

PROLEGOMENA

I

THE MYTH

The foundation for all study of the Phaethon myth is the article by Georg Knaack published in Roscher's *Mythological Lexicon* in 1909. Knaack's article is a monument of industry and patience, but its misrepresentation of several crucial features of the evidence has led astray and still continues to lead astray commentators both on Euripides' play and on the myth in general. My purpose is not to reassemble the material accumulated by Knaack but to reassess it. I begin with a brief sketch of the history of the Phaethon myth in Greek and Latin literature. In the two sections which follow, and in three Appendixes, I develop in detail the features where I diverge from the prevailing accounts. In the two immediately following sections I discuss the evidence for the treatment of the myth by Euripides' predecessors, Hesiod and Aeschylus. In the Appendixes I discuss the surviving treatments of the myth by Euripides' successors, and the treatment of the myth in art, and I attempt to distinguish those elements in which Euripides may be thought to have influenced his successors. Euripides' *Phaethon* will often disappear from view in this discussion, but the discussion is unavoidable. Only a proper assessment of the mythographical tradition as a whole can reveal the place which Euripides' play occupies in that tradition and the means by which reconstruction of the plot of the play may and may not legitimately be attempted.

The reader may find it helpful, before he begins the following sections, to acquaint himself with the *known* facts about the play by consulting the summary of the fragments on pp. 35-44.

PROLEGOMENA

A. PHAETHON IN GREEK AND LATIN LITERATURE:
 A SKETCH

It is not known when the myth of Phaethon, son of Helios, made its first appearance in Greek literature. In Homer the participle φαέθων is several times attached as an epithet to Helios;¹ and just as Ὑπερίων is used in early poetry both as an epithet of Helios and as the name of Helios' father,² so the epithet φαέθων came to be used, at whatever date, as the name of a son of Helios, Phaethon.

Hesiod speaks in the *Theogony* (984–91) of a son of Eos and Cephalus named Phaethon, a favourite of Aphrodite. This figure is unconnected with our Phaethon, and the attempts which have been made to identify him with the charioteer are misguided (see pp. 10–15).³ Several late authorities do, however, attribute to Hesiod a detailed narrative of the Phaethon story, but reasons will be given for regarding their evidence with gravest distrust (pp. 15–27). It remains doubtful whether Hesiod so much as mentioned the story of Phaethon.

A myth which became inseparably linked with that of Phaethon told of the origin of amber in the far west—how the Heliades, daughters of Helios, were transformed into poplars and wept tears of amber on the banks of the Eridanus. When we first meet the myth of Phaethon it is linked with this

¹ *Il.* 11.735, *Od.* 5.479, 11.16, 19.441, 22.388; cf. *h. Helios* [31] 2, Hes. *Theog.* 760, *S. El.* 824, *E. El.* 464. The name Phaethon is applied to a horse of Eos at *Od.* 23.246, and a daughter of Helios is called Phaethousa at *Od.* 12.132. In Latin, and in later Greek, Phaethon was used as the name of the Sun-god himself: Verg. *Aen.* 5.105, Val. Fl. 3.213, Sil. It. 11.369, *al.*, Mart. 3.67.5, St. *Theb.* 4.717; Orph. *fr.* 238.10 Kern, Nonnus *passim* (cf. esp. 38.151 f. Ἥλιος δὲ / υἱεῖ δῶκεν ἔχειν ἐόν οὐνομα), Hadrian *A.P.* 9.137.3.

² Cf. M. L. West on Hes. *Theog.* 134.

³ Several local Phaethons, having no discernible connection with our Phaethon, are attested in various regions throughout Greece and the Aegean: cf. Knaack, *Myth. Lex.* III. 2178 f., Türk, *R.E.* XIX. 1514.

