

# The blind bard and ‘I’: Homeric biography and authorial personas in the twelfth century

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*This paper explores correspondences between biographical attributes of Homer and self-representation in twelfth century texts: The first section deals with the blind bard’s presence in Theodoros Prodromos’ Sale of poetical and political lives and the ‘rhetoric of poverty’ in his poetry; the second with Ioannes Tzetzes’ class-room persona and the emplotment of Homer’s biography in the Exegesis on the Iliad; the third with the same author’s take on ancient traditions about the initially unstable situation of the Homeric text and his struggle to secure the immortality of his own name.*

## Introduction

In his famous 1969 essay ‘What is an Author?’ Michel Foucault designated the indifference towards the ‘author’ as one of the most ‘fundamental ethical principles’ of twentieth century writing, adding ‘I say “ethical” because this indifference is not really a trait characterizing the manner in which one speaks and writes, but rather a kind of immanent rule [...] dominating it as a practice’.<sup>1</sup> The history of how this essay became grouped with Roland Barthes’ 1968 manifesto ‘The Death of the Author’ and rashly interpreted as an expression of the very same indifferent author-ethics it trivialized as only one possible stance begins already in the questions-and-answers session following Foucault’s first reading of this text.<sup>2</sup> What rules dominated the practices of twelfth century Constantinopolitan literary elites? In order to partially explore the ethics of authorship that pervaded this era I wish to put to the test a hypothesis saying that the same ethics affected the way in which writers in this context conceptualized ancient authorships and configured their own authorial personas. In exploring this link

1 M. Foucault, ‘Qu’est-ce qu’un auteur?’, *Bulletin de la Société française de Philosophie* 63 (1969) 73–104: 77; translation from J. V. Harari, *Textual strategies: perspectives in post-structuralist criticism* (Ithaca, NY 1979) 142.

2 See Foucault’s answer to the criticism of Lucien Goldmann: ‘Définir de quelle manière s’exerce cette fonction, dans quelles conditions, dans quel champ, etc., cela ne revient pas, vous en conviendrez, à dire que l’auteur n’existe pas’ (Foucault, *op. cit.*, 100); cf. J. Gallop, *The deaths of the author: reading and writing in time* (Durham, NC 2011) 2–4.

between ancient authors and self-representation I will focus in particular on the works of Theodoros Prodromos and Ioannes Tzetzes, and the way in which they represent Homer.

## 1. The art of selling your life

Let us begin by translating the question ‘What is an author?’ into the literary language used in the context we will be dealing with. This is not an entirely straightforward task; already in the third century Dio Cassius in his *Roman History* (55.3.4–5) noted that the Latin word *auctoritas* cannot be translated into Greek by a single word. The first issue we need to address is the sharp medial difference between the mass-produced literary texts of our contemporary societies and the urbane literary culture of performance and manuscript dissemination in Comnenian Constantinople. At the court or in the *theatron*, i.e. in the various settings where texts were performed before a critical audience of students and/or literati,<sup>3</sup> the author stood before the recipients in the flesh. The indifference that characterized the author-ethics of the twentieth century very much depended on the epigrammatic nature of a text as a silent sequence of signs found in a printed volume; as Roland Barthes put it in the aforementioned epitome of this attitude: ‘Writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing’.<sup>4</sup> But whenever this ‘body’ physically mediates the text to the interpreter it will be more difficult to feel indifferent towards it or evade its authority simply by declaring it ‘dead’. However, this did not necessarily force Byzantine performers to equate their authorial voice with the self, but rather it seems to have been a factor that prompted them to experiment with various ethopoetic personas.<sup>5</sup> The shape shifting sea deity Proteus served as a model for the sophist not only for Plato (*Euthyd.* 288b) and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Demosthenes* 8), but also for Michael Choniates.<sup>6</sup>

But in the manuscripts the situation was different. In this cultural sphere of textual recycling the absent author could never know what would happen with the work once it left his or her hands, and in a sense the ancient author stood as an incontrovertible *memento mori* – always a long gone figure that had left the text as an epitaph on cracked stone addressing the reader as a stranger passing by. The author’s name,

3 See for example P. Marciniak, ‘Byzantine theatron – a place for performance?’, in M. Grünbart (ed.), *Theatron: Rhetorische Kultur in Spätantike und Mittelalter* (Berlin and New York 2007) 275–83; I. Toth, ‘Rhetorical *theatron* in Late Byzantium: the example of Palaiologan imperial orations’, *Theatron*, 429–48; E. C. Bourbouhakis, ‘Rhetoric and performance’, in P. Stephenson (ed.), *The Byzantine world* (London and New York 2010) 175–87.

4 R. Barthes, ‘La mort de l’auteur’, *Mantéia* 5 (1968) 12–17; 12; translation from *Image, music, text*, trans. S. Heath (New York 1977) 142.

5 See E. C. Bourbouhakis, ‘“Political” personae: the poem from prison of Michael Glykas: Byzantine literature between fact and fiction’, *BMGS* 31 (2007) 53–75: 69.

