

Koen De Temmerman, Kristoffel Demoen (edd.), *Writing Biography in Greece and Rome: Narrative Technique and Fictionalization*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, XIII + 354 pp., ISBN 978-1-107-12912-2, £74.99.

As is noted in its short “Preface” (pp. XI–XIII), the collective volume under review “aims to contribute to two broad fields of classical scholarship: the study of biography and that of fictionality in narrative literature” (p. XI), by combining them and thus interconnecting narrative technique and fictionalisation. Although it does not aspire to be an exhaustive study of the particular interconnection in ancient biography, but rather consists of numerous case studies on texts from Greek and Latin literature, it fulfils its aim with considerable success.

The volume is divided into four parts. The first (“Ancient Biography Revisited”), which contains two chapters, deals with the theoretical background of the new approach adopted here, suggests its originality and surveys the diverse biographical tradition in antiquity. It starts with a chapter by Koen DE TEMMERMAN, one of the editors, entitled “Ancient Biography and Formalities of Fiction” (pp. 3–25), which functions as an excellent introduction to the whole volume. Here the author effectively defines and clarifies key points of fictionalisation in ancient biography, such as, for example, the distinction between the notions of fiction and fictiveness, the degree of referentiality in the relevant works, the crucial role of the biographees in this distinction, and the contractual conceptualisation of fiction and (non-)fictionality. Furthermore, he skilfully explains and defends the volume’s overarching approach to fictionalisation in ancient biography “from a *formal* angle” (p. 14, his italics), which focuses on narrative techniques that destabilise the narrative’s sense of truthfulness (such as *ethopoia*, the espousal of topical narrative material, internal focalisation and representation of the biographee’s thoughts by an omniscient narrator, use of anecdotes, metaphorical characterisation and intertextual/intratextual allusions, or literary modelling, which function as markers of fictionalisation). At the same time, the author familiarises the reader both with the relevant bibliography and the main points of the chapters that follow. Despite the frequent but necessary use of theoretical technical terms in this chapter, the reader has no difficulty in following the author’s train of thought.

In the second chapter, entitled “Civic and Subversive Biography in Antiquity” (pp. 26–43), David KONSTAN and Robyn WALSH investigate the various types of ancient biography and suggest the interesting and original distinction between two types of ancient biographical tradition: the one “is organized around the dominant social values” (p. 28) and is called the civic biographical tradition, and the other “gives voice to those who are on the margins of power, and more or less subtly undermines or challenges the conventional ideology” (p. 28) and is called the subversive biographical tradition, although the two traditions can interact with each other. Xenophon’s *Agesilaus* and *Memorabilia* respectively are aptly presented as two proto-biographies that constitute typical examples of the aforementioned categories (pp. 29–35), while it is demonstrated that even the life of the same individual can be described according to both traditions, as is evident in Plutarch’s *Life of Alexander* and the so-called *Alexander Romance* (pp. 36–39). The chapter concludes with remarks on the Gospels, which are included in the subversive kind of narrative, and on the Christian hagiographies of the fourth century AD, which seem to blur the boundaries between civic and subversive biographical traditions. This is a significant contribution that provides new insights into ancient biography; however, its connection with the notion of fictionalisation, the principal subject of the volume, is not explicitly stated.

Part II deals with individual biographies and contains six sections. Grammatiki A. KARLA, an expert in the *Vita Aesopi*, in a chapter entitled “*Life of Aesop*: Fictional Biography as Popular Literature?” (pp. 47–64) analyses in depth aspects of the particular work and focuses on the question of whether it is popular literature. Following BOURDIEU’s theory of popular aesthetics

and HANSEN's way of approaching popular literature, she adroitly notes elements from a variety of fields that single out the *Vita Aesopi* as popular literature, such as its simple language and style; its relatively simple, episodic structure with frequent use of antithetical pairs, exaggerations, novellas, anecdotes, fables and riddles; its dearth of details about time, names and space; its didactic and recreational function as well as its use of satirical motifs; its ideology; its one-dimensional characters and the fluidity of its text and its reception.