THE MYTH

story.¹ For the myth of Phaethon and the Heliades Pliny cites the five earliest authorities known to him: *Phaethontis fulmine icti sorores luctu mutatas in arbores populos lacrimis electrum omnibus annis fundere iuxta Eridanum amnem, quem Padum vocavimus, electrum appellatum quoniam sol vocitatus sit Elector, plurimi poetae dixere primique, ut arbitrator, Aeschylus Philoxenus Euripides Nicander Satyrus* (*N.H.* 37.2.31). Of Aeschylus' *Heliades* a few unhelpful fragments survive: the course of the play can only be conjectured (see pp. 27–32). Of the treatment of the legend by the dithyrambic poet Philoxenus (436–380),² the didactic Nicander,³ and the unknown Satyrus,⁴ we have no evidence. Euripides speaks of the amber tears of the Heliades in a choral ode of the *Hippolytus*: Ἡριδανοῦ θ' ὕδωρ, / ἐνθα πορφύρεον σταλάς-/κουσ' εἰς οἶδμα τάλαιναί / κόραι Φαέθοντος οἴκτωι δακρύων / τὰς ἠλεκτροφαεῖς αὐγάς (737–41). It is certainly to this and not to our play that Pliny refers.⁵

We cannot tell from what source Aeschylus took the story of Phaethon. We can only record with surprise the absence of the myth from the remains of early Greek poetry and from the whole of extant Greek lyric poetry. The earliest reference to the myth after the tragedians is a regrettably uninformative allusion by Plato (*Tim.* 22c): τὸ γὰρ οὖν καὶ παρ' ὑμῖν λεγόμενον, ὥς ποτε Φαέθων Ἥλιου παῖς τὸ τοῦ πατρὸς

¹ Whether the story of the Heliades' amber tears had a separate existence at an earlier time cannot be determined. It is possible that Hesiod alluded to the Heliades weeping amber beside the Eridanus, though, if he did, he did not mention Phaethon in the same context (see p. 24). According to Pliny (*N.H.* 37.2.40) Sophocles said that amber was produced beyond India from the tears of the *meleagrides* (guinea-fowl) lamenting Meleager: cf. A. C. Pearson, *Fragments of Sophocles*, II, 66, and see below, p. 46. ² = *fr.* 21 Page.

³ = *fr.* 63 Schneider. Nicander's date is uncertain: see Gow and Scholfield, *Nicander: The Poems and Poetical Fragments* (Cambridge 1953), 3–8. His *Heteroeumena* was probably used by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses*, so that it is possible that he was one of Ovid's sources for the episode of the Heliades: cf. W. Vollgraff, *Nikander und Ovid* (Groningen 1909), 105–9.

⁴ He wrote about precious stones: cf. Pliny *N.H.* 37.6.91 and 37.7.94, *R.E.* II A. 235.

⁵ Even if amber tears appeared in our play (cf. p. 46), the Eridanus did not.

PROLEGOMENA

ἄρμα ζεύξας διὰ τὸ μὴ δυνατὸς εἶναι κατὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς ὁδὸν ἔλαύνειν τὰ τ' ἐπὶ γῆς συνέκαυεν καὶ αὐτὸς κεραυνωθείς διεφθάρη. Thereafter the allusions become more common. Aristotle records that according to Pythagorean doctrine the Milky Way had been formed by the course of a star dislodged from its place during Phaethon's ride (*Meteor.* 345a; cf. *Diod. Sic.* 5.23.2). The Hellenistic poets furnish scattered allusions. Aratus speaks of the constellation Ποταμός as λείψανον Ἡριδανοῖο πολυκλαύτου ποταμοῖο (360), the epithet suggesting the lamentations of the Heliades. Apollonius Rhodius also speaks of the Eridanus, ἔνθα ποτ' αἰθαλόεντι τυπείς πρὸς στέρνα κεραυνῶι / ἡμιδαῆς Φαέθων πέεεν ἄρματος Ἡελίοιο / λίμνης ἐς προχοᾶς πολυβενθέος· ἢ δ' ἐτι νῦν περ / τραύματος αἰθομένοιο βαρὺν ἀνακηκίει ἄτμόν (4.597–600).¹ And a story which probably dealt with the association between Phaethon and a comrade Cycnus found a place in the Ἔρωτες ἢ Καλοὶ of Phanocles.²

These are the meagre traces of the myth surviving in Greek literature.³ Which of the lost accounts most influenced the shaping of the myth we cannot tell. The influence of Aeschylus was probably large. The influence of Euripides was probably much smaller. It is plausible to assume that, when

¹ He speaks of the weeping Heliades at 4.603–11 and 624–6, and adds a Celtic version of the origins of amber wherein the amber tears are shed not by the Heliades but by Apollo (611–17).

