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.
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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 φαεθόν is several times attached as an epithet to Helios; and just as ὑπερπόν is used in early poetry both as an epithet of Helios and as the name of Helios' father, so the epithet φαεθόν 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). 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 H. 11.195, Od. 5.479, 11.16, 19.441, 22.988; cf. Ἡ. Ἁθ. 760, S. El. 894, E. El. 484. The name Phaethon is applied to a horse of Eos at Od. 23.496, 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. 11.959, al., Mart. 3.675, St. Theb. 4.717; Orph. fr. 238.10 Kern, Nonnus passim (cf. esp. 38.151 f. Ἡλίας οὗτος ἀκέως ἀποδοκοῦντα οὖν θεὸς), Hadrian A.P. 9.197.3.

2 Cf. M. L. West on Ἡθ. Th. 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.
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story. For the myth of Phaethon and the Heliades Pliny cites the five earliest authorities known to him: Phaethonis fulmine siti sorores luctu mutatas in arbores populos lacrimis electrum omnibus annis fundere iuxta Eridanum annem, quem Padum vocavimus, electrum appellatum quoniam sol vocitatus sibi Elector, plurimi poetae dixerunt primique, ut arbitror, Aeschylus Philoxenus Euripides Nicander Satyros (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 Satyros,4 we have no evidence. Euripides speaks of the amber tears of the Heliades in a choral ode of the Hippolytus: ‘Ἡριενευνόθ 9’ οὗον / ἕνα παρφόρον στολάς-/cous’ ἐν οξύμα τάλαναι / κόραι Φαέθοτος ὀξύτοι δακρύων / τὰς ἥλετροφασίς 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’ ὑπὸν ἀγαθῆναι, ὡς πὸτε Φαέθος Ἐλλῆν πατὴρ τοῦ πατρός

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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. 37.4.40) Sophocles said that amber was produced beyond India from the tears of the nulaeagrides (quince-fowl) lamenting Medea: cf. A. C. Pearson, Fragments of Sophocles, n. 66, and see below, p. 46.

2 =fr. 65 Schneider. Nicander’s date is uncertain: see Gow and Scholfield, Nicander: The Poems and Poetical Fragments (Cambridge 1953), 3–8. His Heteromenea 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, Nicander und Ovid (Groningen 1909), 105–9.

3 He wrote about precious stones: cf. Pliny N.H. 37.6.91 and 37.7.94, R.E. xi. 235.

4 Even if amber tears appeared in our play (cf. p. 46), the Eridanus did not.
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άρμα χεώςας διά τό μή δυνατός εἶναι κατά τήν τοῦ ποτρός δύον ἐκλεόντων τά τ’ ἔπι γῆς συνάκαους καὶ αὐτὸς κεραυνωτικής διεφάρη. 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. 345α; cf. Diod. Sic. 5.23.2). The Hellenistic poets furnish scattered allusions. Aratus speaks of the constellation Ποταμός as λείψανον Ἡριδανόῳ πολυκλάυντος ποταμοῦ (360), the epithet suggesting the lamentations of the Heliades. Apollonius Rhodius also speaks of the Eridanus, ἕνθα ποτ’ αἰθαλόντι τυπῆς πρὸς τήρια κεραυνοῖ / ἠμιάσας Φαέθον πέεν ἄρματος ἸΕλιοῖο / Λήμυς ής προχός πολυβεθέος: ἡ δ’ ἐτὶ νῦν περ’ τραύματος αἰθωμένου βαρὺν δαναικὴς στῆμαν (4. 597–600).¹ And a story which probably dealt with the association between Phaethon and a comrade Cycnus found a place in the Ἑρωτείς ή 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 614–6, 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: ἰρεῖα ἔληψασθε, óπποὶ (cf. Str. 9.2.25 etc., Verg. Ed. 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 (Πλ. 2 Ἡριδανόῳ ταξίδε παρ’ ἡλίον). Lines 3–4 allude to the broken chariot. Lines 5–6: Φαέθων, οὐ θάνατον σέρεα κεραυνός, / δοὺς ὑπερεχθεῖαι χρύσον όλον ἑκατὸν (ed. pr.). Lines 7–8: he will be lamented by his sisters: φθινον κλαίσανταί (κλαυθ- par.) δολεῖν / —στέφεια πλησάσθησαι.
³ Diod. Sic. 5.39.2 testifies to the popularity of the myth, which, he claims, has been recounted by πολλοί...τῶν τε ποιητῶν καὶ τῶν συγγραφέων.
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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 Ethiopian king Merops, he is seeking to elaborate his predecessor’s more straightforward plot. These features, whether or not they were Euripides’ own invention, gained no place in the later poetic tradition. 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 Ovid and Seneca. Cicero betrays an acquaintance with it: Sol Phaethontis filio, ut redeamus ad fabulas, factum se esse dixit quidquid optasset. optavit ut in currum patris tolleretur: sublatus est. atque is, antequam constitisset, iuc ultra fulminis deflagravit. quanti melius fuerat in hoc promissum patris non esse servatum. quid quod Theseus exagit promissum a Neptuno? (De Off. 3.25.94).∗