In the next chapter, entitled "Parallel Narratives and Possible Worlds in Plutarch's *Life of Artaxerxes*" (pp. 65–79), Eran ALMAGOR investigates the function of competing narratives and possible worlds in Plutarch's biographies by choosing the *Life* of the Persian king Artaxerxes as a case study. He explores several explicit and implicit illustrative instances of hypothetical situations and alternative scenarios and convincingly remarks that "Plutarch uses fictionality in order to study reality" (p. 69). As a result, it is reasonably concluded that the variant parallel worlds lead to several different biographies of Artaxerxes within the same work (p. 72). Thus Plutarch's biography is placed in the grey area "between fictionality used to arrive at historical truth (used by historians) and fiction employed for its own sake (akin to poetry, according to Aristotle)" (p. 78).

In his chapter "Lucian's *Life of Demonax*: The Socratic Paradigm, Individuality, and Personality" (pp. 80–96), Mark BECK deals with Lucian's *Life of Demonax* and proficiently relates the intention and structure of this work to the questions of its authenticity or fictionality. He rightly interprets its tripartite structure as an indication of "Lucian's desire to represent both the character and the personality of his protagonist" (p. 85). In particular, he asserts that this structure facilitates Lucian's intention not only to depict Demonax's character according to the Socratic paradigm, but also to offer insight into his personality, elaborate on it and gradually redefine it, thus bringing to the fore its seriocomic element and more generally the paradoxical quality of Demonax's behaviour. In this framework, he argues that Lucian modelled the *Life of Demonax* on Xenophon's *Agesilaus* and suggests that this choice betokens that the particular work "is a true biography and not a fictional account" (p. 96).

Chapter 6: "The *Apologia* as a *mise-en-abyme* in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*" (pp. 97–116) by Patrick ROBIANO (translated by R. GEUSS) focuses on the *Apologia* of Apollonius of Tyana and its important function in Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, as it contributes to the correct reading of the entire work. ROBIANO suggests that the *Apologia* points to its own fictionality, establishes intertextual (especially with Plato's and Xenophon's *Apologiai*) and intratextual relations and echoes the narrator. One of the strengths of this chapter is its meticulous investigation of multiple intertextual relations, citations and allusions that fictionalise the biographical material about Apollonius and liken him to various historical and mythological figures (e.g. Socrates, Pythagoras, Zeus, Oedipus, Apollo, Odysseus and Proteus), while at the same time reinforcing the *Apologia's* organic connection with the rest of the work.

The next two chapters transfer us to Christian hagiography. In chapter 7: "The Emended Monk: The Greek Translation of Jerome's *Vita Malchi*" (pp. 117–132), Christa GRAY demonstrates that the changes between the Greek translation and the Latin original of Jerome's *Vita Malchi* "might be symptomatic of the stereotyping of hagiography as it was gradually developed into a more stable literary genre" (p. 118). She mentions the work's generic similarities with the Greek erotic novel and fictionalised narrative in general, detects the indisputable influence exercised on the Greek translation by Eastern Christianity, and comments upon distinctive formal changes in the translation (such as, for example, its additional references to the authority of the Scripture).

In the following lengthy chapter (pp. 133–159), entitled "The Divided Cloak as *redemptio militiae*: Biblical Stylization and Hagiographical Intertextuality in Sulpicius Severus' *Vita Martini*", Danny PRAET subtly reappraises the truthfulness of Sulpicius Severus' *Vita Martini* and highlights the prescriptive character of the work. His contribution concentrates on the famous passages of Martin's divided cloak at Amiens and aptly demonstrates its complex biblical stylisation. After mentioning Sulpicius' play with Martin's both metaphorical and real *militia*, PRAET proves that the saint's *Vita* is modelled in a way that suggests the imitation and emulation of Christ and efficiently underlines the

crucial role of clothes in the making of the holy man. The exploration of multiple biblical parallels and intratextual references corroborates Martin's connection with Christ even further and leads to the conclusion that the scene of the division of the cloak "is not only an instance of fictionalization inherent to the metaphorical, intertextual construction of Martin as a counterpart of Christ, but that it is a creation out of nothing rather than a reconstruction of earlier traditions" (p. 158).