6 *Orations*, ed. S. P. Lampros, Μιχαὴλ Ἀκομινάτου Χωνιάτου τὰ σωζόμενα, I (Athens 1879) 1.1; cf. P. Magdalino, *The empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143–1180*. (Cambridge 1993) 337; Bourbouhakis, ‘Rhetoric and performance’, 179.

inflected, for instance, in the genitive case and placed before the title of the work, was in constant danger of mutations: attributions, dis-attributions and re-attributions of texts to authors was – as it still is – an appealing way for philologists to engage with texts,<sup>7</sup> and even without any deliberate intervention quires could fall out of manuscripts and titles skipped by copyists.

I will get back to these material conditions and related author anxieties in the third section of this article, but for the moment we shall leave them aside and consider instead a situation where the reader could feel fairly confident about the integrity of the name attached to a text. In this case it was an item of great significance. As a discursive function it had a specific meaning that would seriously alter the expectations of the reader and thereby also his or her interpretation of the text. If the meaning of the name was not clear it could be looked up in an encyclopedia like the *Suda* lexicon. Here one would learn about the textual field that the name stood for (that is, what works were attributed to this author) and also a set of 'biographemes',<sup>8</sup> basic data about the author's life such as place of birth, education, family, career and cause of death. With the canonical Classical authors the reader did not always have to go through all that trouble, but would find a 'life', a βίος, as a separate paratext within the manuscript itself or in the preface to an exegesis. For certain authors several lives, βιοί, dating to different periods and in turn attributed to various authors, were available. In the lives the basic biographemes could differ slightly and they were usually emplotted in varying ways. For instance, Homer was generally blind but the reasons for his blindness and its connection to other events in his life are not always the same.<sup>9</sup> To engage professionally with a text often meant getting involved in this tradition. In the philological works of Ioannes Tzetzes, biography has its given place in the preface and is occasionally used to explain events and characters in the poems.<sup>10</sup> It was also a genre in itself, as we can see from Konstantinos Manasses' *Life of Oppian* in political verses.<sup>11</sup>

A first attempt to translate the question 'What is an author?' may perhaps then be this: what is a βίος? If we direct this question to Theodoros Prodromos' satirical dialogue *Sale of poetical and political lives* (Βίων πρῶσις ποιητικῶν καὶ πολιτικῶν)<sup>12</sup> an answer may be elicited provided that we allow ourselves a certain measure of allegorical interpretation. This text is a sequel to Lucian's dialogue *Sale of lives* (Βίων πρῶσις) in which Zeus and Hermes put up Pythagoras, Socrates, Chrysippus and other philosophers for

7 Cf. *Scholia on Dionysius Thrax*, 304, 2–1; 471.34–472.2.

8 For this Barthian term and its implications for a reader's desire for the author see Gallop, *The deaths of the author*, 44–8.

9 See B. Graziosi, *Inventing Homer: the early reception of epic* (Cambridge 2002) 126–32.

10 *Ibid.* 159 n. 100.

11 Ed. A. Colonna, 'De Oppiani vita antiquissima', *Bollettino del comitato per la preparazione dell'edizione nazionale dei classici greci e latini* 12 (1964) 38–9.

12 Ed. T. Migliorini, *Gli scritti satirici in greco letterario di Teodoro Prodromo: introduzione, edizione, traduzione, comment* (diss. Pisa 2010) 127–36 (accessible on <http://opacbib.sns.it:8180/handle/10671.1/870>). See also P. Marciniak, 'Theodore Prodromos' Bion prasis – a reappraisal', *GRBS* 53 (2013) 219–39.

auction. The items sold in Lucian, however, are not really the historical individuals but abstractions of the philosophical schools they had founded. They represent philosophical life-styles or -isms, and the carnivalesque satire of this piece lies in the fact that ultimate life positions are sold off as simple commodities.<sup>13</sup> Lucian's dialogue ends with the promise that the auction will continue the following day with common lives (*ἀγοραῖοι βίοι*) but just like the famous promise at the end of the *True histories* it is one that will implicitly not be kept. It was not until a millennium later that Prodromos started where Lucian left off; it is morning and Zeus orders Hermes to start the auction again. The fundamental transformations of Lucian's satirical strategy are announced in the opening sections where Zeus clarifies that by *ἀγοραῖοι βίοι* he did not mean 'lives belonging to the agora' in the sense of craftsmen, but 'figures who speaks in public', meaning authors. On the following pages Homer, Hippocrates, Aristophanes, Euripides, Pomponius (who tends to answer the buyers with Latin *termini technici*) and Demosthenes must step down and present themselves to the buyers who question them on their pros and cons. In this way the Lucianic critique of the distance between the mundane philosophical life-styles of his day and the sublime systems of thought they derived from is transformed into a satirical allegory of reading, studying and imitating; these slaves are not founders of schools but authors of texts, founders of textual professionalisms, or perhaps even embodiments of books and classroom readings. At first they are asked about their nationality, career, family etc., i.e. their *βίος*, but the dialogue will soon move on to how they will benefit their buyer. Hermes constantly takes part in the conversation as the auctioneer whose primary role is to help the buyers understand what the authors are saying, translating, for instance, the Latin terms used by Pomponius; he is explicitly equated with the *λόγος* (as was often the case in allegorical traditions) and stands in for the hermeneutic method, the discipline of philology and the *grammatikos* (Prodromos' own profession).<sup>14</sup>

