Introduction

This book is a manifesto at heart. It argues for the recognition of a distinct mode of the reception of Roman poetry by which poetic texts are read fundamentally in terms of the imagined lives of their authors. Its roots lie in a growing movement among classicists to rethink the value of ancient poetic Lives. As Mary Lefkowitz decisively showed in a study of the ancient Lives of the Greek poets, 'virtually all the material in all the lives is fiction' based 'on literature by and about the poets whose lives they were seeking to write'.[1] But rather than dismissing them because their biographical 'facts' are extrapolated from the poems themselves, classicists have increasingly come to acknowledge that the ancient Lives are best treated not as a species of inherently suspect factual history but, rather, as valuable documents that tell us important things about life-writing as a mode of the ancient reception of poetry. As Barbara Graziosi put it in a pioneering study focusing on the ancient biographical constructions of Homer,

> the fictionality and popularity of the ancient material on Homer's life does not warrant our 'disregard'. Precisely because they are fictional, early speculations about the author of the Homeric poems must ultimately derive from an encounter between the poems and their ancient audiences.[2]

It is *precisely because they are fictional* that the Lives of the ancient poets have value: they tell us about how ancient audiences read the poems they encountered. 'Euripides was eaten by dogs', Virginia Woolf noted in 'On

[1] Lefkowitz (1981), viii; Lefkowitz (2012), 2. Some of Lefkowitz's conclusions were anticipated by Fairweather (1974); cf. also Fairweather (1984).

[2] Graziosi (2002), 3. Recent work that takes a similar approach includes Chitwood (2004) on the thanatographical traditions in the ancient Lives of philosophers, 'always drawn from the subject's work, and indicative of the biographers' reaction to that work' (49; cf. Kechagia (2016)); Fletcher and Hanink (2016) on the 'creative lives' of poets, philosophers, musicians and visual artists, and Goldschmidt and Graziosi (2018) on the tombs of the ancient poets as sites of creative reception. See also publications related to *Living Poets: A New Approach to Ancient Poetry* <https://livingpoets.dur.ac.uk>.

Not Knowing Greek' (1925), 'Aeschylus killed by a stone; Sappho leapt from a cliff. We know no more of them than that. We have their poetry, and that is all.'[3] It turns out that, beyond their poetry, we know even less of the ancient poets than Woolf assumed: Euripides' grisly fate combines the deaths by dismemberment of Pentheus and his cousin Actaeon in the *Bacchae*;[4] Aeschylus' fate mimics the role of *tychê* in his own tragic drama;[5] Sappho's suicide off 'lover's leap', heartbroken from unrequited love, mirrors her poetry and subsumes her life into the world of local myth.[6] We cannot 'know' the ancient poets – we have their poetry and that is all – but the narratives extrapolated from their texts give us an insight into how ancient readers encountered the poets of the past by telling stories about their lives and deaths.

This book shares the premise with recent work on ancient poetic Lives that biographical readings of Greek and Roman poets are valuable precisely because they are fictional, but it changes the focus and widens the debate. First, whereas major studies of the Lives of the ancient poets have been overwhelmingly focused on Greek poets and Greek Lives, this book focuses on Roman poetry and its reception.[7] This is not just to fill a scholarly gap. There is something fundamental about Roman poetry, in particular, I argue, that cries out for biographical modes of reception. While autobiographical writing is found in Greek poetry, reading 'for the life' is

[3] Woolf (1925), 39–40.

[4] An alternative story recorded in the *Suda* (E 3695 Adler) links the poet's life even more closely with his work by having him, like Pentheus, torn apart by women; cf. also *TrGF* 5.1 Testimonia III.1. On the links between the death of Pentheus (dismembered by the Bacchae) and the imagery of Actaeon (torn apart by hunting dogs) in Euripides' play with ancient accounts of the author's death, see Lefkowitz (2012), 93, and see also Lefkowitz (2012), 99 with Burges Watson (2014) for further links between the death story and Euripides' early reception in comedy.

