CHAPTER NINE

Euripides

Euripides' *Vita* is of particular interest because we can trace in some detail 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 organisation of Satyrus' third-century biographical dialogue about the poet. Scholarly comment has concentrated on these earlier sources.[1] 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* which is ostensibly the principal source of information about his life.[2] Close analysis again shows that virtually all the information in the *Vita* derives from comedy or Euripides' own dramas; that anecdotes endow the poet with both heroic capabilities and degrading weaknesses; and that over time these weaknesses gradually receive more emphasis in order to make the poet's achievement seem more comprehensible and accessible. Duplication and inconsistency suggest that the *Vita* has undergone a long and deteriorating process of condensation.

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).[3] Aristophanes is also the source of several

[1] See esp. Arrighetti 1964, Kumaniecki 1929, Leo 1912, Delcourt 1933.

[2] See Appendix 5. Despite the issues raised by Stevens 1956, material from the *Vita* is regarded as historical by (e.g.) Webster 1967, Lesky 1966, 462–3.

[3] Also cf. *Ach.* 457, *Ran.* 947, *Eq.* 19; Méridier 1925, iii. Criticism of social background is a standard mode of invective; Nisbet 1961, 194. Ruck 1976, 14–32, supposes the herbs were aphrodisiacs; but it is a mistake to take at

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 flavour', 944);[4] (b) Euripides had a long beard (27, a detail from a costuming scene in *Thesm.* 190 where Euripides says 'I'm grey-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);[5] (e) Euripides hated women and the women wanted to kill him (70–1, 91, 100–4), 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*.[6]

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'.[7] Dionysus in the *Frogs* teases Euripides for writing plays about adulterous women like Phaedra and Stheneboea (1043–4, 1080–1). In the *Vita* we are told that Euripides' wife was unfaithful, on more than one occasion (93–5, 22, 69–74), and that because of her infidelity he wrote the *Hippolytus* (70). 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.* 923–4: 'Poor man [meaning the dead Aegisthus], if he thinks she won't be chaste in other's homes but

face value what Aristophanes says in a comedy about his friends. A member of his *thiasos* (*IG* II^2 3.2343), Simon, is portrayed in *Nub.* 351 as a harpy and in 399 as a perjurer; Amphitheos, another member, boasts in *Ach.* 46 that he is immortal, descended from Demeter. See Dow 1969; Gelzer 1970, 1398.

[4] In *Thesm.* 1060ff. Aristophanes accuses him of plagiarising from himself; there is also Cratinus' notion of *euripidaristophanizein* (fr. 307); cf. schol. Pl., *Apol.* 19c.

[5] Cf. the note on Alex. Aetol. 7.1 (p. 126 Powell); P. 167 n.10 below. Charges of sternness and ugliness are standard in invective; Nisbet 1961, 195–6.

[6] Cf. Lesky 1966b, 361; Leo 1912, 377; Arrighetti 1964, 126.

[7] On the technique in general, Leo 1912, 377.

will be chaste in his.'[8] Lines about women's usefulness from *Melanippe* are cited in Satyrus and in the *Vita* as 'evidence' of his recantation.[9] 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' about his exile to the Athenians.[10] A trimeter verse about a mouth sweeter than honey and the Sirens (89–90) becomes the punchline for an anecdote about Euripides' bad breath.[11] In the *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.[12] In every case the poet and his work are regarded as synonymous.[13]

But the process of generating biographical data from poetry is best illustrated by the anecdote in Philochorus and the *Vita* about Euripides' cave (62–5). 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.[14] Other tragic poets speak

[8] *par' hōi men autēn sōphronein, par' hōi de mē* (*Vita*); cf. *dustēnos estin, ei dokei to sōphronein/ekei men autēn ouk echein, par' hōi d'echein* in *El.* Euripides himself appears as an adulterer in two anecdotes omitted in the *Vita*, Soph. T75 (p. 81 above) and Hermesianax 7.61ff. (p. 165 n.6 below).

[9] Cf. Stesichorus' palinode; Arrighetti 1964, 126–7; p. 33 above. The story of Chaucer's repentance at the time of his death may be based on his retraction at the end of *The Canterbury Tales*; Crow-Olson 1966, 547. Cf. the idea that the writer of the novel *Aethiopica* later became Heliodorus bishop of Trikka; Perry 1967, 107–8.

