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Studies in Honour of Guido Avezzù

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Plato's κάλλιστον δράμα in Greek Biography

MAURO TULLI

Abstract

In the vast repertoire on Plato's *Nachleben* in the ancient world conceived by Dörrie, several passages, which derive from Greek biography, include a judgement of great value and sharp originality on Plato's corpus. This judgement, mainly handed down through the code of Greek biography, on the basis of his Peripatetic origin, has as its main feature the fruitful commitment to project details from the work of an author on to his personal life experiences. The paper will give a critical assessment of the testimonies of Hermippus on Demosthenes as Plato's pupil, of Dicaearchus on Socrates, of Alexander Polyhistor on the burning of the tragedies, of Dionysius of Halicarnassus on Plato's troubles, of Euphoriion of Chalcis and Panaitius on the incipit of the *Politeia*, and of the author of the commentary in the Berlin Papyrus on the incipit of the *Theaetetus*. The principal aim is to reconstruct in Greek biography the roots of the modern interpretation of Plato's corpus as being the outcome of an extremely important and thoroughly cognizant literary engagement, as, in Plato's own words, a κάλλιστον δράμα.

It has long been argued that a major concern of Greek biography is to recall individual experience in the life of an author, something which is often almost impossible to retrieve, through his works. This results in a close intermingling of the reconstruction of the one and the subjective interpretation of the other. It is a truly fruitful commitment, of Peripatetic origin, already detectable in Aristotle's thought, which in turn derives from Plato's conception of μίμησις ("imitation"). However, it is not difficult to retrieve successfully from Greek biography distinguishing traits of the genre, favoured topics of an author, style or crucial issues in his production.¹ In this way, the conventions of Greek biography reveal a

¹ Cf. Arrighetti 1987: 141-59. In particular, Schorn (2004: 56-63) examines Greek biography of Peripatetic origin after Chamaeleon.

contribution of literary criticism, either through the objective record of a remote past or through the details of an anecdote. The vast repertoire on Plato's corpus in the ancient world derives often from Greek biography and offers a very valuable judgement on Plato's style.² This last, however, is mainly handed down through the basic principles of Greek biography and is either revealed by the recounting of personal experiences (γενόμενα) or indicates the meaning of an anecdote.

For example, Hermippus (fr. 49 Bollansée), Aristotle's pupil, who emphasizes the dependence of Demosthenes on Plato's style maintains, on the basis of ὑπομνήματα ("memoirs") by an unknown author, ἀδέσποτα, that Demosthenes is Plato's pupil. This constitutes a double jump into the past:³ in Plutarch's Demosthenes there is a judgement on Plato's style that derives from Hermippus, but was born earlier, in ὑπομνήματα of an unknown author, ἀδέσποτα. This reconstruction gives rise to doubt. If Plutarch's relationship with the Peripatetic production is plausible, its connection to the ὑπομνήματα, of an unknown author, ἀδέσποτα, is out of the question. First of all, is it possible to consider the diffusion of ὑπομνήματα as early as the IV century? Moreover, were these ὑπομνήματα on Demosthenes or on Plato's corpus? In any case this judgement is in the form of a story: an unknown author, possibly Hermippus himself, recognises Demosthenes as Plato's pupil to prove that Demosthenes has adopted Plato's style. Certainly, Hermippus developed his argument in the form of a story, because Aulus Gellius (3.13) recalls a passage from Hermippus which tells how Demosthenes was distracted, during his habitual practice of listening to Plato's lessons, by the noisy enthusiasm of the crowd due to the impending event of Callistratus' speech, the famous Περὶ Ὀρωποῦ (*About Oropous*). According to the Peripatetic perspective, Demosthenes

2 In the third section of the second volume edited by Dörrie and Baltes 1990: 110-51 between *Baustein* 51 and *Baustein* 57.