Part III deals with collective biographies and contains chapters 9–13. In chapter 9: "Mirroring Virtues in Plutarch's Lives of Agis, Cleomenes and the Gracchi" (pp. 163–180), Maarten DE POURCQ and Geert ROSKAM underscore the important position of Plutarch's moral programme in his *Parallel Lives*, mention its role in the fictionalising of the historical narrative and connect it with classical narratological principles (time, focalisation, action and actants). Their focus on the *Lives of Agis, Cleomenes and the Gracchi* proves to be effective, since this particular set introduces multiple significant moral issues, while at the same time allowing Plutarch to exploit the principle of *synkrisis* in many ways. Their narratological analysis offers significant arguments in favour of the view that what could be regarded as fictionality in Plutarch's *Lives*, for him would "only be a better way of looking for the truth" (p. 180).

In chapter 10: "Dying Philosophers in Ancient Biography: Zeno the Stoic and Epicurus" (pp. 181–199), Eleni KECHAGIA expertly discusses the death stories relating to two Hellenistic philosophers, Zeno of Citium and Epicurus, the extent to which these stories could be regarded as representative of the relevant Stoic and Epicurean philosophical theories respectively, and finally the ensuing interplay between truth and fiction. As she convincingly demonstrates, in such cases "the death stories may fall short of historical truth, but can still, through fiction, convey philosophical truths" (p. 199).

Death scenes also dominate in the next chapter, entitled "Never Say Die! Assassinating Emperors in Suetonius' *Lives of the Caesars*" (pp. 200–216). Here Rhiannon ASH analyses the assassination scenes of Julius Caesar, Caligula and Domitian as they are presented by Suetonius in his *Vitae Caesarum*, and explores the nature of their fictionality, which is creatively combined with verisimilitude. This is a well-researched contribution that includes many invaluable remarks on the similar structural framework and the verbal repetitions in the three accounts, which, however, remain individualised; on Suetonius' techniques, formal ways and devices that help him enhance the verisimilitude and the credibility of his narratives, or on his exploitation of elements suggestive of theatricality and the spectacular that imply fictionality.

Tristan POWER's chapter 12: "Poetry and Fiction in Suetonius' *Illustrious Men*" (pp. 217–239) also deals with Suetonius, but focuses on his *Illustrious Men*. POWER meticulously scrutinises some of the anecdotes recorded in the *Lives* of Horace and Valerius Cato and offers reasonable and compelling explanations for Suetonius' inclusion of unreliable details and questionable evidence, which, although possibly fiction, can reveal something true about the protagonists. Thus, he defends Suetonius' credibility, while at the same time drawing interesting broader conclusions about Suetonius' biographical approach and his use of fiction in both his literary and political biographies.

In "*Qui vitas aliorum scribere orditur*: Narratological Implications of Fictional Authors in the *Historia Augusta*" (pp. 240–256), the last chapter of this Part, Diederik BURGERSDIJK describes paratextual elements and the blend of fact and fiction in the *Historia Augusta* by focusing on the implications of fictional names. Since, by necessity, his approach involves the treatment of relevant issues, such as the author, the "paratextual authors", and the narrator of the work, he argues in favour of one author and "a narrator with multiple *personae*" (p. 245). Moreover, he comments upon the narrative's unclear beginning and its end, the purported time of narrating, the fictional authors mentioned and the sources invoked by the narrator. BURGERSDIJK succeeds in shedding new light on the tension between historicity and fiction in the *Historia Augusta*, which is interpreted as intentional, and rightly connects the work with the literary playfulness of its era.

Part IV: "Biographical Modes of Discourse" consists of chapters 14–16. In chapter 14: "Chion of Heraclea: Letters and the Life of a Tyrannicide" (pp. 259–277), John Paul CHRISTY notes the Platonic background (with a special emphasis on the *Epistles*) of the anonymous *Letters of Chion*,

discusses the multiple advantages offered to Chion and the author on many levels by the choice of the epistolary genre, explores the work's programme of exemplarity and, finally, investigates the way Chion is associated with other exemplary anti-tyrannical figures, such as Dion and Brutus. CHRISTY is at his best when remarking on the work's deviation from the expected straightforwardness of letter writing, or when suggesting Xenophon rather than Plato as Chion's ideal philosophical and political model.