Any dilapidated notion of Byzantine writers as slavish imitators must be thrown out as we approach this text where it is the ancient authorships that are sold as *their* slaves, eager to serve and receive *their* patronage. Hippocrates will help the doctor to hide his gross incompetence under terminological nonsense and aphorisms about compassion, Euripides – with his countless interjections and tragic diction – will help you when bewailing a lost loved one, Pomponius will make you successful in law courts, Demosthenes in political situations, and Aristophanes – well, Aristophanes will not be useful for anything really and is never sold. This pragmatic and utilitarian perspective on the pagan classics had often pervaded Byzantine metaliterary discourse ever since Basil of Caesarea famously likened the task of reading this literature to avoiding the thorns when picking roses: 'we will pluck all that is useful (*chresima*) and protect

13 The dialogue is provided as an example of this satirical mode by M. Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*, trans. C. Emerson (Minneapolis 1984) 116.

14 Cf. P. Roilos, *Amphoteroglossia: a poetics of the twelfth-century medieval Greek novel* (Washington, DC 2005) 51–3.

ourselves from the harmful'.<sup>15</sup> To give only a few examples: the late antique *Life of Aesop* opens by declaring him 'most useful in life' (*biophelestatos*),<sup>16</sup> and in the ninth century Photios could recommend reading even the breathtaking fabrications in Ptolemaios Chennos' *Kaine Historia* since 'the book is truly useful' for anyone who wishes to appear learned.<sup>17</sup> The twelfth century is certainly no exception; the usefulness – the *biopheleia* – of Homer lies at the heart of the case made for him by Eustathios,<sup>18</sup> and Tzetzes presents Homer as a teacher of useful arts (*technai biopheleis*) such as 'grammar, poetry, rhetoric, metallurgy, mechanics, magic etc.'<sup>19</sup> Clearly, the first three items in this list are by far the most important; in the Homeric *Allegories* Tzetzes praises Homer for his ability either to exalt or bring down whatever he wishes,<sup>20</sup> and presents him as a source of rhetorical methods.<sup>21</sup> He will primarily be useful for the grammarian and rhetorician, and the way in which he is represented in the *Sale of poetical and political lives* highlights the benefits of literary imitation. Thus the text could certainly be read as a sort of 'why study Classics?' of the twelfth century.

Let us now turn to the blind bard, the first author to be sold in Prodrornos' dialogue, who takes up almost half the text. A literary meeting with Homer may stir up certain expectations of amazing answers to traditional biographical problems, such as that in Lucian's *True histories* where we learn that Homer was *really* a Babylonian named Tigranes who was not blind at all. But Prodrornos' Homer is not fantastic in that sense; rather, he is a personification of the Homeric texts and his βίος, including the various inconsistent biographical assertions. He is a poor blind man who tends to speak in hexameter verses, mostly in the form of a Homeric *parodia*, and at first even refuses to answer questions not put in this metre. He is simultaneously from Smyrna, Chios, Colophon, Ithaca, Pylos, Argos and Athens and thus called 'the one of seven

15 *To young men on how to profit from Hellenic literature*, ed. F. Boulenger, *Saint Basile. Aux jeunes gens sur la manière de tirer profit des lettres Helléniques* (Paris 1935) section 5. See Ch. Gnllka, *Χρησις: Die Methode der Kirchenväter im Umgang mit der antiken Kultur I: Der Begriff des "rechten Gebrauchs"* (Basel and Stuttgart 1984); T. M. Conley, 'Byzantine criticism and the uses of literature', in A. Minnis and I. Johnson (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, II: The Middle Ages* (Cambridge 2005) 669–92.

16 G. Karla, *Vita Aesopi: Ueberlieferung, Sprach und Edition einer fruehbyzantinischen Fassung des Aesopromans* (Wiesbaden 2001) section 1.

17 *Bibliotheca*, ed. R. Henry, *Photius. Bibliothèque*, III (Paris 1962) cod. 190, 146b.

18 Eustathios, *Parekbolai on the Iliad*, ed. M. van der Valk, *Eustathii archiepiscopi Thessalonicensis Commentarii ad Homeri Iliadem pertinentes* (Leiden 1971–87) 38.26–7; *Parekbolai on the Odyssey*, ed. J. G. Stallbaum, *Eustathii archiepiscopi thessalonicensis Commentarii ad Homeri Odysseam* (Leipzig 1825–1826) 1380.5; cf. F. Pontani, *Sguardi su Ulisse* (Rome 2005) 172–3; A. Basilikopoulou-Ioannidou, *Ἡ ἀναγέννησις τῶν γραμμάτων κατὰ τὸν 11<sup>ο</sup> αἰῶνα εἰς τὸ Βυζάντιον καὶ ὁ Ὀμηρος* (Athens 1971–72) 57–9.