3 Ἑρμιππος δὲ φησιν ἀδεσπότοις ὑπομνήμασιν ἐντυχεῖν, ἐν οἷς ἐγγράπτο τὸν Δημοσθένη συνεσχολακέναι Πλάτωνι καὶ πλείστον εἰς τοὺς λόγους ὠφελῆσθαι ("Hermippus says that he once came upon some anonymous memoirs in which it was recorded that Demosthenes was Plato's pupil and found his speeches of great help"). Cf. Bollansée 1999: 398-405.

has a sudden flash of inspiration, giving rise to inevitable anguish, as he finds himself at a life and career crossroads and he decides he will no longer attend Plato's lessons at the Academy. In other words, from now on, Demosthenes, *motus*, *demultus*, *captus* ("moved, charmed, captivated") will be Callistratus' pupil. The relationship that Demosthenes has with the Academy is immediately apparent in Ammianus Marcellinus (30.4.5) and culminates in Philostratus (1.18). It is a question that interests Cicero, for example in *De Oratore* (1.89), when distinguishing between *ingenium* and *ars*. Diogenes Laertius (3.46-7) confirms this point and indicates Sabinus as the source, who in turn uses Mnesistratus of Thasus as the source.⁴ The tradition is handed down over a long period of time, but its evident need to depict a contribution of literary criticism, with the semblance of an objective record of a remote past, demonstrates that it certainly originates from the Peripatetic School. According to their version, Demosthenes is influenced by Plato's style and his dependence takes the form of a discipleship. But his own style does not show any real debt to the conventions of dialogue because he is an orator, which is why, from the Peripatetic standpoint, his change of heart must be caused by Callistratus' famous *Περὶ Ὀρωποῦ* (*About Oropous*).

As for Plato's literary production, Greek biography offers a model for this shift through the tradition from which Diogenes Laertius (3.4-5) conveys details on Plato's youth and in particular on his encounter with Socrates. This tradition has a Peripatetic imprint and constantly emerges in a new form.⁵ Diogenes Laertius attributes to Plato's youth a literary production consisting of dithyrambs, lyric production, and tragedies. He indicates the source, Dicaearchus (47 Mirhady), Aristotele's pupil, perhaps the greatest together with Theophrastus.⁶ This is nothing but a contribu-

4 Cf. Worthington 2013: 38-41. The scheme that Erbi (2011: 157-90) offers on the relationship between the Peripatetic production and the theatrical production on Demosthenes is very useful.

5 Cf. Regali 2016: 275-308.

6 καθὰ καὶ Δικαίαρχος ἐν πρώτῳ Περὶ βίων, καὶ γραφικῆς ἐπιμεληθῆναι καὶ ποιήματα γράψαι, πρῶτον μὲν διθυράμβους, ἔπειτα καὶ μέλη καὶ τραγωδίας. ("It is stated also by Dicaearchus in the first book of *Lives* that he applied himself to painting as well as writing poems, first dithyrambs, then

tion of literary criticism. Already in the fourth-century Peripatetic reasoning indicates the relationship of Plato's corpus with dithyrambs, lyric production and tragedies, but this is embedded in the conventions of Greek biography and takes the form of *γενόμενα*, of personal experiences. An author of dialogues, who becomes the convinced heir of the poetic tradition both from the point of view of style and that of general structure, is one who, before writing the dialogues, develops surrounded by dithyrambs, lyric production, and tragedies. From the Peripatetic perspective, he offers outstanding evidence of this, even though it has been lost in the course of time. In the same way, Diogenes Laertius offers the image of Plato's first meeting with Socrates, who recognises in Plato's profile the young swan of his dream, the young swan which landed in his lap and shortly after flew away, singing sweetly. Here, once again, Dicaearchus is a possible source.⁷ The metaphor of the young swan reveals the strength behind Plato's subsequent creation of dialogues: certainly, its function here is made clear through Socrates, who indicates the juxtaposition, τοῦτον εἰπεῖν εἶναι τὸν ὄρνιν ("said that he was the bird"). It is the best interpretation of Plato's corpus: the sweet song of a young swan, the harmony of the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium* or the *Phaedrus*, mellowed through his meeting with Socrates, on the lap of his elenchus and maieutics.⁸

The anecdote of the young swan has a long *Nachleben*, which is not worth pursuing any further here. Diogenes Laertius includes it in the pages on Plato's life, after Herodicus of Babylon via Athenaeus (11.507c), after Apuleius in *De Platone* (1.1), Tertullian's *De Anima* (46.9) and Origen's *Celso* (6.8). It is already quoted by Pausanias (1.30.3) as a gloss to the description of Plato's

lyric production and tragedies"). Cf. Mirhady 2001: 218-28.