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 παλυκλητόν: ānem magnis cum viribus annem, / quem lacrimis maesta Phaethontis saepe sorores / sparsarunt letum maerenti

1 Why and from what source the name Merops was chosen is indeterminable. In Greek tradition Merops was the most famous legendary ruler of Cos: cf. R.E. xiv. 1065 f. Hesychius has the note Μέρωπος... ἀπὸ Μέρωπος θου πατρὸς (Wilamowitz; πρὸ codd.) Θαδοῦντος Κωνιό. 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. Ill. 18.47 and by a daughter of Oceanus and Tethys at Hes. Theog. 351, 508).

2 Σ. H. Od. 11.326 [–Heis. fr. 68MW] says ἔνοι τε σοῦ τὴν [τὴν Κυ-


∗ For the ‘promise’ see lines 45–6 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 Ἰππολύτum perdidit, cum ter optandi a Neptuno patre habuisset potestatem?

7
voce canentes. Catullus speaks in neoteric fashion of the metamorphosed poplars: non sine mutantibus planis lentisque sorore / flammati Phaethonis (64.290 f.). Lucretius tells briefly of Phaethon’s ride: avia cum Phaethonta rapax vis Sols equorum / aethere rapta totu terraque per omnis. / at pater omnipotens ira tum / percutitis acri / magnanimum Phaethonta repente fulminis ietu / deturbavit equis in terram, Solque cadenti / obius aeternam suscepit / lampada mundi / disiectaque redigit equis luxisque trementis, / inde / suum per iter recreavit cuncta gubernans, / sicut 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 Graum poetae to whose authority Lucretius appeals (see p. 196). The isolated line of Varro Atacinus (fr. 10 Morel) tum te flagrantis dextrem / fulmine, Phaethon, perhaps translates Ap. Rh. 4.597 f. (quoted above). Virgil at Ecl. 6.62 f. curiously calls Phaethon’s sisters Phaethontiades,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 Cyncus for Phaethon. Horace addsuces Phaethon, alongside Bellerophon, as a caution against overreaching ambition: terret ambustus / Phaethon auras / spes (Carm. 4.11.1.25 f.). And the author of the Culex is unable to mention the poplar without appending a crabbled account of its mythical origin: at, quibus ignipedum (Heinsius: insigni codd.) curru proiectus equorum / ambustus Phaethon luctu mutaverat artus, / Heliades teneris implices brachia / truncis / candida fundabant 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., 2002.

¹ He is followed by several later authors: see Knaack, Myth. Lex. m.
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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. Soon the rhetorical aspects of the myth passed into the repertories of the declamatory schools. Τίνα δὲν λόγος χρήσιμος Ζέας ἐπηγγέλων Ἡλίασ ὅτι τὸ ἄρμα δοκεῖ Φαέθωντι; was the theme of the Greek hexameters, inspired by Ovid, of a Roman schoolboy in the time of Domitian. 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’.