[5] In the better-known version of the story, told in the ancient *Life of Aeschylus*, he was killed specifically by the instruments of his own poetic composition when a passing eagle dropped not a stone, but a tortoise – from whose shell the poet's lyre was traditionally made – on his head. On this and the role of chance (*tychê*), see Burges Watson (2013) with further references, noting also the comic reversal of Aeschylus' Zeus-centred teleology in the presence of the eagle (traditionally Zeus' bird).

[6] Lefkowitz (2012), 43; cf. Most (1995) on biofictional receptions of Sappho after antiquity.

[7] The recent burgeoning of interest in biographical readings of Virgil constitutes an exception to the largely Hellenic focus of recent work on ancient poetic biography: see esp. Laird (2009); Laird (2016) (the only Roman chapter in Fletcher and Hanink (2016)); Peirano (2012) (on the autobiographical elements in the *Appendix Vergiliana*); Hardie and Powell (2017) (on the ancient Lives of Virgil); Ziogas (2018) (on Donatus' Life of Virgil); cf. also Putnam and Ziolkowski (2008), 179–468. The guides and collections at the *Living Poets* project have begun to broaden the field by treating several Roman poets (https://livingpoets.dur.ac.uk/w/Welcome_to_Living_Poets); see also Graziosi (2009) on Suetonius' *Vita Horatii*, and Hardie and Moore (2010) on a range of Roman poets and receptions viewed through the narrower *topos* of the literary career.

encoded in Roman poetry itself.[8] Aware of well-established practices of biographical reading, Roman poets frequently inscribed their own self-consciously constructed life narratives into their works, establishing a body of texts which demands to be read in terms of lives.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, I want to emphasise that the mode of reading which looks for the poet's life in the text is far from an exclusively ancient phenomenon. The ancient Lives are just the beginning of a long chain of receptions, encoded in Roman poetry itself, which read ancient poetry in terms of the life of the author. By tracing a reception history from the Lives on the margins of medieval manuscripts to the modern death of the author, this book develops a concept of reception centred on the imaginary lives of authors. Fictional life-writing (or 'biofiction'), I argue, is a core mode of the reception of Roman poetry – and Roman poetry and its reception are crucial to later life-writing. While ancient literature has largely been ignored by modern life-writing studies, and scholars of ancient literature have largely ignored modern life-writing, one of the main aims of this book is to expand the scope and material of both debates, putting later reception onto the table of the discussion among classicists, and antiquity and its reception on the map of modern studies in life-writing.[9]

1 Biographies, Biofictions

Part of the problem with approaches to the Lives of the ancient poets which took their 'facts' at face value or dismissed them as suspect is that the Lives were approached or assessed as if they were modern biographies. As Momigliano put it in his 1971 study of Greek biography, '[n]obody nowadays is likely to doubt that biography is some kind of history'.[10] Conceptions of the genre have since largely shifted: nowadays, scholars of biography are more likely to stress its fictionality over its perceived truth

[8] For autobiographical writing in Greek poetry, see e.g. Stein (1990); Lefkowitz (1991), 127–46 (on autobiographical mythology in Pindar); Arrighetti and Montanari (1993); Irwin (2005), 132–52 and Irwin (2006) (on Solon); Graziosi (2013) (on the 'I' in the *Iliad* and ancient perceptions of Homer).

[9] Partly in order to stress continuities between ancient and modern traditions, I extend the term 'Life'/'Lives', conventionally used to describe ancient biographies, to modern life-writing about ancient authors. For a comparable practice, see Taylor (2017) on Ovidian life-writing in seventeenth-century France.

[10] Momigliano (1971), 6. Cf. Hägg (2012), 3 on the traditional prevalence in scholarship on ancient biography of 'the naïve demand that [biography] … should be "true", in the sense of verifiable and historically correct'.

value.[11] But 'biography' – a genre historically associated with the kinds of positivistic life-writing that flourished in the nineteenth century – may not be the best way to think of the *bioi* or *vitae* of ancient poets, as ancient 'Lives' were known in antiquity.[12] Inherently fictional and imaginatively tied to the texts themselves, ancient Lives of the poets were not biographies as we might conventionally think of them. Instead, the Lives and the habits of reading they exemplify are best situated at the beginning of a different tradition: not as early instances of documentary biography, but rather as some of the earliest examples of biofiction.