² =fr. 6 Powell: see below, p. 195 n. 2. There survives also, from the Alexandrian period, a fragmentary epigram on Phaethon's death (*Pap. Tebt.* 3.1–10). Line 1:]ραῖ Λιβηθρίδες οἰκτρα[ι], i.e. Λ(ε)ιβηθρίδες, preceded perhaps by νύμ]φα (cf. *Str.* 9.2.25 etc., *Verg. Ecl.* 7.21), but the connection between Boeotian (or Thracian) nymphs and Phaethon is not obvious (for his burial by a different set of nymphs see pp. 195, 198), and they are hardly compatible with the Eridanus (l. 2 Ἡριδανοῦ τα]ίςδε παρ' ἠϊόσιν, suppl. ed. pr.). Lines 3–4 allude to the broken chariot. Lines 5–6: Φαέ]θων, οὐ ἔδαίσατο σάρκα κεραυνός, / ἄψ Ὑπεριον]ίδα χρύσειον οἶκον ἰδ(ε)ῖν (ed. pr.). Lines 7–8: he will be lamented by his sisters: φθίμεν]ον κλαύσονται (κλαυθ- pap.) ἀδελφόν / —στ]ήθεα πλησσόμεναι.

³ *Diod. Sic.* 5.23.2 testifies to the popularity of the myth, which, he claims, has been recounted by πολλοὶ . . . τῶν τε ποιητῶν καὶ τῶν συγγραφέων.

THE MYTH

Euripides ascribes the birth of Phaethon to an illicit encounter between Helios and Clymene and introduces as Clymene's lawful husband and Phaethon's putative father the Aethiopian king Merops, he is seeking to elaborate his predecessor's more straightforward plot.¹ These features, whether or not they were Euripides' own invention, gained no place in the later poetic tradition.² Phaethon's marriage, the one undoubted invention of Euripides, went entirely unnoticed. None the less the play continued to be read as late as the first century A.D. It is quoted by Strabo, 'Longinus' and Plutarch, and imitated in part by Ovid³ and Seneca.⁴ Cicero betrays an acquaintance with it: *Sol Phaethonti filio, ut redeamus ad fabulas, facturum se esse dixit quidquid optasset. optavit ut in currum patris tolleretur: sublatus est. atque is, antequam constitit, ictu fulminis deflagavit. quanto melius fuerat in hoc promissum patris non esse servatum. quid quod Theseus exegit promissum a Neptuno?* (*De Off.* 3.25.94).⁶

There is little of Phaethon in Roman literature before Ovid. Cicero in his *Phaenomena* (146–8) expands Aratus' single line allusion by a lengthy elucidation of the epithet πολυκλαύτου: *funestum magnis cum viribus amnem, | quem lacrimis maestae Phaethontis saepe sorores | sparserunt letum maerenti*

¹ Why and from what source the name Merops was chosen is indeterminate. In Greek tradition Merops was the most famous legendary ruler of Cos: cf. *R.E.* xv. 1065 f. Hesychius has the note Μέροπος . . . ἀπὸ Μέροπος τοῦ πατρὸς (Wilamowitz: πρὸ codd.) Φαέθοντος Κωιοῦ. Phaethon's mother is regularly called Clymene (for an exception see p. 31), but the name need not have been first given her by Euripides (it is borne by a Nereid at *H. Il.* 18.47 and by a daughter of Oceanus and Tethys at *Hes. Theog.* 351, 508).