[10] The anecdote may have influenced Horace; Nisbet-Hubbard 1978, 334.

[11] A stock insult; cf. Brecht 1931, 95. But no such anecdote evolves from Aristophanes' similar line about the well-loved Sophocles, fr. 580A/*Vit.* 22.

[12] Nestle 1898, 141–4; but cf. Wilamowitz 1969, I 17. The term *diasyrontes* ('tearing him apart', 122) also retains the metaphor (cf. Soph. fr. 767 of a hawk tearing at meat). 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' (*has ethrepsato*) describes Archelaus' servant Lysimachus in the Suda biography (*hous autos etrephe*, p. 166 n.6 below). On dog sacrifice, see Greenewalt 1978, 31.

[13] Cf. also Euripides' 'trial' for impiety, p. 110 below; on misquotations, Dover 1976, 42ff.

[14] E.g. *IT* 392–420, *Hel.* 1451–64; Barlow 1971, 26–7; Padel 1974, 240.

of the sea; its random violence is an effective metaphor for the course of human fate.[15] But the same stories are not told about Aeschylus and Sophocles because they are not reported to have hated other people like Euripides (65–6, 118–20). Satyrus provides as documentation of his misanthropy a conveniently apt line from Aristophanes about Euripides being like the characters in his plays.[16] Hence the assumption that he would have lived in isolation, like the Cyclops in *Odyssey* 9 or Timon the misanthrope (Plu., *Ant.* 70).[17]

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.[18] What happens to Euripides happens with remarkable frequency and symmetry to other poets. For example, Euripides' future promise was recognised early by an oracle, which his father at first misinterpreted and so had his son train first to be an athlete (4–7). Sophocles, according to his biographers, also studied wrestling along with poetry (*Vit.Soph.* 3). Archilochus' father was told that his son would be immortal.[19]

Euripides, we are told, had a second profession, painting (17–18). Aeschylus, according to his biographer, was an exemplary soldier (*Vit.Aesch.* 1.10).[20] Euripides' wife prefers the poet's slave to her husband (92–6). The wife of Aesop's master Xanthias also prefers his more capable slave (*Vit.Aesop.* 75,

[15] E.g. Aesch., *Eum.* 550–7, *Sept.* 158–76; Soph., *Ant.* 586–92; Easterling 1978, 145.

[16] Leo 1912, 382; Fairweather 1974, 234–5. Cf. the modern deduction that Shakespeare had boils because he wrote about them; Schoenbaum 1970, 756.

[17] Cf. also Phrynichus' *Monotropos*, fr. 18: 'I am called the solitary; I lead the life of Timon, without wife or mate, quick to anger, unapproachable, humourless, won't talk with anyone, prefer my own opinions.' On the attractiveness of the cave story and scholars' credulousness, see Jacoby *FGrHist* 111B586–7; Lefkowitz 1978, 466; Lesky 1966, 361. Cf. Wilamowitz 1969, 1 6 n.1. On the cave as a tourist attraction, p. 102 below.

[18] Lefkowitz 1978, 469; Momigliano 1971b, 14–15.

[19] P. 28 above.

[20] Plato was said to have been a wrestler, painter and poet; Riginos 1976, §§12–14. Socrates was said to have been a sculptor, D.L. 2.19 Paus. 1.22.8; cf. Calder, 1974, 274. Tisamenes misinterprets an oracle about winning contests in Hdt. 9.33.

p.95 Perry). Euripides was hated by his fellow Athenians but prospered in exile (87, 117–20). So did Aeschylus, at least according to his biographers (*Vit.Aesch.* 2.5), and Apollonius of Rhodes (*Vit.Ap.Rhod.* A p.1.10–12, B p.2.7–11 Wendel).[21] Euripides was worshipped as a hero after his death, like Aeschylus (*Vit.Aesch.* 2.26) and Sophocles (*Vit.Soph.* 17).[22] 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).[23]

Only two incidents in the *Vita* sound unique and therefore possibly of historical significance. But here again we may suspect that they found their origin in some literary source. Both are favourable to the poet. (1) Euripides acted as a torch-bearer in the rites of Apollo at Cape Zoster; stories about Pindar's poetry are offered as aetiologies of his hymns.[24] 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 valour and courage'?[25] The story could also 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 Ister alleged (*Vit.* 1).[26] (2) That Euripides was awarded the privileges of *proxenos* in Magnesia after his emigration there (22–3) could easily have originated from literal interpretation of a metaphorical expression of friendship: the scholia to Pindar offer concrete explanations for references in

[21] Pp. 72–3 above, 129 below.