A portmanteau of 'fiction biographique' originally coined by Alain Buisine, 'biofiction' captures the fictional element in imaginative life-writing.[13] As Michael Lackey puts it, biofiction is marked by 'creative invention'.[14] Imagining the lives of 'real, historical individuals' by blending biographical information with 'the sophisticated instruments' of fiction,[15] authors of biofiction 'invent stories … in order to answer perplexing questions, fill in cultural lacunae, signify human interiors, or picture cultural ideologies'.[16] Biofiction can draw on documentary evidence, but it can also invent it, creating the illusion of factual reliability while also leaving a space for imaginative speculation. It can take the form of cradle-to-grave narratives typical of biography, but it can also encompass biographical fiction of all kinds. 'Permitting a fictional and speculative recreation' of the subject's inner and outer life,[17] biofiction fills in the gaps of biography and enriches the possibilities of fiction.[18]

[11] For the destabilisation of concepts of 'truth' in modern biography, see e.g. Lee (2009), 6–7, and for the fictionality of ancient biography, see esp. Borghart and De Temmerman (2010) and De Temmerman and Demoen (2016).

[12] Cf. McGing and Mossman (2006), xi; Konstan and Walsh (2016), 26–7. On the history of the term *biographia* (the first use of which is attributed to Damascius, fifth/sixth century CE), see Renders and De Haan (2014), 11–13.

[13] Buisine (1991). On biofiction, see, esp. Middeke and Huber (1999); Ní Dhúill (2012); Lackey (2016a); (2016b); (2017a); (2017b); Novak (2017a), 9–11. For a helpful overview of new developments in contemporary life-writing studies which attempt to capture how 'texts depart from the tenets of traditional biography and autobiography and … capture the relationship of fact and fiction', see Novak (2017a) with 2–3 on modern terminology.

[14] Lackey (2016a), 14. For the creative element in ancient poetic and artistic biography, cf. Fletcher and Hanink (2016), esp. 3–28.

[15] Schabert (1990), 4 on 'fictional biography'.

[16] Lackey (2016a), 14.

[17] Ní Dhúill (2012), 286.

[18] The distinction between modern biography and biofiction is not always as clear cut as Lackey suggests: Peter Ackroyd's *Dickens* (1990), for instance, notoriously contains several fictional episodes, including a meeting between Charles Dickens and one of his own characters, Little Dorrit: Ackroyd (1990), 100–5. See further Lee (2009), 6–7 and Novak (2017a), 9–11, with Keener (2001), 1 on modern biography and biofiction as 'a continuum'.

Although the term 'biofiction' was formulated primarily in reference to the fictional games played out in the postmodern novel, biofictional modes have important analogues in the ways in which Lives were written and imagined in Graeco-Roman antiquity. As recent work on Greek and Roman biography has made clear, the lines between truth and fiction were fundamentally blurred in the theory and practice of ancient life-writing.[19] Plutarch's birth-to-death accounts of Great Men and Suetonius' chronological but more thematically structured Lives would become foundational models for the kinds of modern prose biography against which modern biofiction would later react,[20] but *bioi* could mean very different things in antiquity. As Koen de Temmerman puts it, ancient Lives were 'particularly conducive to slippages into the realm of fiction'.[21] Several ancient works in the biographical mode, from Xenophon's fourth-century BCE *Cyropaedia*, a self-consciously fictional account of Cyrus the Great, to the popular *Alexander Romance*, a fabulous Life of Alexander circulating in textual form in the third century CE, come far closer to what we might term 'biofiction' than 'biography'.[22] Moreover, far from restricted to Plutarchan and Suetonian models, ancient Lives could come in many different forms:[23] from dramatised dialogues like Satyrus' *Life of Euripides* to short anecdotal snippets, and from stories about statesmen based on historically reputable sources to full-blown narratives about literary and philosophical figures self-consciously based on their own works. Ancient readers and writers – like modern authors of biofiction – invented stories to fill lacunae, skirting over the flimsy borderline of verifiable historicity into the realms of imaginative fiction. Like modern authors of biofiction, they, too, relied on fictional and creative speculation to attempt to capture the living presence of the biographical subject, deploying the multiple techniques of creative fiction available to them to evoke the subject's inner life. Even the most apparently conventional biographers engaged in

