus first by Ephorus (Diod. Sic. xi.27 = T27 Wil), the author of the genealogy which makes Homer and Hesiod cousins (*FGrHist* 70F1), and of the allegorical names of Hesiod's parents Dios and Pycimede.[7]

Since Aeschylus' traditional dates make him a suitable age, there is no reason to doubt that he fought in any of the battles;[8] but the *evidence* that he participated may derive from his poetry rather than any independent source. Ion in his *Visits* wrote that Aeschylus fought at Salamis (*FGrHist* 392F7). But Ion is cited in the scholia to *Pers.* 432–3: 'Understand this clearly, never did so great a multitude perish in a single day', lines that could be taken as evidence that Aeschylus was an eye-witness at the battle. The notion that he fought 'heroically' could be inferred from his characterisation in Aristophanes and then strengthened by association with the hero Cynegirus and finally with Ameinias. In popular imagination his military service came to represent what his poetry stood for. The epitaph preserved in the *Vita* makes no reference to what he wrote, but claims that 'the famous grave of Marathon could tell of his courage and the

[5] See Appendix 3.
[6] Cf. how Sappho's mother acquires the name of Sappho's daughter (?) Cleis, p. 63 above; inconsistency suggests the name of Aeschylus' second son (Euaion, Eubion, Bion) was invented, p. 64 n.42 above.
[7] P. 6 above.
[8] Lefkowitz 1978, 464.

long-haired Mede knew it well' (25). An unnamed figure in the Stoa Poikile painting was represented to Pausanias as Aeschylus at Marathon.[9]

The literary history in the *Vita* also comes directly from the *Frogs*. Aeschylus says: 'I brought my songs for a noble purpose from a noble source, so that I wouldn't be seen plucking them from the same holy meadow as Phrynichus' (1298–300); the *Vita* reports that 'he raised standards far above his predecessors' (1.4).[10] The *Vita* emphasises his innovations in staging, the splendour of his choral productions and costumes, and the seriousness (*semnotēs*) of his choral songs. The chorus in the *Frogs* addresses him as 'you who first built towers of serious (*semna*) speeches and adorned the tragic lyre' (1004–5); Euripides accuses him of using 'boastful language and driving [the audience] out of their minds', and of 'terrifying them' with characters in martial costume (961ff.). Euripides criticises Aeschylus for his ponderous style and the lack of action in his plays (911ff.); Aeschylus himself speaks with complex compound adjectives (841ff.). According to the *Vita* 'in the composition of his poetry he strove for a grand style, by using compound words and epithets, and also metaphors and every other device that could lend weight to his diction; the plots of his plays do not abound in reversals and complexities like those of later poets, for he aimed solely at investing his characters with dignity; he thought heroic grandeur struck the appropriate archaic note' (1.13ff.).

Euripides says in the *Frogs* that he improved tragedy by putting her on a diet (938ff.), simplifying diction and giving excitement to narratives, and by bringing in ordinary people as characters 'in a democratic manner', actions for which Aeschylus suggests that he should have been executed (950). Euripides in Aristophanes claims that he taught the audience how to use sophistic arguments (959–60) and that he 'explained to them how to think, by putting Reasoning in my art and Inquiry' (972ff.). Aeschylus, according to the *Vita*, believed that 'cunning ingenuity and sententiousness were foreign to tragedy' (1.20–1).

[9] Ibid., 465n.32.
[10] Cf. Dioscorides, *EG* 2853ff. (p. 68 n.4 above).

The *Vita* explains that 'it was for this reason that Aristophanes made fun of him in his comedies' and summarises the scenes with the silent Niobe and Achilles that Euripides makes fun of in the *Frogs*.[11] As in the case of Solon's poem on Salamis 'before the agora'[12] the explanation of the poetry has become 'history', of which the poetry itself is then cited as confirmation.