² Σ *H. Od.* 11.326 [= *Hes. fr.* 62 MW] says ἐνιοι δὲ αὐτὴν [τὴν Κλυμένην] προγαμηθῆναι φασιν Ἑλίου, ἐξ οὗ Φαέθων ἐγένετο παῖς. We do not know whom he meant by ἐνιοι.

³ See pp. 182 f., 186, 200.

⁴ See pp. 96 f.

⁵ 'Before coming to a halt', i.e. 'in mid flight'. See pp. 41, 196.

⁶ For the 'promise' see lines 45–8 of the play. The same two examples of fatal promises are found at *De Nat. Deor.* 3.31.76: *deus falli qui potuit? an ut Sol in currum cum Phaethontem filium sustulit, aut Neptunus cum Theseus Hippolytum perdidit, cum ter optandi a Neptuno patre habuisset potestatem?*

PROLEGOMENA

voce canentes. Catullus speaks in neoteric fashion of the metamorphosed poplars: *non sine nutanti platano lentaque sorore | flammati Phaethontis* (64.290 f.). Lucretius tells briefly of Phaethon's ride: *avia cum Phaethonta rapax vis Solis equorum | aethere raptavit toto terrasque per omnis. | at pater omnipotens ira tum percitus acri | magnanimum Phaethonta repenti fulminis ictu | deturbavit equis in terram, Solque cadenti | obvius aeternam suscepit lampada mundi | disiectosque redegit equos iunxitque tremantis, | inde suum per iter recreavit cuncta gubernans, | scilicet ut veteres Graium cecinere poetae* (5.397–405). The manner in which the Sun-god's rescue of the bolting horses is described suggests that Euripides is not the least among the *Graium poetae* to whose authority Lucretius appeals (see p. 196). The isolated line of Varro Atacinus (*fr.* 10 Morel) *tum te flagranti deiectum fulmine, Phaethon*, perhaps translates Ap. Rh. 4.597 f. (quoted above). Virgil at *Ecl.* 6.62 f. curiously calls Phaethon's sisters *Phaethontiadēs*,¹ and he transforms them not into poplars but into alders; and at *Aen.* 10.189–93 he alludes to the story (derived perhaps from Phanocles) of the love of Cycnus for Phaethon. Horace adduces Phaethon, alongside Bellerophon, as a caution against overreaching ambition: *terret ambustus Phaethon avaras | spes* (*Carm.* 4.11.25 f.). And the author of the *Culex* is unable to mention the poplar without appending a crabbed account of its mythical origin: *at, quibus ignipedum* (Heinsius: *insigni codd.*) *curru proiectus equorum | ambustus Phaethon luctu mutaverat artus, | Heliades teneris implexae brachchia truncis | candida fundebant tentis velamina ramis* (127–30).

The Greek sources which Ovid used for his Phaethon narrative in the *Metamorphoses* are uncertain. The influence of Euripides, who was not his chief source, can alone be recognised. Certain of the unconventional details from the Euripidean version, though incompatible with the version which served as the basis of Ovid's account, found an unhappy and precarious place in his narrative (see pp. 182 f.,

¹ He is followed by several later authors: see Knaack, *Myth. Lex.* III. 2202.

THE MYTH

186, 200). But after Ovid the search for Euripides must cease. Ovid's successors, both Roman and Greek, could not remain immune from his influence. The poets of the Silver Age did not emulate him but were content to employ the briefest allusions to the story.¹ Soon the rhetorical aspects of the myth passed into the repertoires of the declamatory schools. Τίτιν ἄν λόγοις χρῆσαιτο Ζεὺς ἐπιτιμῶν Ἑλίωι ὅτι τὸ ἄρμα ἔδωκε Φαέθοντι; was the theme of the Greek hexameters, inspired by Ovid, of a Roman schoolboy in the time of Domitian.² Only one later poet, Nonnus, writing in the fifth century at Egyptian Panopolis, ventured to compose a Phaethontic narrative as ambitious as that of Ovid. That Nonnus' account is often close in content and expression to the narrative of Ovid has fostered a belief, propounded long ago and current still, that each poet drew independently upon a common model, a hypothetical epyllion composed in Hellenistic times (see pp. 180–200). The truth is rather that Ovid's influence had penetrated even to Panopolis and that the *Metamorphoses* must be acknowledged to be no small element in that 'great variety of learning' of this 'able Grammarian though... very ordinary Poet'.³