[19] Pelling (2002b); Borghart and De Temmerman (2010); Hodkinson (2010); De Temmerman and Demoen (2016); Power (2016).

[20] Lackey (2016b), 5 ('most authors of biofiction explicitly claim that they are not doing biography').

[21] De Temmerman (2016), 4. Cf. Momigliano's earlier observation that '[t]he borderline between truth and fiction was thinner in biography than in ordinary historiography' (1971), 56, though as we now increasingly emphasise 'ordinary historiography' itself has a complex relationship with fiction: Pelling (2002b).

[22] For fictionality in the *Cyropaedia*, see Tatum (1989). As Reichel (1995), 438 points out, the *Cyropaedia* itself includes 'one of the very few discussions about fictional prose narrative in ancient literary theory'. For the *Alexander Romance*, see Hodkinson (2010).

[23] Leo (1901) influentially divided ancient biography along 'Plutarchan' and 'Suetonian' models, but later scholarship has done much to acknowledge the broad range of life-writing types: see McGing and Mossman (2006), xi–xii.

'creative reconstruction' of undocumented childhood selves.[24] They drew on established techniques of *ethopoeia*, 'characterisation through speech', to imagine the words of their biographical subjects,[25] and played with chronology to represent what seemed to them crucial truths about the character of their biographees, 'altering established fact to make what they consider an important intellectual point'.[26] Ancient life-writers projected elements of their own self-experience onto that of their subjects.[27] They used omniscient psychic narrators to fashion the subject's emotions and inner life, which, like moden biofiction, 'suggests the narrator's direct access to the subject's thoughts – something considered to be atypical of "straight" biography'.[28] Details of external appearance could conjure up the physical presence of the biographee, whether real or imagined, as in cases where, as Pliny the Elder put it, 'desire gives birth to countenances that have not been handed down to us, as in the case of Homer',[29] but they could also, in an echo of techniques developed in ancient popular physiognomy, mimic a sense of living human character traits: Nero's belly indicating his gluttony and malice,[30] Domitian's good looks aptly disintegrating with age as his character declined.[31]

While a wide spectrum of Greek and Roman life-writing can be seen to 'interrogate, destabilize or challenge, if only for a minute, the narrative's intention to be believed or its claim to be truthful',[32] more than other kinds

[24] For this practice in Plutarch, see Pelling (2002b), 154 with Pelling (2002c), 301–15.
[25] De Temmerman and Demoen (2016), 14–15.
[26] Lackey (2017a), 9, on modern biofiction. Plutarch famously asserted in his *Life of Solon* (27.1) that he was 'not prepared to reject' a story 'because of the so-called rules of chronology', since 'it fits Solon's character so well': Pelling (2002b), 143.
[27] On automimesis in ancient biography, see Hägg (2012), 6, citing one of 'the most famous' examples in ancient literature, the strikingly different portraits of Socrates by Plato and Xenophon. For a psychoanalytically inflected reading of the phenomenon, see Edel (1987), 65–97, and for the ways in which life-writers ancient and modern from Theocritus to Malcolm X have projected their own personal lived experience onto the poets of ancient Greece, see Graziosi (2016).
[28] Novak (2017b), 99 on modern biofictional Lives. For 'omniscient psychic narrators' in ancient texts as a narrative technique used to depict the inner lives of biographical subjects, see Hodkinson (2010), 21–32: while the strategy is clearest in works which sit at the centre of the 'history-fiction spectrum' (21), Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, the *Aesop Romance*, the *Alexander Romance* and Philostratus' *Vita Apollonii*, similar strategies can also be detected in Plutarch, even though he deliberately qualifies them with 'an explanation for this privileged insight' (18–19) which the apparently 'fictional' technique affords: Hodkinson (2010), 18–21.
[29] *quin immo etiam quae non sunt finguntur, pariuntque desideria non traditos uultus, sicut in Homero euenit*: Pliny, *Natural History* 35.9–10, describing the fashion for the placement of busts of poets in the libraries of first-century CE Rome.
[30] Suetonius, *Vita Neronis* 51; Tatum (2014), 171.
[31] Suetonius, *Vita Domitiani* 18.1; Tatum (2014), 170. On Plutarch and physiognomy, see Tatum (1996). A more sceptical view of the impact of physiognomy on ancient biography is expressed by Hägg (2012), 228–9: cf. also Tatum (2014), n. 42 with further references.
[32] De Temmerman (2016), 14.