Two stories in the *Vita* about Aeschylus' contests with other poets account for why Aeschylus had a tomb in Gela rather than in Athens (2.7ff.). The first explanation is that 'he was criticised by the Athenians and defeated by Sophocles when the latter was a young man'; the second claims that he was 'defeated by Simonides in an elegy for those who died at Marathon' and so left Athens for Sicily. 'Literary history' is cited in confirmation of the judgment in favour of Simonides: 'Elegy in particular needs to have the conciseness necessary to arouse emotion, and Aeschylus' poem, as the story goes, was not suitable.' The impression that Aeschylus' poetry contained 'few pathetic scenes or other effects calculated to produce tears' (2.3ff.) of course derives from the characterisation of his poetry in the *Frogs* as weighty (924–5), long-winded (914–15), and boring (1018), and of his verse as monotonous (1261–2). In the *Lives*, contests frequently account for a poet's disappearance: the seer Calchas dies after being defeated by the seer Mopsus (Hes., fr. 278); Homer dies after failing to answer the riddle of the fisher boys;[13] Pindar was defeated in his native Boeotia by Corinna.[14]

Finally the *Vita* proposes a third reason for his departure from Athens: 'Some say that during the performance of the *Eumenides*, when he brought on the chorus one by one, he so frightened the audience that children fainted and unborn infants were aborted' (2.11f.). Detail makes the story sound plausible; but the text of the *Eumenides* indicates rather that the chorus were already on stage asleep at the beginning of the parodos, and *wake* each other from sleep one by one: 'Wake up; and you wake her up; I'll wake you up' (140).[15] After their

[11] Lefkowitz 1978, 464–5. Taplin 1972, 58–64.
[12] P. 40 above. [13] P. 18 above.
[14] P. 65 above.
[15] Cf. Eur., *Hec.* 52ff.; Taplin 1977, 134ff., but cf. 141, 372.

song Apollo states that they belong not in his temple but in places where 'the manhood of the young is ruined by the destruction of seed' (187–8); they themselves sing a song that drives men mad and is 'withering to mortals' (328ff.). They claim: 'I have chosen the ruin of houses' (354). They threaten Athens with 'canker, blasting leaves and children' and to 'cast upon the land infections that destroy its people' (785–7). In the *Frogs* the character of Aeschylus was based on his style ('terrible things with bogey faces', 925); in the anecdote the words of the Furies are taken to represent the intentions of the poet.

It is significant that the *Vita* offers these three negative reasons for Aeschylus' visit to Sicily, rather than simply stating that he went there because he was invited to Hieron's court, like the lyric poets Simonides and Pindar. The notion that the Athenians were dissatisfied with him makes his invitation to Gela seem like an exile, instead of an indication of his success and international recognition. The Suda biography explicitly states that 'he went into exile in Sicily because the stage fell down when he was putting on a performance' (T41 Wil). The *Vita* relates that he put on the *Women of Aetna* to celebrate the founding of Aetna (the occasion is commemorated also in Pindar's *Pyth.* 1) and that 'he was greatly honoured both by Hieron and the people of Gela and lived there for two years before he died' (2.13–17). But then the *Vita* gives an account of his death that both marks Aeschylus as extraordinary and at the same time demeans him. He had received an oracle 'something thrown from the sky will kill you' and he was killed when an eagle dropped a tortoise on his head (2.17–21). The account in the *Vita* omits a detail that makes the poet's death sound even more comic: that the poet was bald and the eagle mistook his head for a rock on which to break the tortoise's shell (T32 Wil).

Death as a result of a misunderstood oracle gives Aeschylus the stature of a famous poet: Hesiod avoided the famous grove of Nemean Zeus in order to die in Nemean Locri; Homer did not heed the oracle's warning about Ios and the riddle posed by young men. As in the case of the other poets, the setting of Aeschylus' death has an inverse relation to his poetry: Hesiod wrote the *Theogony* in praise of Zeus; Homer was alleged to be

the wisest of all Greeks; Aeschylus the poet is killed by a tortoise, the animal whose shell is used to make a lyre. In an analogous way, Tiresias' vague prediction in the *Odyssey* that 'death will come to you from the sea' became in cyclic epic an account of how Odysseus' son Telegonus killed him with the spine of a roach-fish, which he was using instead of a spear (Procl. *Chrest.* 324).[16] At the end of Aeschylus' *Vita* the oracle about his death is cited in verse form as 'an inscription on his tomb: "I died, struck on the forehead from an eagle's claws" '. Without reference to the tortoise the 'inscription' sounds less comic and more like Archilochus' final encounter with the mysterious Calondas Corax ('crow').[17]

By suggesting that Aeschylus went to Gela because the Athenians were dissatisfied with him, the *Vita* implies that Aeschylus received greater honour after his death than during his lifetime (2.21f.). The people of Gela 'buried him richly' and 'honoured him extravagantly' with the epigram about his having fought at Marathon (*EG* 454ff.). 'All who made their living in the tragic theatre went to his tomb to offer sacrifices and recited their plays there. The Athenians liked Aeschylus so much that they voted after his death to award a golden crown to whoever was willing to put on one of his dramas.' Homer was buried by the people of Ios, and honoured with an epigram (*Vit.Hdt.* 36);[18] Hesiod's innocence was recognised after his death and his bones moved to Orchomenos.[19] After the difficulties in their lifetimes, the posthumous honours give them heroic stature; but in Aeschylus' case it is possible to see that the pattern is not inherent, but rather imposed on the few 'facts' that could be deduced from his poetry or poetry about him.