¹ For references see Knaack, *Myth. Lex.* III. 2192 f. To the allusions in Statius may be added *Theb.* 2.281, with *Heliadum* for *Hesperidum* as suggested by J. B. Poynton, *C.R.* LXXVII (1963), 259.

² See pp. 201 f. I have nothing to say about the inscrutable and half-literate Greek anapaestic monody found on a papyrus of the late second century A.D. (H. J. M. Milne, *Cat. Lit. Pap. Brit. Mus.* [London 1927], no. 51; E. Heitsch, *Die griechischen Dichterfragmente der römischen Kaiserzeit* [Göttingen 1963], I, pp. 42–4, with review of the earlier literature), except that claims that it is a lament by Helios for Phaethon are patently false.

³ Bentley, *Phalaris*, p. 90 Wagner.—Upon the possible origins of the Phaethon myth much speculation, from which I have derived little profit, may be found in Arbois de Jubainville, 'Note sur les origines de l'ambre, Phaéthon, l'Eridan, les Ligures et les Celtes', *Bull. Soc. nat. des Antiquaires de France* (1876), 134–42, and G. Capovilla, 'Le Ἑλιόδεσσις ἐσχίλου: Problemi sull'Eridanos, sugli Hyperboreoi, su Kyknos e Phaethon', *Rend. d. Ist. Lomb.* ser. III. XIX (1955), 414–82. J. G. Frazer, *Apollodorus* (Loeb 1921), II. 388–94, cites remarkable parallels to the myth from North America. The popular notion, suggested by Robert,

PROLEGOMENA

B. PHAETHON AND HESIOD

1. *Theog.* 984–91

Τιθωνῶι δ' Ἡὼς τέκε Μέμνονα χαλκοκορυστῆν,
 Αἰθιοπῶν βασιλῆα, καὶ Ἡμαθίωνα ἀνακτα. 985
 αὐτάρ τοι Κεφάλωι φιτύσατο φαίδιμον υἷον,
 ἴφθιμον Φαέθοντα, θεοῖς ἐπιείκελον ἀνδρα·
 τόν ῥα νέον τέρεν ἀνθος ἔχοντ' ἔρικυδέος ἠβης
 παῖδ' ἀταλά φρονέοντα φιλομμειδῆς Ἀφροδίτη
 ὄρτ' ἀνερειψαμένη καὶ μιν ζαθέοις ἐνὶ νηοῖς 990
 νηοπόλον μύχιον ποιήσατο, δαίμονα δῖον.

991 μύχιον] ὄχιον codd.: cf. Σ (p. 291 Flach) τουτέστιν ἀφανῆ λαθραῖον· Ἄρισταρχος δὲ γράφει μύχιον, ὅσον ἐν τῶι μυχωῖ τῶι ἀδύτῳι.

§ 1. *Interpretation.* Phaethon is described as a handsome youth who excites the admiration of Aphrodite. She carries him off, appoints him her temple-keeper and makes him immortal. His fate is similar to that of the Homeric Erechtheus, whom Athene locates in her temple on the Acropolis.¹ Both are to be thought of as dwelling alive in the temples of their goddesses, Phaethon in the inner shrine.² The legend is referred