7 λέγεται δ' ὅτι Σωκράτης ὄναρ εἶδε κύκνου νεοττὸν ἐν τοῖς γόνασιν ἔχειν, ὃν καὶ παραχρῆμα πτεροφυήσαντα ἀναπτῆναι ἠδὲ κλάγγαντα· καὶ μεθ' ἡμέραν Πλάτωνα αὐτῷ συστήναι, τὸν δὲ τοῦτον εἰπεῖν εἶναι τὸν ὄρνιν. ("It is stated that Socrates in a dream saw a cygnet on his knees, which all at once put forth plumage, and flew away after uttering a loud sweet note. And the next day Plato came to him, and Socrates said that he was the bird which he had seen."). Cf. Nünlist 1998: 39-67.

8 Gaiser 1984: 103-23 = 2004: 43-55.

gravestone. Here emerges the relationship of the young swan with μουσική which has its root in the myth of the King of the Ligures and the will of Apollo, and which certainly derives from a Peripatetic reflection on the pages of the *Phaedo* (60e-61c), that is on philosophy as μουσική, the greatest, μεγίστη.⁹ Greek biography derives a feature from the literary production of an author and weaves it into his life, together with the distinctive quality of the record of a far distant past, as it does both with philosophy as the μουσική for Socrates, and with the image of the young swan which represents an apt metaphor of the sweet music of the dialogues.¹⁰ As far as Plato's dithyrambs, lyric production, and tragedies is concerned, Diogenes Laertius is immediately confirmed by Alexander Polyhistor (273 F 89 Jacoby). Plato's encounter with Socrates is described as a flash of inspiration and the result is the burning of his tragedies, despite his intention to compete, μέλλων ἀγωνιεῖσθαι, not far from Dionysus' theatre.¹¹ Greek biography makes a contribution to literary criticism: the comparison of Plato's corpus with his dramatic production, in particular of the dialogues, the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*, with tragedies, takes shape. Without any actual evidence to corroborate this story, Plato's sudden decision to burn his tragedies represents the separation between his dramatic works, and his subsequent production, which finds its highest form in the dialogues and which is the unquestionable consequence of his previous dramatic works. It is a contribution of literary criticism, which here too, through the

9 Cf. Giuliano 2005: 80-100.

10 Lasserre (1986: 49-66) illustrates Plato's image of the swan in the *Phaedo* (84e-85b). Cf. Erler 2003: 107-16.

11 ἐφιλοσόφει δὲ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐν Ἀκαδημείᾳ, εἶτα ἐν τῷ κήπῳ τῷ παρὰ τὸν Κολωνόν, ὡς φησιν Ἀλέξανδρος ἐν Διαδοχαῖς, καθ' Ἡράκλειτον. ἔπειτα μέντοι μέλλων ἀγωνιεῖσθαι τραγωδίᾳ πρὸ τοῦ Διονυσιακοῦ θεάτρου Σωκράτους ἀκούσας κατέφλεξε τὰ ποιήματα εἰπών· Ἥφαιστε, πρόμολ' ὦδε· Πλάτων νύ τι σεῖο χατίζει. ("At first he used to study philosophy in the Academy, and afterwards in the garden at Colonus – as Alexander states in his *Successions* – as a follower of Heraclitus. Afterwards, when he was about to participate in a competition with a tragedy, he listened to Socrates in front of the theatre of Dionysus, and then consigned his poems to the flames, with the words: "Come hither, Hephaestus, Plato now has need of thee"). Cf. Erler 2007: 35-60.

Peripatetic imprint, finds comfort in Plato's corpus, through the profitable commitment towards projecting details from the works of an author on to episodes from his life. A famous passage in the VII book of *Laws* (816d-817d) offers a persuasive interpretation of the dialogues as the most noble, κάλλιστον, paradigm for dramatic writing and makes the inevitable comparison between the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus* with the tragedies, indeed with the greatest, ἀρίστη, on the basis of research.¹² If this is Plato's opinion, why not depict, following the code of Greek biography, a young man, who is standing not far from Dionysus' theatre after his encounter with Socrates, and burning his tragedies?