[22] Apollonius was buried in Alexandria next to Callimachus (*Vit. Apoll.* B. 2.11–14); p. 129 below.

[23] Not that remarkable coincidence in itself constitutes 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 Declaration of Independence.

[24] P. 60 above. Cf. how according to Theophrastus Euripides poured wine for Delian Apollo at Athens for the dancers who came from among the first families in Athens (Ath. 10.424E).

[25] Fr. 39 iv.33ff., omitted in the *Vita*.

[26] P. 75 above.

the *Odes* to *proxenia* with foreigners.[27] 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'.[28] Custom would have located a commemorative inscription of Euripides' *proxenia* in Magnesia.[29] 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.[30]

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.[31]

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).[32] Archilochus

[27] *Nem.* 7.95*b*, III 129–30; *Ol.* 9.123c, I 296; Lloyd-Jones 1973b, 135.

[28] P. 130 below.

[29] Cf. the stele in Athens designating certain Selembryani as *proxenoi* of the Athenians, *IG*² I 116(409/8 B.C.). Thus Macedonia court historians could have had access to the decree of Philip's *proxenia* for Aristotle; cf. Düring 1957, 235.

[30] Lefkowitz 1975b, 180–1. Tombs of Themistocles were identified at Magnesia (p. 96 n.41 below) and at Athens, Plu., *Them.* 32.

[31] Nagy 1979, chs. 16, 17 suggests that a ritual pattern underlies the deaths of heroes and certain poets. To Euripides being torn apart by dogs, cf. the Lycaon werewolf ritual, Burkert 1972, 127–30. On the importance of hero worship in the fifth century, also Lloyd-Jones 1973b, 136–7.

[32] P. 59 above.

suddenly discovers a lyre at his feet and is stunned.[33] The warrior heroes of myths discover their calling early by performing special tasks. Theseus moves a stone which hides the sword and sandals hidden for him by his father (Plu., *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.

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 recognised 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), though his skill in strategy is questioned in Ion's anecdote.[34] 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 (Plu., *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).

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 9, Sophocles' contemporary Ion of Chios 40 (at most; it might have been only 30, or 12), Euripides' successful rival Nicomachus 11.[35] Heroes in

[33] P. 28 above.

[34] P. 81 above. Arist., *Rhet.* 1384b says that Euripides was a member of an embassy to Syracuse; Stevens 1956, 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 1971, 533–4.

[35] This information from the Suda (s.vv.) may derive from Aristotle's *didaskaliai* (D.L. 5.26); Jaeger 1934, 326–7; Fairweather 1974, 253–4; Griffith 1977, 229–31.

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 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.[36]

Historical heroes also are worshipped for having committed extraordinary damage, even though magnitude makes power indiscriminate and immoral.[37] 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.[38] 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 foetuses were aborted' (*Vit.Aesch.* 2.11).[39]

Isolation, exile. The Greek attitude toward extraordinary achievement is ambivalent. Though it seems strange to us, Greeks celebrated victory by both praising and blaming.[40] 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' (62–4). 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

[36] Lévi-Strauss 1968, 88–91; Leach 1970, 80–2.

[37] Brelich 1958, 313–14; cf. Ar. fr. 58.4–5 Austin, 'heroes . . . stewards of good and of evil'; Nilsson 1967, 189–90; Burkert 1978, 318.

[38] Paus. 6.9.6–8; cf. Plu., *Rom.* 28; Brelich 1958, 320; Knox 1964, 56–7.

[39] P. 71 above.