Hermes xviii (1883), 440, that Phaethon's fall attempts to explain in mythical terms why the sun sinks blazing in the west as if crashing to earth in flames and yet returns to its task unimpaired the following day, cannot be entertained. Phaethon's crash is an event out of the ordinary, a sudden and unexpected calamity, occurring once and not daily. If we must try to explain myths in these terms, I have more sympathy with the view advanced by Goethe and developed by F. X. Kugler, *Sibyllinischer Sternkampf und Phaethon* (Münster 1927) [known to me only through the review by W. Gundel in *Gnomon* iv (1928), 449–51] that the picture of a blazing sun-like body falling from heaven accompanied by a crash of thunder may have been suggested by the experience of falling meteorites. For typical descriptions of the impressions both of sight and sound made by such phenomena on bewildered onlookers see Sp. N. Marinatos, 'Two Interplanetary Phenomena of 468 B.C.', *Πραγματεῖαι τῆς Ἀκαδημίας Ἀθηνῶν*, xxiv, 4 (1963).

¹ *Il.* 2.546–51. Cf. Rohde, *Psyche* (English transl. by W. B. Hillis), 98 and 111 n. 35. For other parallels see West on *Theog.* 991.

² This, rather than underground (Rohde, 111 n. 35), is probably the implication of μύχιον.

THE MYTH

to by Pausanias in his description of the Stoa Basileios in the Athenian Cerameicus (1.3.1):

ταύτης ἔπεστι τῶι κεράμωι τῆς στοᾶς ἀγάλματα ὀπτῆς γῆς, ἀφιεῖς Θησεύς ἐς θάλασσαν Σκίρωνα καὶ φέρουσα Ἡμέρα Κέφαλον, ὃν κάλλιστον γενόμενόν φασιν ὑπὸ Ἡμέρας ἔρασθεισῆς ἀρπασθῆναι· καὶ οἱ παῖδα γενέσθαι Φαέθοντα, (ὃν ὕστερον ἢ Ἄφροδίτῃ ἦρπασε) καὶ φύλακα ἐποίησε τοῦ ναοῦ. ταῦτα ἄλλοι τε καὶ Ἡσιόδος εἶρηκεν ἐν ἔπεσι τοῖς ἐς τὰς γυναικάς.¹

Pausanias' φύλακα τοῦ ναοῦ paraphrases Hesiod's νηοπόλον.

Two late authors hint at the tale and interpret Aphrodite's interest in Phaethon as erotic: Clem. Alex. *Protr.* 2.29 Ἄφροδίτῃ δὲ ἐπ' Ἄρει κατηιχυμένη μετῆλθεν ἐπὶ Κινύραν καὶ Ἀγχίσην ἔγημεν καὶ Φαέθοντα ἐλόχα καὶ ἦρα Ἀδώνιδος, Arnobius *Adv. Gent.* 4.27 *nonne vestris cautum est litteris (various love affairs of goddesses and mortals)... et post Vulcanum Phaethontem Martem in Anchisae nuptias ipsam illam Venerem Aeneadam matrem et Romanae dominationis auctorem?*²

§2. *Misinterpretation.* It was upon a misconception of these lines that Wilamowitz built his reconstruction of our play. Pursuing a hint offered by the Hellenistic astronomers he claimed that Phaethon was to be interpreted in these lines as the Morning and Evening Star, Phosphoros-Hesperos, the two phases of the planet Venus. The story reflected by Hesiod, he suggested, told of a mortal youth endowed with such surpassing beauty that he was elevated to heaven by

¹ = [Hes.] *fr.* 375 MW. For the identification of Hemera with Eos see *Myth. Lex.* 1. 2032. A supplement such as that of Hartung and Urlichs printed in the text is demanded by both sense and syntax. Pausanias' attribution of the story to the *Catalogue of Women* must be a mistake: see West on *Theog.* 986–91.

² It remains very doubtful whether we should adduce, in evidence for a cult connection between Aphrodite and Phaethon on Samothrace, Pliny *N.H.* 36.5.25: *Scopae* (the sculptor, saec. iv) *laus cum his certat. is fecit Venerem et Pothon et Phaethontem, qui Samothrace sanctissimis caerimoniis coluntur.* Most manuscripts omit *Phaethontem*; his inclusion is defended by K. Kerényi, *Symb. Osl.* xxxi (1955), 141 f.