of life-writing, Lives of poets palpably straddle the blurred lines between reality and fiction, which makes them natural precursors to biofictional modes of reading and writing. Linked to the Muses who know how to tell both truth and 'many falsehoods which resemble real things' (Hesiod, *Theogony* 27), what Xenophanes called the 'fabrications' (*plasmata*) of poets (1.22 D-K) have meant that poetry as a genre – and poets as biographical subjects – lend themselves to creative biofictional constructions in particularly fundamental ways. There may have been a factual core in some of the ancient Lives of poets at some point, and local traditions also played a role.[33] But unlike typical ancient Lives of statesman or other well-documented historical figures, and unlike biofictions of modern authors which can draw on external archive material (a letter, a diary, a personal object), Lives of ancient poets tend to have limited recourse to sources outside pre-existing biographical traditions.[34] Essentially, ancient life-writers on poets generally drew their 'facts' from 'the only material that was available to them': the texts of the poets themselves.[35] Even Suetonius, though he advertised his use of imperial archives for the *Lives of the Caesars*, was left with 'little to save him' from biofictional reading in *De poetis*, a major source for Roman traditions of poets' Lives.[36] Homer was blind like the bard Demodocus in the *Odyssey*;[37] Pindar died 'reclining on the knees' of his lover Theoxenus, whom he had praised in his poems;[38] Virgil's land was confiscated and returned to him like Tityrus in the *Eclogues*;[39] Plautus ended his days as a penniless mill-pusher enacting a threat made to the slaves in his drama;[40] Lucretius died of a madness induced by the kind

[33] For the possibility of a factual core preserved in the Greek Lives, see Kivilo (2010), 5–6, 223–4 and Hendrickson (2013).

[34] The distinction between ancient and modern practice is blurred by the fact that postmodern biofiction, particularly of literary figures, often destabilises the validity of 'verifiable' archival sources themselves: Julian Barnes' *Flaubert's Parrot* (1984), for example, notably includes fake archive material and points up the unreliability of existing material evidence for Flaubert's life in the form of the two competing exemplars of the green parakeet Flaubert is said to have kept on his desk when he wrote 'Un cœur simple': Keen (2001), 55–6.

[35] Lefkowitz (2012), 2.

[36] Horsfall (2000), 1. It is possible that the letters to and from Augustus quoted in Suetonius' Life of Horace and Aelius Donatus' Life of Virgil (thought to be based on Suetonius' lost original) may go back to genuine archival documents: Stok (2010), 108. For Suetonius' self-conscious deployment of fictional poetic sources in a way that seems to 'reflect … something true about a life', see Power (2016), 218. Scholars engaged in source criticism have tried to scour the *VSD* for other extrapoetic sources, including possible second-hand oral testimony gleaned from Asconius Pedianus, and other sources for comments about the poet's composition methods: see Stok (2010), 108–10.

[37] Graziosi (2002), 125–50.

[38] ἀνακεκλιμένον εἰς τὰ τοῦ ἐρωμένου Θεοξένου αὐτοῦ γόνατα, *Suda* Π 1617 Adler; Valerius Maximus 9.12. ext. 7 with Pindar, fragment 123: Boterf and Taretto (2014).