1 For references see Knaack, Myth. Lex. iii. 2192 f. To the allusions in Statius may be added Theb. 2.281, with Heliodorus for Hesperidum as suggested by J. B. Poyntton, G.R. lxxxvi (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 for Helios for Phaethon are patently false.

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B. PHAETHON AND HESIOD

1. Theog. 984–91

Τιθώνω δ' Ἡλέκ τέκε Μήδους χαλκοκορυστήν,
Αθήνας βασιλῆς, καὶ ᾿Ημιθίωνα διαστα.

αὐτὰρ τοῖς Κεράλωι φιτύσκατο φαίδομεν υόν,
ἲθημιον Φαεθόντα, θεὸς ἐπειδῆκεν ἄνδρα·
τὸν ρὰ νέον τέραν ἀνθὸς ἔχοντ᾽ ἐρυκτήδες ἐβής
παιδ᾽ ἀπάλα φρονόντα φιλομεμήθη Ὀμροδίτη
ἄρτεν ἀνεφευμάζη καὶ μνεῖα δοθεὶς ἐνὶ ἱερὸς

νηπιότολον μύχιον τοιῆσσο, δαίμονα δίον.

991 μύχον] μύχοιν codd.: cf. Σ (p. 291 Flach) τουόταν ἄφονη λαθάροιν·
‘Ἀρίσταρχος δὲ γράφει μύχιον, οἷον ἐν τοῖς μυχίσι τοῖς ἄδυτοις.

§ 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 god-
desses, Phaethon in the inner shrine. 2 The legend is referred

Hermes 8 να (189g), 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,
Sibyllinisches Sterbkatuff und Phaethon (Münster 1927) [known to me only
through the review by W. Gundel in Gramm 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 48g B.C.,
Πραγματεία τῆς ᾿Άναθημᾶς Ἀθηνῶν, xxiiv, 4 (1965).
1 Il. 2,546–51. Cf. Rohde, Psyche (English trans. 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 μύχον.
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to by Pausanias in his description of the Stoa Basileios in the Athenian Ceramicus (1.3.1):

ταύτης ἐπετεὶ τῷ κεράμῳ τῆς στοάς διγύλλας ὑππῆς γῆς, ἀριεῖ Θησεύς ἐκ θάλασσας Σκύρωνα καὶ φέροντα Τιμήρα Κέφα-

λου, διὸ κάλλιστον γενόμενον φαίνει ὑπὸ Ἡμέρας ἔρακτον ἔρισθήκον: καὶ οἱ παιδὰ γενέθαι Φαῖδοντα, ἐν ὥστεν ἡ

Ἀφροδίτη ἕρπασε καὶ φύλακα ἐποίησε τοῦ ναοῦ. ταῦτα

ὅλοι τε καὶ Ἡσιόδος ἔφηκαν ἐν ἑπετεὶ τοῖς ὑπὸ τὰς γυναικάς.\(^1\)

Pausanias' φύλακα τοῦ ναοῦ paraphrases Hesiod's νηστήλον.

Two late authors hint at the tale and interpret Aphrodite's interest in Phaethon as erotic: Clem. Alex. Protr. 2.29 ἢ Ἀφροδίτη ἔδε ἐπ᾽ Ἕρατι κατηχευμένη μετήθηκαν ἐπὶ Κυνόραν

καὶ Ἀγγείσιν ἔγημεν καὶ Φαῖδοντα δόξα καὶ ἱερὰ Ἀσώνιδος,

Arnobius Adv. Gent. 4.27 nonne vestris cautem est litteris (various love affairs of goddesses and mortals)... et post Vulcanum

Phaethontem Martem in Anchisae nuptias ipsam illam Venerem

Aeneadum materem et Romanae dominationis autorem.\(^2\)

§ 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. 375MW. For the identification of Hemera with Eos see

_Myth. Lex._ 1. 2092. A supplement such as that of Hartung and Urichs 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 Thag. 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: Sosippe (the sculptor, see, iv) laus cum his certat. is

facti Venerem et Polhon et Phaethontem, qui Samothraean sanctissimis cœrimenis

coluntur. Most manuscripts omit Phaethontem; his inclusion is defended