[40] Lefkowitz 1976, 33.

envy and hatred (the Greek word *phthonos* essentially means both). 'The comic poets attacked him and tore him to pieces in their envy' (*phthonōi* 121–2). Euripides was accused 'enviously' (*hypo phthonou*) of having Cephisophon serve as coauthor of his tragedies (78–80). 'He was hated (*ephthoneito*) by the Athenians' (87).[41] 'A boorish youth said enviously (*hypo phthonou*) 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.* 2.5). 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 (*phthonounta*) of his half-brother.[42]

Violent death. The heroes of tragedy die violent deaths in exile. The Theban Oedipus is swallowed by the earth at Colonus outside Athens. Heracles (another native Theban) has himself burned alive on Mt. Oeta in Thessaly. Euripides is torn apart by dogs in Macedonia (57–9). Aeschylus is killed in Sicily by being struck on the head by a tortoise dropped by an eagle (*Vit.Aesch.* 2.17). 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.[43]

The explanation lies once again in the Greeks' ambivalent

[41] The Athenians' envy of greatness was proverbial; cf. Diodorus on Aeschylus (*AP* 7.40 = *Garl.Phil.* 13 GP) and on Themistocles (*AP* 7.74 = *Garl.Phil.* 14 GP), also Antipater of Thessalonica on Themistocles (*AP* 7.236 = *Garl.Phil.* 115 GP). The practice of ostracism provided limited social sanction for these feelings; Schoeck 1970, 205–9.

[42] Pp. 84–5 above.

[43] 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. Cf. Fairweather 1974, 270–1.

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.[44] The heroes Oedipus and Amphiaraus were worshipped where the earth had swallowed them. The Athenians offered yearly sacrifices to Sophocles (*Vit.Soph.* 17).[45] Aeschylus had a hero's shrine in Sicily and was honoured by the Athenians after his death (*Vit.Aesch.* 2.21).[46]

Euripides, once dead, is treated like a hero. Sophocles, his actors and the audience openly mourn for him (45–9). Dionysius the tyrant sent for his stylus and lyre and had them dedicated in the temple of the Muses (80–5). Like Amphiaraus and Themistocles, he has shrines in more than one place, the monument in Athens and a tomb in Macedonia.[47] Both were struck by lightning (45; *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.[48] 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 (Adaeus, *AP* 7.51 = *Garl.Phil.* 3 GP).

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 (100–2); he is sexually inadequate (92–6). Nor do the circum-

[44] Cf. Hor., *Ep.* 2.5–14; Fraenkel 1957, 386n.2; Pind., *Pyth.* 1.84, 2.55–6.

[45] Pp. 86–7 above.

[46] 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; Farnell 1921, 367, 421–6. Parmenides built a *hērōon* for his teacher Ameinias the Pythagorean, D.L. 9.21; Burkert 1969, 27–8.

[47] Farnell 1921, 58–61.

[48] Nestle 1898, 145–9; 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 *FGH* 1 289; Ael. *VH* 3.18. 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 (p. 95 n.37 above), not as Nestle suggested (p. 149), the 'double nature' of Euripides' poetry.

stances of his death enhance his stature; its 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.

In emphasising 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.[49] 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.[50] 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.[51] But it is only in the fourth century, in the first literary biographies, that the poet's original heroic stance appears in completely naturalised 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).[52] 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.[53]

In addition to this trend toward naturalism, anecdotes drawn from comedy, once condensed, acquire a hostile tone. Exaggeration is funny only when set against true information; without perspective humour 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

[49] Jacoby 1933, 10.
[50] Trenkner 1958, 35ff.; Lloyd-Jones 1973b, 137; Lefkowitz 1978, 463.
[51] Lefkowitz 1978, 460–2; Dover 1974, 29–30; Gallo 1967, 155.
[52] Hence the notion of what E. M. Forster called Sophocles 'the bishop'; cf. Lloyd-Jones 1971, 193n.13. On poets as priests, Nagy 1979, ch. 18.
[53] Ephorus *FGrHist* 70F1; p. 14 above; Trenkner 1958, 30. Cf. the story that Plato's father was Apollo; Riginos 1976, §1.

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?).[54] Philochorus explicitly contended with the distortions of the comic poets by arguing that Euripides' mother was not a vegetable seller but well-born.[55] 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.[56] 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').[57]

But in the *Vita* all sense of debate has disappeared. Quotations are introduced as evidence without qualification or concern about their provenance. Satyrus in his dialogue has discussions of Socratic notions in Euripides; the *Vita* offers instead a statement about literal collaboration.[58] The *Vita* omits the verbal parallels that Diogenes Laertius cites to 'prove' that Euripides