The list of discoveries attributed to Aeschylus in the *Vita* should be regarded with equal caution.[20] The phrase 'highly

[16] Fairweather 1974, 271. Hartmann 1917, 108 suggests that the story of Aeschylus' death may derive from a comic parody of Aeschylus' *Psychagogoi*.
[17] P. 29 above.
[18] P. 21 above.
[19] P. 10 above.
[20] Taplin 1977, 44–6, 438; Lloyd-Jones 1966, 19.

heroic effects' (*gennikōtatois pathesi* 3.6) summarises Aeschylus' description in the *Frogs* of how his dramas the *Seven* and the *Persae* made the citizens 'heroic' (*gennaious*, 1017). Chamaeleon's claim (fr. 41 Wehrli) that Aeschylus first created choreography (*prōton schēmatisai*) is based directly on the lines given the poet in a lost play (fr. 677) of Aristophanes: 'I myself made the arrangements [*schēmata epoioun*] for choruses' (T38 Wil). Special stage effects and scenery listed in the *Vita*, 'altars, tombs, trumpets, images and Furies' are mentioned in the text of his dramas (altars and tombs, *Cho.* 160, trumpets,[21] *Eum.* 568 and *Ran.* 1041; Furies, *Eum.*). Aristotle in the *Poetics* (1449a) says he was the first to use two actors; the *Vita* (3.11) gives their names, Cleandrus and Mynniscus, but then adds that he 'invented the third actor, though Dicaearchus of Messene says it was Sophocles'. Dicaearchus got this information from his teacher Aristotle, who claimed that Sophocles added the third actor and scenery; but all of this 'data' can be deduced from the texts of their plays.[22] In the *Persae* and *Septem* Aeschylus uses two actors, but in the *Oresteia* he uses three. Aristotle's scheme makes a neat progression out of a continuing process of experimentation.[23] Aeschylus may have been the first to equip the actors with gloves and robes and higher buskins; but it is likely that these discoveries were imputed to him by later critics primarily because he was considered the first major dramatist.

[21] Taplin 1977, 393n.2.
[22] Knox 1979, 40–1.
[23] Cf. also TT36–40 Wil.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Sophocles

The compiler of the Life of Sophocles[1] evidently had before him several biographies of the poet from which to draw his information. He selects data with some discrimination, discarding information that runs contrary to common sense. He declares that Aristoxenus was wrong to call Sophocles' father Sophillus a carpenter (fr. 115 W), and Ister to say that he was a bronze-smith or sword-maker (*FGrHist* 334F33) because a man descended from a tradesman would not have held generalship 'along with Pericles and Thucydides, who were the most important men in the city'. He also says that Ister is not to be believed when he said that Sophocles was a Phliasian by birth,[2] because the information is to be found only in Ister. So he concludes that Sophocles was an Athenian by birth, from a good family, though he does not cite Ion of Chios, Sophocles' contemporary, who says Sophocles behaved like 'any other Athenian aristocrat' (T75.32/35 W) nor does he observe that Sophocles must have come from a leading family since he participated (as he says later) in Athenian cult.

But even though the compiler distinguishes between sensible and fanciful (or likely and less likely) information, he does not inquire into the nature of the source material on which Aristoxenus and Ister drew. He observes that 'indeed if his father had been a tradesman, he would not have got off without abuse from the comic poets';[3] but he does not note

[1] See Appendix 4.
[2] The satyr plays on which tragedy was thought to have been based were invented by Pratinas of Phlius, cf. Dioscorides *EG* 2860 (T179); Gow-Page 1965, on 1599; did Ister misunderstand his source?
[3] The joke would only make sense if Euripides' parents were well-born; apparently no one made fun of Socrates because his mother Phaenarete was a midwife, *Theaet.* 149a; Herodicus apud Ath. v.219b; pp. 127–8 below.

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