Diogenes Laertius (3.9-17) has the same point of view in the general analysis of Plato's relationship with Epicharmus. It is difficult to retrieve the source of the anecdote on Plato's relationship with Sophron's works, which Diogenes introduces at the end (3.18): it is a claim of Plato's role in the diffusion of the μῖμοι ("mimes") in Attica, a claim that culminates in the image of Sophron's book discovered under Plato's head, immediately after the latter's death.¹³ However, the meaning of the anecdote is clear. Through the code of Greek biography, the Peripatetic tradition indicates Plato's dependence on Sophron's production and more in general on the production of μῖμοι. Certainly, the production of μῖμοι is still a mystery for us.¹⁴ However, it is possible to postulate a gripping dramatic feature in the production of μῖμοι, and therefore, using the code of Greek biography, the Peripatetic tradition offers here, once again, a contribution of literary criticism, by stressing, for example, the same feature for the *Protagoras*, the *Symposium* or the *Gorgias*.

If Diogenes Laertius derives this reflection on Plato's corpus from Dicaearchus and Alexander Polyhistor, it is not difficult

¹² Cf. Tulli 2015: 41-51.

¹³ δοκεῖ δὲ Πλάτων καὶ τὰ Σώφρονος τοῦ μιμογράφου βιβλία ἡμελημένα πρῶτος εἰς Ἀθήνας διακομίσει καὶ ἠθοποιῆσαι πρὸς αὐτόν· ἃ καὶ εὔρεθῆναι ὑπὸ τῆ κεφαλῇ αὐτοῦ ("Plato, it seems, was the first to bring to Athens the mimes of Sophron which had been neglected, and to draw characters in the style of that writer: a copy of the mimes, they say, was actually found under his pillow"). Cf. Haslam 1972: 17-38.

¹⁴ Cf. Hordern 2008: 4-10.

to recognize a contribution of literary criticism, adopting the typical guise of Greek biography, in the pages of an author far-removed from the Peripatetic perspective, who generally rejects the code of Greek biography and offers us a well-founded analysis of Plato's corpus, both in its form and in its content. As to Plato's style, Dionysius of Halicarnassus in *De Compositione* (25.31-3) suggests the image that frequently comes as a surprise, Plato's image, who in his eighties intervenes in every section of his works κτενίζων καὶ βοστρυχίζων καὶ πάντα τρόπον ἀναπλέκων, combing, curling, and intertwining.¹⁵ Hence derives the story, which Dionysius of Halicarnassus indicates as an extremely widespread one, and of course useful for literary criticism on Plato's style, πᾶσι γὰρ δήπου τοῖς φιλολόγοις γνώριμα ("of course every scholar is familiar with"), the story about the small wooden tablet, discovered immediately after Plato's death, with the changed incipit of the *Politeia*, filled with trouble, ποικίλως ("in various ways").¹⁶ The shifting of words, a process of refining and polishing, the torment of an author who in the dialogues recognises the opportunity for his elaborate style, born from a great commitment. It is the story for which Dionysius of Halicarnassus, in actual fact, found the title: περὶ τῆς φιλοπονίας τάνδρὸς ("about the industry of the man"). Objectively – and inevitably – the doubt remains, concerning the small wooden tablet itself. This image is not compatible with the mass of the *Politeia* and with what is known of the art of writing in the IV century.¹⁷ It is senseless to invoke a possible metaphorical interpretation of the story. Obviously, this interpretation offers the solution for the expression ἐν κηρῷ ("on wax") which

15 Cf. Berti 2011: 17-32.

16 πᾶσι γὰρ δήπου τοῖς φιλολόγοις γνώριμα τὰ περὶ τῆς φιλοπονίας τάνδρὸς ἱστορούμενα τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ δὴ καὶ τὰ περὶ τὴν δέλτον, ἣν τελευτήσαντος αὐτοῦ λέγουσιν εὑρεθῆναι ποικίλως μετακαεμένην τὴν ἀρχὴν τῆς Πολιτείας ἔχουσιν τήνδε Ἐκατέβην χθὲς εἰς Πειραιᾶ μετὰ Γλαύκωνος τοῦ Ἀρίστωνος. ("Of course every scholar is familiar with the stories told about Plato's industry, especially the one about the writing tablet which they say was found after his death, with the opening words of the *Republic* arranged in various ways, that is: 'I went down yesterday to the Piraeus with Glaucon the son of Ariston'"). Cf. Thesleff 1997: 149-74 = 2009: 519-40.