[54] E.G., Dionysus in Ar., *Ran.* 66–70. Cf. Callimachus Ep. 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 1976, §132. 'If the dead have feeling' is an oratorical commonplace, Dover 1974, 243. Cf. App. 7, p. 173 below and the anecdote, based on Plato's account of Socrates' defence (*Apol.* 41a), that the dying poet Cercidas looked forward to meeting his favourite authors in Hades (Ael., *VH* 13.20, *ap.* Powell p. 202).
[55] His interest in the chronology of Euripides' death may also derive from concern about the use of poetry as evidence (*FGrHist* 328F220; Jacoby III B587). Euripides' *Palamedes* had been used as evidence that the Athenians executed Socrates, but Philochorus argued that Euripides had died earlier (*FGrHist* 328F221). Cf. the argument about Pindar's birthplace preserved in *POxy* 2438.ii.4ff.; Gallo 1968, 25–6; Lefkowitz 1975, 75. *POxy* 2506 fr. 98 preserves debate about the timing of Alcaeus' and his brother's deaths.
[56] P. 164 n.5 below.
[57] On the positive qualities of Satyrus' dialogue form; Leo 1912, 274; Arrighetti 1964, 23; Gallo 1967, 158; Momigliano 1971b, 11. The criticisms of S. West 1974, 282–3 do not take into full consideration the differences between literary and non-literary biographies; cf. Leo 1912, 382n.2.
[58] P. 164 n.4 below; p. 132 below. The tendency of biographers to turn inference into fact was noted even in antiquity; Antiphon's biographer observes that Caecilius took Thucydides' praise (8.68) as evidence that Antiphon was Thucydides' teacher (*XOrat* 832e); cf. Fairweather 1974, 258–9.

was Anaxagoras' pupil.[59] 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).[60] Debate on his attitude toward women survives only in outline; quotation from *Melanippe* is cut to essentials (100–10), and omitted altogether from *Thesmophoriazousae*.[61] 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 Plu., *Nic.* 29) about how Athenian soldiers won release in Sicily by reciting verses of Euripides.[62] 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 role 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.[63]

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.[64] Satyrus' account preserved chronological order.[65] But in the *Vita* the anecdote about Euripides' bad breath, originally set in Macedonia, becomes another instance of the Athenians' hatred.[66] In Satyrus Archelaus defends Euripides with the

[59] Euripides' 'golden clod', D.L. 2.10 = fr. 783; Anaxagoras' 'molten mass', D.L. 2.8 = 59A1 DK; Arrighetti 1964, 105–7. On collections of Euripides' sayings, Dihle 1977, 32.

[60] Arrighetti 1964, 101; Delcourt 1933 did not recognise the transformation in her over-schematised account of correspondences.

[61] Leo 1912, 376; Arrighetti 1964, 126–7.

[62] Fr. 39 iii, iv, vi, xix, xxii (Timotheus), cf. the anecdotes about Plato's support of the poet Antimachus, pp. 172–3 below.

[63] P. 165 n.6 below. For the meaning of *esti tis*, 'there is such a thing as', cf. Alcman *PMG* 1.36. The verbal correspondence is not 'almost word-for-word', *pace* Delcourt 1933, 287 and Arrighetti 1964, 145.

[64] The earlier version sounds like the plot of a comedy; Delcourt 1933, 278–9.

[65] Leo 1912, 379; Arrighetti 1964, 21.

[66] P. 167 n.10 below; Leo 1912, 378n.1; Delcourt 1933, 286–7. In a third-century dialogue-biography of Socrates, Xanthippe is shown to be a concerned hostess (*PHib* II 182, p. 27); but the scene emerges in Diogenes Laertius 2.34 as an anecdote critical of Xanthippe. In the papyrus biography

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.[67] Heraclides epitomised Satyrus' *Lives*, Hermippus' *Lives of the Lawgivers*, of the Seven Wise Men, and of Pythagoras.[68] We can get a sense of Heraclides' methodology and of his audience's interests from his excerpts of Aristotle's *Athenian Constitution*. 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.[69] 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 emphasises 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).[70] His life has been made sufficiently unpleasant that readers can be content that they have not accomplished as much as he. By emphasising that he wrote his dramas in reaction to particular events, the *Vita* represents Euripides' achievement as a process

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; Dick 1972, 360ff., 437ff.

[67] Gallo 1974, 182.

[68] Gallo 1967, 157; Arrighetti 1964, 14–15; Momigliano 1971, 79.