19 *Exegesis on the Iliad*, ed. M. Papatomopoulos, 'Ἐξηγήσις Ἰωάννου Γραμματικοῦ τοῦ Τζέτζου εἰς τὴν Ὀμήρου Ἰλιάδα' (Athens 2007) 343.12–14.

20 *Allegories on the Odyssey*, ed. H. Hunger, 'Johannes Tzetzes, Allegorien zur Odyssee', *BZ* 48 (1955) 4–48 (books 13–24) and 49 (1956) 249–310 (books 1–12): verses 9.31–4.

21 *Allegories on the Iliad*, ed. J. F. Boissonade, *Tzetzæe Allegoriae Iliadis* (Paris 1851) verses 15.37–41.

cities' *ἐπιπόλις*, which ingenuously also hints, perhaps, at the alternative Egyptian descent known from Heliodoros,<sup>22</sup> since this epithet belongs to Egypt. Overall the richness of the biographical tradition is taken as an expression of his versatility and manifoldness. I shall not dwell on the details of this fascinating portrait, but we need to look closer at a few lines that will prove relevant as we proceed. Grabbing the blind old bard by the hand Hermes leads him down to the buyers and proclaims that he is selling a life 'that knows what is, what will be and what has been' (cf. *Iliad* 1.70). But the buyer is not so sure:

Καὶ μὴν πολλοῦ δεήσει θεωρήμων [Migliorini : θεωρήμασι cod.] τῶν ἐσομένων εἶναι, ᾧ μὴδὲ τῶν ὄντων τὰ ἐν ποσὶν ἐξέσται ὄραν, τυφλώττοντι ἐς τὸ ἔσχατον, ὡς, εἰ μὴ σὺ αὐτὸν ὑπεστήριζες τὴν λαιὰν ὑποθεῖς, τάχα ἂν οἱ καὶ τὸ κρανίον συμποδιοσθέντι κατέαγεν.

But he will hardly have knowledge of future events who cannot even see the present before his feet, as he is completely blind; so if you had not supported him with your left hand, he could have stumbled and smashed his head.<sup>23</sup>

This allusion to Homer's death according to the biographical tradition<sup>24</sup> is important; the fact that divine Homer did not have anyone to guide him and died a poor old man on Ios was an act of ingratitude that many poets must suffer. Accordingly, Hermes reacts strongly to the buyer's blasphemous suspicion and advertises Homer as 'the wisest of all' and again stresses his versatility; he is a benefactor of the gods and the ultimate panegyrist:

τηλικούτον εὐεργέτην [...], ὃς τῷ Διὶ μὲν ἐκείνῳ τὴν αἰγίδα καὶ τὸν κεραυνὸν ἐχαρίσατο, ἐμοὶ δὲ τὰ πτερὰ ταῦτα καὶ τὴν ῥάβδον καὶ τὰ χρύσεια πέδιλα, τὰς λευκὰς ὠλένας τῇ Ἥρᾳ, τὸν δὲ κεστὸν τῇ Ἀφροδίτῃ, τῇ δὲ Ἀθηνᾷ τοὺς γλαυκοὺς ὀφθαλμούς, τὴν δὲ τρίαῖναν τῷ Ἐνοσιγείῳ καὶ τὰ ὄπλα τῷ Ἄρει.

so great a benefactor, who provided legendary Zeus with the aegis and the thunder bolt, and me with these wings here and the staff and the golden sandals, Hera with her white arms, Aphrodite with her embroidering, Athena with her bright eyes, the Earth-shaker with his trident and Ares with his arms.<sup>25</sup>

Without Homer's epithets, mythical representations and heroic verses the Gods would go thirsting and starving; there would be no nectar to eat, no ambrosia to drink. The buyer notices the paradox in that Homer himself is blind and miserably poor yet lavishes great

22 *Aethiopica*, 2.34.5; 3.13.3–15; cf. Eustathios, *Parekbolai on the Iliad*, 4.21; *Parekbolai on the Odyssey*, 1379.64–1380.1; Tzetzes, *Exegesis on the Iliad*, 9.13–14.

23 Prodromos, *Sale of poetical and political lives*, 128.55–8.

24 *Contest between Homer and Hesiod*, ed. T. W. Allen, *Homeri opera*, V (Oxford 1912) 237.319–38. Proclus, *Life of Homer*, ed. T. W. Allen, *Homeri opera*, V (Oxford 1912) 100.11–101.1 Allen. See also section 3 below.

25 Prodromos, *Sale of poetical and political lives*, 128.60–4.

amounts of riches unto others. Why did he give away one hundred eyes to Argus but give none to himself? Hermes develops the contradictory nature of this βίος:

Καίτοι τὸ μέγιστον οὐπω ἀκήκοας, εἴσεαι γὰρ ἀκούσας

οἶν ἐκ ῥακέων ὁ γέρων ἐπιγουνίδα φαίνει.