17 Cf. Dorandi 2007: 13-24.

Diogenes Laertius (3.37-8) introduces for the *Laws*, as a fruitful area of activity for Philip of Opus, just after Plato's death: the expression ἐν κηρῶ signifies a quick sketch for the general scheme of the *Laws*, perhaps for the last section on the nocturnal council.¹⁸ But what about the story on the changed incipit of the *Politeia*? Of course, it does not refer to the above-mentioned sketch. Instead, it conceals a contribution of literary criticism through the code of Greek biography: the story of the changed incipit of the *Politeia*, with many an afterthought, ποικίλως, is a sign of the reflection on the *Politeia* or perhaps more in general on Plato's corpus, which stands out for its elaborate style and culminates in the *Politeia* itself.

Diogenes Laertius (3.37-8) confirms the story of Dionysius of Halicarnassus and recalls its source, through key figures such as Euphoriion of Chalcis (187 Van Groningen), who is famous for his poetry, but not less so for his literary criticism, and Panaetius (130 Van Groningen), the Stoic of the second century whose tradition links to the reflection on Plato's corpus. The story about the changed incipit of the *Politeia* may be seen as an invitation to a correct analysis of details in Plato's corpus, for example the κατέβην ("I went down") which in the opening words of the *Politeia* refers to relationship of Socrates with politics.¹⁹ However, it is not really possible to believe in the story of the small wooden tablet discovered immediately after Plato's death containing the changed incipit of the *Politeia*. The story has no basis in fact: through the conventions of Greek biography it demonstrates the inevitability of projecting various details from the works of an author on to episodes from his life. Both for Euphoriion of Chalcis and for Panaetius it is not difficult to prove their relationship with the basic tenets of the Peripatetic tradition. Euphoriion of Chalcis could be seen to publish a *Hesiod* (130 Van Groningen) following the code of Greek biography in relationship with the tradition of the *Certamen*, and of course Panaetius is the Stoic most receptive of Aristotle's system.²⁰ The dependence is plausible: Euphoriion of

18 Cf. Aronadio 2009: 9-14.

19 Cf. Vegetti 1998: 93-104.

20 Cf. Alesse 1997: 289-90.

Chalcis developed the story in the III century, Panaetius finds the story among his works, and very soon Dionysius of Halicarnassus includes it in the reflection on Plato's corpus, before Diogenes Laertius, who is the last link in the chain. Between Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Diogenes Laertius the story, according to Quintilian (8.6.64), demonstrates the strength that the *ordo verborum* possesses. What then is the origin of the story? Perhaps the famous passage of the *Phaedrus* (278d-e) on writing, which is Plato's reflection on the myth of Thamus and Theuth.²¹ Certainly, the fruitful effort of the research on the dialogues with the master is in conflict with the writing of an author who spends his time on possible alternative words, on refining and polishing, ἄνω κάτω στρέφων ("turning up and down"), spinning them to and fro, who goes ahead pasting and cutting, κολλῶν τε καὶ ἀφαιρῶν ("adding and taking away"). According to the code of Greek biography, the image of writing becomes an objective record of a remote past and the technique of writing, presented in a negative light in Plato's reflection on the myth of Thamus and Theuth, is actually nothing but his own style. If Dionysius of Halicarnassus describes Plato's style with κτενίζων καὶ βοστρυχίζων καὶ πάντα τρόπον ἀναπλέκων in a plastic dimension on the basis of the scheme of ἄνω κάτω στρέφων or κολλῶν τε καὶ ἀφαιρῶν, the Peripatetic tradition gives the input to the story of the small wooden tablet with the changed incipit of the *Politeia*.