[39] See below, pp. 16–17.

[40] Goldschmidt (2015a).

of *furor* of love he excoriated in *De rerum natura*.[41] Poetic texts, in other words, substantially provided the material for stories about the lives of their authors. Over time, previous Lives – which had, in turn, drawn many of their 'facts' from the poems themselves – fed back into the cycle to become the 'archive' on which later biofictions could draw, but essentially it is on the basis of the literary fictions of ancient poets themselves that, from antiquity to modernity, the Lives of the poets have been written.

In collapsing the distinction between reality and fiction, biofictional modes of reception leave themselves open to accusations of what Harold Cherniss, writing in 1943, influentially dismissed as 'the biographical fallacy': the habit of reading literary texts as direct reflections of the lives of their authors.[42] Cherniss' essay was rooted in mid-twentieth-century New Critical views of literary texts as hermetically sealed aesthetic objects detached from external contexts: in Cleanth Brooks' iconic metaphor, poetry is a 'well wrought urn', which, as Cherniss put it, 'exists independently of its author and of the accidental circumstances of its production'.[43] For Cherniss, the biographical fallacy posed an 'insidious danger' threatening 'fatal consequences for the study of the classics', and the influence of his essay partly accounts for the disregard in which the Lives of the ancient poets and the reading practices they exemplify have been held.[44] But the 'biographical fallacy' contains a kind of authenticity that is in some ways truer to how readers read and understand literature. The need to encounter the author as a living presence within the text is a fundamental aspect of reading.[45] Even the most radical declarations of textuality that emerged later in the twentieth century accommodated that implicit need. As Séan Burke put it, 'the concept of the author is never more alive than when pronounced dead'.[46] When Roland Barthes announced 'The Death of the Author' ('La Mort de l'auteur') in 1967, five years after Cherniss'

[41] See Chapter 4, with Goldschmidt (forthcoming).
[42] Cherniss (1943).
[43] Cherniss (1943), 290; Brooks (1947).
[44] Cherniss (1943), 290–1. On the 'dramatic effect' of Cherniss' article among classicists, particularly after its post-war reprinting by J. P. Sullivan (= Cherniss (1962)), see Du Quesnay and Woodman (2012), 255–6.
[45] The recent outcry after the flesh-and-blood identity of the novelist Elena Ferrante was revealed by Claudio Gatti in 2016 is a case in point: one reason why readers were so appalled by Gatti's revelation was that, whatever the facts of her life (her mother was German not Neapolitan and probably not an impoverished seamstress), the author's life as extrapolated from her texts seemed more 'authentic' to readers than the figure tracked down through her tax records: as Ruth Scurr puts it, working up one of Ferrante's own favourite images, '[i]f women's bodies are dresses, in this anguished metaphorical sense, all of our mothers are dressmakers': see Gatti (2016a); Gatti (2016b); Scurr (2016).
[46] Burke (2008), 7; cf. also Gallop (2011).

essay influentially reappeared, he carefully left the door open in his writing for the author's return, not as a flesh-and-blood figure in the real world, but as a construct within the text itself: 'in the text, in a way, I *desire* the author: I need his figure (which is neither his representation nor his projection), as he needs mine'.[47] As he explained elsewhere:

> It is not that the Author may not 'come back' in the Text, in his text, but he then does so as a 'guest' … [H]e becomes, as it were, a paper-author: his life is no longer the origin of his fictions but a fiction contributing to his work; there is a reversion of the work on to the life.[48]

Biofiction about ancient poets is a manifestation of one of the fundamental pleasures of the text: it speaks to a desire among readers to discover the figure of the author lurking within the fabric of the text itself. Through a 'reversion of the work on to the life', the biofictional author – no longer the origin of literary creation – becomes a function of his or her own creation, as the tables are turned against documentary biography to establish the literary text *itself* as the origin of the life.[49]