Οὗτος τὸν Ἑλληνικὸν ἐκείνον συναγήγερκε ναύσταθμον καὶ τὴν ἵππον ἐκείνην καὶ τοὺς βασιλέας ἐκείνους καὶ Τροίαν ὅλην εἶλε μόνος καὶ τὸν κορυθαίολον αὐτὸς ἀπεκτονῶς Ἔκτορα τῷ τῆς Θέτιδος ἐπιγράφεται τὴν μεγαλουργίαν.

And yet you have not heard the greatest thing of all. For you will know once you have heard

what thigh-muscle the old man shows through his rags. [*Od.* 18.72]

For he gathered that Hellenic fleet and that horse and those kings and alone captured all of Troy and killed Hector with the glimmering helmet, ascribing his great deed to the son of Thetis.<sup>26</sup>

With a verse from the *Odyssey* Homer is conceptually equated with Odysseus disguised as a beggar when the suitors get a glimpse of his strong thigh-muscle hiding under the rags. Like Odysseus this old, blind beggar also harbours unexpected heroic powers, yet he is versatile and will also teach his buyer about music, banquets, love and other peacetime arts (128.85–129.102). Another important aspect is his myths and fantastic imagination:

ῥαδιώτατα γὰρ ἢ ἐς τοὺς Κύκλωπας σε ἀπαγαγὼν «ἄσπαρτα καὶ ἀνήροτα» ἐσθίειν παρασκευάσει ἢ Οὐλυμπόνδε ἀναβιβάσας, ὅπου μακάρων «ἔδος ἀσφαλὲς αἰὲν» ἄφθιτον «οὔτε χιῶν ἐπιπίλναται οὔτε ὄμβρω δεύεται», τοῦ νέκταρός σε ποτίσει καὶ ἐπισιτίσει τῆς ἀμβροσίας. [...] τὸ δὲ δὴ φρικτὸν τε καὶ δεινῶς τεράστιον διὰ τινὸς σε νεκυίας ζῶν ἐς τὸν Πλουτέα κατὰξει, καὶ φίλων ψυχὰς κατατεθνεῶτων καὶ αὐτῆς μητρὸς ὑποδείξειται. κάκεῖθεν τὰ ἀπόρρητα τελεσθέντα καὶ τῷ Θήβηθεν ξυγγενόμενον Τειρεσίᾳ πάλιν ὑπὲρ γῆς ἀναγάγη.

He will easily lead you to the Cyclops and prepare 'unsown and untilled crops' [*Od.* 9.109] for you to eat or lead you up to mount Olympus – 'the eternally fixed seat of the blessed, immortal, which 'neither snow touches nor is moistened with rain' [6.42–44] – and give you nectar to drink and serve you ambrosia. [...] And what is more frightening and terribly astonishing: he will lead you alive to Pluto through some sort of *nekuia* and show you the souls of your friends and of your very own mother. And once you have been initiated into the mysteries and conversed with Tiresias of Thebes he will lead you back up from there up to earth.<sup>27</sup>

26 Prodromos, *Sale of poetical and political lives*, 128.80–4.

27 Prodromos, *Sale of poetical and political lives*, 129.130–9.

Through his combination of fictional escapism with heroic grandeur and panegyric magnificence, this poor blind man turns out to be the richest life of them all (ὁ πλουσιώτατος, 130.163); he is the ultimate eulogist who owns nothing himself but can bestow incomparable gifts upon others; the buyer's attempt to haggle proves fruitless and he ends up paying the price Hermes asks for.

The focus on Homer's extraordinary power to praise gods and heroes is highly compatible with the growing tendency during the twelfth century to adopt Homeric themes, language and metre in panegyrics directed at members of the imperial family. By tapping into the heroism of archaic epic, writers found a suitable literary mode in which to express the military ideology of the Komnenoi.<sup>28</sup> Reincarnation of the blind bard emerged as a *desideratum*: Anna Komnene entitled her father's history *Alexias*, and wished to describe her husband 'as Homer extolled Achilles among the Achaeans' (*Alexias* 7.2.6). This trend was very much spearheaded by Prodrornos himself; when praising the feats of Ioannes Komnenos he repeatedly regrets that Homer cannot be brought back up from Hades to take on the impossible task at hand,<sup>29</sup> and in several other poems Homeric metre and language is used to eulogize the same emperor.<sup>30</sup> In one piece he even dramatizes the process of choosing this metre: when confronted with iambs and anacreontics

Ὁμήρου τὸ στόμα  
βρυχήσεται μέγιστον ἐξ ἄλλου μέρους·  
καὶ τίς βρυχηθμοὺς τοῦς ἐκείνου βαστάσοι  
μηδ' ἂν χανεῖν εὐξάιτο τὴν γῆν αὐτίκα;

55

the mouth of Homer | will fiercely roar from another direction. | Who could resist the  
roars of that man | without wishing that earth should immediately open?<sup>31</sup>