[69] Heracl. Lemb. 1.5; Dilts 1971, 9.

[70] On the various traditions, Gow-Page 1965, II 5; Arrighetti 1964, 145–50. Adaeus attempts to rationalise the mythology, like the writer of Sophocles' *Vita*, p. 75 above. To the story of jealous poets, cf. the scholiasts' tales about Pindar's rivalry with Bacchylides, Lefkowitz 1975, 79–85.

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 Muslim ascetic who loved to be alone in the wilderness and wept so loud one could hear him crying two miles away.[71]

In Aristophanes' *Frogs* the poet was regarded as a teacher; Alcidamas' *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.[72] 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 (D.L. 9.62). 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. 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 (Petron., *Sat.* 59. 3–7; Artem. 4.2). When they visited Salamis, tourist guides could point out to them Euripides' cave.[73]

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

[71] Rosenthal 1969, 28–9; Riginos 1976, §107; Dillon 1978, 483–4.
[72] Lefkowitz 1978, 468.
[73] P. 91 above; Aulus Gellius had seen it; see p. 166 n.7 below.

early as the second century B.C. In its present form it would seem best to serve the interests of an audience with some ambition but without the leisure or persistence seriously to acquire culture, and which accordingly would have derived reassurance from the condescending tone of the *Vita*.

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.[74] 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.[75] That Euripides won fewer victories than Sophocles says only that audiences liked Sophocles' plays better at the moment; the Athenians still never denied Euripides a chorus.[76]

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.[77] 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.[78] The *Bacchae* is the source also of

[74] Finley 1967, 94–101.
[75] Cf. Devereux 1976, 311; on the limitations of the methodology, Lefkowitz 1977, 305–7.
[76] Stevens 1956, 92.
[77] Dodds 1960, xxxix.
[78] Heliodorus *FGrHist* 373F4; cf. Gelzer 1970, 1398. On scholiastic methodology, Slater 1971, 150–2.

the story about the poet's violent death in Macedonia.[79] Thus Greek tragedy may in fact not end where it began, with Dionysus.[80] The actual date of Aeschylus' *Suppliants* indicates that the course of literary history is less easily charted than scholars or their pupils would like.[81]

[79] P. 90 above. The story about Sophocles' and Iophon's quarrel (p. 83 above) is taken as proof that Sophocles composed the *OC* toward the end of his life (it was produced by his grandson in 401); yet the anecdote appears to be based on comedy. But the story of Sophocles dying as a result of winning first prize with *Antigone* (p. 82 above) is not used as evidence for dating that play to 406/5, because Aristophanes' suggestion of *c.* 441 seems more plausible.
[80] Lesky 1966, 400.
[81] Lloyd-Jones 1964, 256–84.

CHAPTER TEN

Comic Poets

Old comedy, because it is not based on inherited myth and uses a variety of metrical forms, contains relatively less mythical material than other types of ancient poetry,[1] and consequently provides a more precise sense of its historical content. But even though biographies of Aristophanes draw their anecdotes directly from the texts of his plays, they do not attempt to recreate in any detail the chronology or circumstances that he describes. Instead the biographies designate his place in the history of Greek literature, and claim for him a role as champion of Athenian democracy and freedom of speech.

Aristophanes' *Vita* begins by emphasising his ethical achievements: 'It was he who first decided to transform comedy—which was still wandering around in the old style—into something more constructive and serious. Comedy had previously been nastier and more shameless because the poets Cratinus and Eupolis had uttered more slander than was appropriate' (2–5).[2] No sources for this information are specified, but the notion of reforming art in the guise of a wayward and shameless woman sounds as if it came from comedy. Euripides in the *Frogs* says to Aeschylus: 'When I first took over Tragic Art from you, swollen from your bombast and heavy words, I first slimmed her down and took off weight' (939–41). Aristophanes in the parabasis of the *Clouds* speaks of his play as 'basically chaste' (537; cf. Pherecrates fr. 145).[3] The idea that Aristophanes was not only a better poet, but more elegant and less

[1] The same distinction applies to middle comedy, cf. Antiphanes ii.90 Kock *ap.* Ath. vi.222b.
[2] See Appendix 6.
[3] Comedy is a character also in Cratinus' *Pytine*, fr. 180 = schol. Ar., *Eq.* 400.

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