Yet biofictions of ancient poets are more than a biographically minded version of radical textuality. They instance an essentially human-centred form of reception which is predicated on texts, but which also takes a human shape. Understood in terms of lives, the relationship between biofiction and original text becomes a quasi-social dialogue that sees a human life latent in the fabric of the text.[50] Not simply intertextual, the encounter between the biofictional author and the ancient poem becomes, in Ina Schabert's terms, interauthorial, part of an imagined human encounter, which takes place on a plane beyond the system of signs, between the author as perceived in the ancient text and the author of the receiving text.[51] As Cora Kaplan puts it, 'the "bio" in biofiction … references a more

[47] Barthes (1975), 27. For the full publication history of 'The Death of the Author' (the essay was first published in English in *Aspen* magazine in 1967, closely followed by the influential French version in 1968), see Burke (2008), 232–3 n. 2.

[48] Barthes (1977a), 161. For the return of the author in other twentieth-century theorists from de Man to Derrida, see Burke (2008). Some of these issues are discussed further in Chapter 5, esp. p. 180, and cf. also Chapter 2, pp. 83–4 on Foucault's author function.

[49] For this specific aspect of modern imaginary Lives of authors, see, esp. Middeke and Huber (1999) and Klock (2007).

[50] On the essentially relational nature of lives and life-writing, see Eakin (1999), 43–98.

[51] Schabert (1983), 679 defines 'Interauktorialität' as a kind of 'textual reception documented in literary texts, which takes place in the form of a human encounter between the author as perceived in the text being read and the author of a later work' ('literarisch dokumentierte Textrezeption, die sich als menschliche Begegnung zwischen dem in einem gelesenen Text wahrgenommenen Autor und dem Autor eines nachzeitigen Werks vollzieht'). On the intersubjective 'quest for the other person' in biographical fiction, see Schabert (1990), and for the interauthorial nature of literary biofiction, see Middeke and Huber (1999), 18.

essentialised and embodied element of identity, a subject less than transcendent but more than merely discourse'.[52] The life of the author captured in biofiction about ancient poets may be derived from the text, 'the Text of life, life-as-text' in Barthes' words,[53] but it testifies to an encounter between readers and texts that has its own inherent authenticity, embedded in the text, but more than merely discourse.

2 Autofictions: Writing Lives in Roman Poetry

Ancient Lives, and ancient Lives of poets in particular, mark the beginnings of biofictional habits of reading and writing, but there is something about Roman poetry *itself* that calls out for biofictional modes of reception. Coming after Greece and starting late, Roman poets were already inherently aware of ancient practices of reading for the life of the author in the text, and many of them lay trails in their works for later readers to follow. Some of the self-writing they produced can be explained in terms of *persona*, the 'mask' worn by an author in the text, which may or may not have been taken at face value by ancient audiences.[54] But the ways in which Roman poets inscribed their lives into their texts go far beyond what *persona* theory can account for. Recent developments in the understanding of autobiography mean that the 'opposing claims of art and autobiography'[55] at the heart of *persona* criticism – which fundamentally operates on the perception of the gap between the mask and its wearer – are necessarily blurred, since, as Max Saunders puts it, 'auto/biography itself cannot be kept entirely apart from fiction'.[56] Reading self-writing in Roman poetry in terms of autofiction rather than *persona*, in other words, means that it is no longer necessary to determine whether the narratives Roman poets constructed about themselves were consciously read or written as *either* veridical or fictional (a crux of the *persona* debate),[57] since the 'fictional' element of autofiction, like that which is increasingly recognised in autobiography, is inherent in the nature of textuality itself.[58] In fact, as Tim Whitmarsh puts it in reference to what he calls 'fictional autobiography' in

[52] Kaplan (2007), 65.
[53] Barthes (1977b), 64.
[54] For the *persona* debate in ancient literature, see esp. Clay (1998) and Mayer (2003).
[55] Freudenburg (1993), 3.
[56] Saunders (2010), 7; cf. Dix (2017), 72.
[57] Mayer (2003).
[58] Saunders (2010), 6–7.