Homeric imitation offers a mode of expression with unparalleled grandeur when praising the heroes of his age, but this article is not about the language and magnificent objects of panegyrics but poetic subjects, and this is where I get to my main point: Just like Odysseus and Homer the heroic rhetor of the twelfth century may assume the guise of a beggar. The hardships that Homer had to suffer according to the biographical tradition, I would suggest, occasionally becomes a factor in what Roderick Beaton termed 'the rhetoric of poverty',<sup>32</sup> a panegyric mode of discourse characterized by communication

28 Basilikopoulou-Ioannidou, *Ἡ ἀναγέννησις πῶν γραμμάτων*, 124–26 and 131–3; P. Magdalino, *The empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 431; cf. also M. Bazzani, 'The historical poems of Theodore Prodrornos, the epic-Homeric revival and the crisis of intellectuals in the twelfth century', *BS* 65 (2007) 211–28; 222–5.  
29 *Historical poems*, ed. W. Hörandner, *Theodoros Prodrornos, Historische Gedichte* (Vienna 1974) verses 4.256–7; cf. also 11.17–20.

30 *Historical poems*, ed. Hörandner, 3, 6 and 26a.

31 *Historical poems*, ed. Hörandner, 56a.55–8.

32 R. Beaton, 'The rhetoric of poverty: the lives and opinions of Theodore Prodrornos,' *BMGS* 11 (1987) 1–28; M. Alexiou, 'The poverty of écriture and the craft of writing: towards a reappraisal of the Prodrornic poems', *BMGS* 10 (1986) 1–40.

between a magnificent object and a poor and miserable subject. To give one example: the employment of epic language and metre in Prodrornos' poem to Anna Komnene does not only highlight the greatness of its recipient, but also the Homeric qualities of the poet's persona. In this piece 'Prodrornos' recalls how his father encouraged him not to learn any normal profession but to study (*Historical poems* 38.13–44).<sup>33</sup> The poet obeyed him and set out on the seas of grammatical, rhetorical and philosophical education (45–63) only to find out afterwards that there is no gain in it and regret ever taking his father's advice (64–84). Still, he is happy to be the servant of 'wise lords' (87–97), but at the moment the situation is getting desperate:

νῦν δέ μοι εἰς τὸ κάταντες ἀποιχεται οἶον ἅπαντα  
 Μανδραβόλου τε πράγμασιν εἴσκομαι· ἄξια ταῦτα,  
 ἄξια, θεῖον ἄγαλμα λόγιό τε ἔμπνοον ἱρόν;  
 οὐκέτι τοῦτ' ἐρέεις· ἀληθέα γάρ τ' ἀγορεύεις. 100

But now almost everything has gone downhill for me | and my situation is like that of Mandrabolos. 'Are these things worthy, | are they worthy, you divine gift and inspired temple of λόγος?' | This you will not say anymore, since you tell the truth.<sup>34</sup>

Proverbial Mandrabolos found a buried treasure on the island of Samos but gradually lost his riches and went from dedicating a golden sheep in the shrine of Hera to one of silver in the next year and bronze in the third.<sup>35</sup> Similarly the poet is finding it more and more difficult to pay the proper sacrifice to his godlike patron. The same metaphor for panegyric is found in our satiric dialogue: when Hermes asks Homer to stop speaking in hexameter verse for just a moment, the bard answers in the same words that Zeus uses to praise Odysseus for his wisdom and devoutness, replacing the hero's name with *logos*:

Τέκνον ἐμόν, ποιόν σε ἔπος φύγεν ἕρκος ὀδόντων;  
 πῶς δ' ἂν ἔπειτα λόγιοι ἐγὼ θεῖοιο λαθοίμην,  
 ὃς περὶ μὲν νόον ἐστὶ βροτῶν, περὶ δ' ἱρὰ θεοῖσιν  
 ἀθανάτοισιν ἔθυσε, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν.

My child, what word just escaped the fence of your teeth? | How could I ever be forgetful of the divine logos, | which is in the mind of all men and offered sacrifices | to the immortal gods, who hold the broad heaven? [≈ Od. 1.64–67]<sup>36</sup>

In this way Homeric language and verse is associated with Odysseus and *logos*, defining it as something intrinsically connected to wisdom and paying honour to the gods. But the poet's unlimited benevolence can be met with ingratitude, just as when Homer died a poor old man according to the biographical tradition. He can never be brought back

33 Cf. Alexiou, 'The poverty of écriture', 17 n. 33; Beaton, 'The rhetoric of poverty', 5; see also Bazzani, 'The historical poems of Theodore Prodrornos', 220–2.

34 *Historical poems*, ed. Hörandner, 38.98–101.