But perhaps it is possible to go a step further. What is striking in the opening words of the *Theaetetus* (142a-143c) is Plato's programme. If the story of the research that Theaetetus developed with Socrates is to be excluded ἀπὸ στόματος, that is by means of the memory, a faithful record is not missing. The plot of the *Theaetetus* offers it and it is the faithful record of Euclid, who almost immediately indicates the phases of his reconstruction, that is a short scheme jotted down straight after the end of the research, εὐθύς οἴκαδ' ἔλθῶν ("as soon as I reached home"), the draft developed more slowly, κατὰ σχολήν ("at leisure"), and the monitoring, ἐπανάρθωσις, through Socrates, while being interrogat-

21 The reconstruction by Swift Riginos (1976: 185-6) is here convincing, despite the rapid juxtaposition of her cards.

ed by Euclid.²² Both for the slower draft, *κατὰ σχολήν*, and for the monitoring, *ἐπανόρθωσις*, through Socrates, it is not difficult to assume the choice of different words, a refining and polishing process, which is a useful hypothesis, using the code of Greek biography, for the small wooden tablet with the changed incipit of the *Politeia*. However, here Plato's image of the faithful record of Euclid lays the foundation not for a story, but for a forgery. The commentary preserved by the Berlin Papyrus 9782 (3.28-37) quotes the words ἄρά γε, ὦ παῖ ("Well, boy"), as the opening words of the *Theaetetus*, a fake, because the commentary sees in the opening words ἄρτι, ὦ Τερψίων ("recently, Terpsion"), which the medieval tradition offers us, with B, with T, and with W, the true text, γνήσιον.²³ During the Imperial era, not later than 150, *terminus ante quem* for the commentary preserved by the Berlin Papyrus 9782, both a fake and the true text were being circulated with the opening words of the *Theaetetus*. The commentary preserved by the Berlin Papyrus 9782 recognises them as very similar, if not identical, in size, *σχεδὸν τῶν ἴσων στίχων* ("more or less the same number of lines"). However, according to the commentary it is not difficult to make the right choice because Plato's style suggests the canon which needs to be met, Plato's style, which is not compatible with the words ἄρά γε, ὦ παῖ, a cold, *ὑπόψυχρον*, text. With the choice of different words, and a process of refining and polishing, the Peripatetic reflection derives from the *Phaedrus* and from the *Theaetetus* the details for the story about the small wooden tablet with the changed incipit of the *Politeia* and the tradition offers a modified text for the incipit of the *Theaetetus*, the incipit which recalls the more slowly developed draft, *κατὰ σχολήν*, and indicates the monitoring, *ἐπανόρθωσις*, through Socrates.²⁴ The

22 It is possible to notice here the requirement of a faithful mirroring in the general production of dialogues in the the 4th century. Cf. Clay 1994: 23-47.

23 φέρ[ε-][[τ]αι δὲ καὶ ἄλλο προοίμιον ὑπόψ[υ]χρον | σχεδὸν τῶν ἴσων | στίχων. οὗ ἀρχή· | "ἄρά γε, ὦ παῖ, φέρεις τὸν | [π]ε[ρ]ι Θε[α]ιτήτου λόγον;" | τὸ δὲ γνήσιόν ἐστιν, | οὗ ἀρχή· "ἄρτι, ὦ Τερψίῳν" ("Another foreword has been handed down, quite cold in tone, of about the same number of lines, which begins, 'Well, boy, have you the speech that concerns Theaetetus?' The authentic one, on the other hand, begins, 'Recently, Terpsion'.") Cf. Regali 2005: 83-97.

24 Cf. Ferrari 2011: 10-39.

text is a fake: the commentary preserved by the Berlin Papyrus 9782 rejects the tradition because the text is not compatible with Plato's style. So, the question remains. Does the tradition conceal a Peripatetic origin? Or does the text come from the Academy in relation to the creation of Plato's corpus? It is difficult to say. But, as for the story on the small wooden tablet with the changed incipit of the *Politeia* as well as for the reflection the commentary offers, the cornerstone is Plato's style, the most well developed style, the style that derives from a great commitment, the style that Dionysius of Halicarnassus recalls with his metaphorical language, through a contribution of literary criticism free from the code of Greek biography, from the Peripatetic tradition: by combing, curling and intertwining.

English translation by Jennifer Battiglia

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