Chapter 15: "Brief Encounter: Timing and Biographical Representation in the Ps.-Hippocratic Letters" (pp. 278–292) by Ranja KNÖBL also deals with fictive epistolography. It investigates the pseudo-Hippocratic letters and focuses on how the temporal devices employed in the particular collection affect the biographical representations of Hippocrates and Democritus and contribute to "the creation of biographical exemplarity, authenticity and illusion" (p. 278). Special emphasis is given to the motif of haste – dominant in the collection, but inconsistent with Hippocrates' own actual delay and slowness for a great part of the narrative – which is skilfully connected with biographical, epistemological, ethical, narratological and metaliterary issues. This chapter includes a lot of original and stimulating remarks that demonstrate the sophisticated and playful character of the work and illuminate its narrative techniques. Just one suggestion: while KNÖBL states that "Democritus is not known to have worked on phenomena such as madness" (p. 287), I would suggest that Democritus' association with the notion of madness here could be attributed to his views on *furor poeticus* and poetic inspiration in general, for which cf. e.g. Cic. *De or.* II 194: "Saepe enim audiui poetam bonum neminem – id quod a Democrito et Platone in scriptis relictum esse dicunt – sine inflammatione animorum existere posse et sine quodam adflatu quasi furoris"; *Div.* I 80: "Negat enim sine furore Democritus quemquam poetam magnum esse posse, quod idem dicit Plato"; Hor. *Ars* 295–298: "ingenium misera quia fortunatius arte/ credit et excludit sanos Helicone poetas/ Democritus, bona pars non unguis ponere curat,/ non barbam, secreta petit loca, balnea vitat".

In chapter 16: "A Shaggy Thigh Story: Kalasiris on the *Life of Homer* (Heliodorus 3.14)" (pp. 293–305) Luke V. PITCHER studies Kalasiris' account of Homer's life, as presented in Heliodorus' novel, and comments upon its jarring certitude on the matter of the poet's birthplace (i.e. Thebes of Egypt). This certitude is read against the conventional biographical *topoi* and Kalasiris' account is interpreted as teasingly playing with the traditional strategies of ancient literary biography that inverts "some of the conventional markers of the biographical genre, while following others with ostentatious assiduity" (p. 304). Thus, instead of a momentary digression, understandably Kalasiris' *Life of Homer* appears as a passage with significant impact on Heliodorus' text and compels the reader to question the entire work's claims to truth and its biographical strategies.

The volume concludes with a helpful "General Index" (pp. 343–348) and an "Index Locorum" (pp. 349–354) that includes the most significant passages discussed in it. Generally speaking, it is well edited, without significant errors, typos or inconsistencies that could hinder reading: cf., e.g., p. 83: σφᾶς αὐτᾶς (instead of the correct σφᾶς αὐτούς); p. 90: κοσμοῦ (instead of the correct κόσμου); p. 207, n. 21: "who declines to names all of the conspirators", where "names" should be corrected to "name"; p. 230: *libinis* (instead of the correct *libidinis*); the same journal is not always abbreviated in the same way: cf. e.g. *TAPA* (pp. 313, 314, 316, 323) and *TAPhA* (pp. 307, 309, 312) or *CErc* (p. 307) and *Cron. Erc.* (p. 312). Almost all Greek and Latin passages are translated (cf., however, p. 82, n. 9 or p. 148, n. 51), a fact that makes the volume more easily accessible to its readership. The chapters interrelate to each other, while extensive cross-references reinforce the volume's cohesion and highlight connections throughout.

Overall, this is a fine and well-organised collection of sixteen original, learned and insightful studies of high quality that make a significant contribution to understanding ancient biography and that broaden our perspective on the nature of fictionalisation in ancient biographical narrative. Without doubt, their productive, up-to-date and thought-provoking approaches will advance further research in both this genre and narratology in general.

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