35 Cf. *Suda*, ed. A. Adler (Leipzig 1928–38) ε 2659 = Ephorus, *FGrH* 70 F 59b; Diogenianus 4.62.

36 Prodrornos, *Sale of poetical and political lives*, 128.46–9.

from Hades to sing the emperor's praise, as we are repeatedly reminded in the prodromic panegyrics (see n. 29 above). Similarly, Prodromos needs to stay alive in order to continue offering his sacrifices of *logos* to his patrons:

ἀγχοῦ γὰρ θανάτοιο κατήλυθον, αὐτὸν ἐς Ἄϊδην.  
ἢ φάθι καὶ τι τέλεσσον ἐπάξιον οἴο λόγοιο  
ἢ με κύνεσσιν ἕα καὶ γύπεσι κύρμα γενέσθαι

For I am now close to death, to Hades himself. | Either grant and bestow unto me a gift that matches this speech | or let me become a prey of dogs and vultures.<sup>37</sup>

The same authorship ethics would also apply to contemporary 'beggar-poems' in other stylistic registers: The motifs of education, of the poet as a panegyric servant and benefactor, his poverty, sickness and impending death that would irrevocably put a stop to his activities – these elements are variously combined with praise of the recipient and sumptuous epithets in Prodromos' encomia in political verse, the ptochoprodromic corpus<sup>38</sup> including the poem to Manuel edited by Maiuri,<sup>39</sup> and in Michael Glykas' *Poem from prison*.<sup>40</sup> The same increasing corporate awareness – as Margaret Mullett once termed it<sup>41</sup> – of what it meant to be a professional intellectual during this time leaves traces both in the way in which the ethopoetic personas are designed in these texts and the appropriation of Homer as a paradoxically poor and miserable yet most generous benefactor towards gods and heroes in Prodromos' dialogue.

## 2. Authors and classroom authority

There is a similar relationship to Homer in one of the earliest known works by Ioannes Tzetzes, his *Exegesis on the Iliad*, which he seems to have written in his mid-twenties.<sup>42</sup> As a private teacher and writer on commission at the very beginning of his career, violent polemics were one of the most important tools in his rhetoric of self-promotion. In the introduction he notes that all of his predecessors in Homeric scholarship – from

37 *Historical poems*, ed. Hörandner, 38.116–18.

38 See M. Alexiou, 'Ploys of performance: games and play in the Ptochoprodromic poems', *DOP* 53 (1999) 92–109: 94–5, on 'pain and disease, death and resurrection' in these poems and 105–6; cf. also 'The poverty of écriture', 10. For *ethopoia* in the ptochoprodromika, see R. Beaton, 'Πτωχοπροδρομικά Γ': η ἠθοποιία του ἀτακτου μοναχού', in A. Kechagia-Lypourli and T. Petridis (eds.), *Μνήμη Σταμάτη Καρατζά: ερευνητικά προβλήματα νεοελληνικής φιλολογίας και γλωσσολογίας* (Thessalonike 1990) 101–7 (reprinted in R. Beaton, *From Byzantium to Modern Greece: medieval texts and their reception* (Aldershot 2008) no. X.

39 A. Maiuri, 'Una nuova poesia di Theodoro Prodromo in greco volgare', *BZ* 23 (1920) 397–407.

40 See Bourbouhakis, "'Political" personae', 59–62 (on various parallels with the ptochoprodromic poems) and 73 (on Hades).

41 M. Mullett, 'Aristocracy and patronage in the literary circles of Comnenian Constantinople', in M. Angold (ed.), *The Byzantine aristocracy, IX–XIII centuries*, British Archaeological Reports, International series, 221 (Oxford 1984) 173–201: 182.

42 Cf. Tzetzes, *Prolegomena on comedy*, ed. W. J. W. Koster, *Scholia in Aristophanem*, vol. 1.1a (Groningen 1975) 1.144–5: ὡς ἄρτι ποτὲ τὴν ἔφηβον ἠλικίαν πατῶν καὶ τὸν αἰθέριον ἐξηγούμενος Ὅμηρον.

Aristarchus to Porphyry and Heraclitus – have failed in the pedagogical aspect of their task since they did not provide the young student with a complete and unified work. At the end of his catalogue Tzetzes attacks the absurd interpretations found in the ‘vomit-inducing’ works of Michael Psellos,<sup>43</sup> and exhorts any student who wants to learn about comets to ‘throw off the burden of Psellos’ works [...] and turn instead to me, not some rich philosopher who lives in fame and luxury, but one who plucks his seeds from the grammarians, the noblest by far, yet who in other respects is poor and unfortunate’.<sup>44</sup> What can Tzetzes offer that philosophers cannot? As a professional philologist he has access to certain rare texts (in the case of comets the anonymous exegesis on Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos*)<sup>45</sup> and knows all sorts of obscure poetic fragments by heart. He also claims to employ a stricter hermeneutical system and unlike Psellos will not equate Homer’s gods with the Cherubim and Seraphim.<sup>46</sup> Equally important, however, are the final words in the quotation above: Tzetzes is a ‘poor and unfortunate’ man, and he adds ‘because of the malignant plotting of a powerful woman’ – one of many vague allusions scattered throughout his works to his falling out of favour with the wife of Isaac, eparch of Berroia, due to what Tzetzes himself later called his ‘high spirited, beautiful way of speaking’ (ἀγέρωχος καλλιπέπεια).<sup>47</sup> What is the function of this auto-biographeme in this context? We must remember that this text is not directed towards some lofty member of the imperial family, but his friends and students. A key to this problem is found in one of the most fascinating passages of the introduction to the *Exegesis*, a rather characteristic Tzetzian moment where he clearly breaks with generic expectations. Having dealt at length with different theories about the poet’s native land and family he suddenly presents an alternative and radically different theory:

εἰ δέ τις καὶ ἔτι περὶ τε πατρίδος αὐτοῦ καὶ πατρὸς διαμάχοιτο, ἐκχωρῶ μὲν ἐκείνῳ καθ’ ὅσον οἱ αἰρετόν ἐστι περὶ τούτων πολυπραγμονεῖν καὶ διαμάχεσθαι. ἐγὼ δὲ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων ἀφέμενος, πατρίδα φαίην ἂν εἰκότως Ὀμήρῳ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἀρετὴν καὶ τὴν ποίησιν, ἣν ὁ παγγήρωσ χρόνος τῆ λήθῃ οὐκ ἀπεμάρανε. Πατέρας δὲ

43 *Exegesis on the Iliad*, 5.12 (including the scholium).

44 *Ibid.* 421.4–9 (scholium on 5.20): τὸ βάρος ἀφείς τῶν λόγων τοῦ ἀνδρὸς [...] ἐμοὶ πρόσσχες, οὐ φιλοσόφῳ γε ὄντι πλουσίῳ καὶ περιβλέπτῳ καὶ τρυφῆλῳ, ἀλλὰ γραμματικῆς ἐκ γένους μὲν τῶν λίαν εὐγενεστάτων σπάσαντι τὴν σποράν, πένητι δὲ ἄλλως καὶ δυστυχεῖ.

45 Note that this anonymous commentary has survived and was edited by Hieronymus Wolf in *Hermetis philosophi de revolutionibus nativatum libri duo incerto interprete* (Basel 1559). See also Tzetzes’ own schol. ad loc. (438.12) and the scholium on *Allegories on the Iliad* 4.66–7.

46 Cf. also Tzetzes, *Little Big Iliad*, ed. P. L. M. Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzae Carmina Iliaca* (Catania 1995) 160 and 162 (scholia on 2.27 and 34).

47 Tzetzes, *Little Big Iliad*, 2.142–50; 3.284–9 (with scholium), 620–5; 702 and 753–8; It is also discussed in Tzetzes’ unedited *Exegesis on Porphyry’s Isagoge*, see *Vind. phil. gr.* 300, fol. 71<sup>r-v</sup>. Cf. M. J. Jeffreys, ‘The nature and origins of the political verse’, *DOP* 28 (1974) 141–95: 147; P. Magdalino, *The empire of Manuel I Komnenos*, 348–49; A. Kaldellis, ‘Classical scholarship in twelfth-century Byzantium’, in Ch. Barber and D. Jenkins (eds.), *Medieval Greek commentaries on the Nicomachean Ethics* (Leiden and Boston 2009) 1–43: 25.

αὐτοῦ τοὺς ἡμιθέους ἐκείνους καλῶ καὶ τοὺς ἥρωας· τέκνα δὲ τοὺς ἀπανταχῆ γῆς καὶ θαλάττης τῶν ἐκείνου ἐπῶν ἐπιγνώμονας.

But if anyone still wishes to quarrel about Homer's native land and his father, he has my blessing and may choose to inquire into and fight about these things. For my part I would say, leaving aside all other theories, that Homer's native land is reasonably his own excellence and his poetry, which time – the ager of all things – has not destroyed through oblivion. I call those demigods and heroes his parents, and all who are acquainted with his epics on earth and over the seas I call his children.<sup>48</sup>

The biographical problem is here solved by transforming it into an allegory of reading according to which all who are reached by Homer's poetry are his children. This concept of kinship runs through the opening paragraphs of the *Exegesis* and can be detected already in its dedicatory epigram where it is stated that Tzetzes has 'provided the children of Homer with a gift of Hermes' (παισὶν Ὀμηριάδαις ἑρμῆιον ὄπασα δῶρον, 3.3). These 'children of Homer' are all potential readers of Tzetzes' *Exegesis*. Homer – the author of one of the most fundamental school text – is naturally appropriated as a spiritual father of all young people. In order to claim authority as a Homeric exegete in this context, Tzetzes represents himself as 'the best son of Homer', his best reader. He is admittedly the youngest of all Homeric exegetes,<sup>49</sup> but this potential obstacle is effectively turned into an advantage:

γνώσι δὲ καὶ πάντες οἷος Ὀμήρου γόνος ἐνθάδ' ἰκάνω, ἠδὲ καὶ αὐτὸς Ὀμηρος γνοίη εἰν Αἴδαο, ὡς ἀγαθὸν καὶ παῖδα καταφθιμένοισι λιπέσθαι.

'But everyone knows' [*Il.* 23.661; 24.688.] 'what manner of son' [*Il.* 13.449] to Homer 'I am, who have come to this place' [*Il.* 13.449]. Even Homer himself would know in Hades 'that it is a good thing when a child is left behind when somebody dies'. [*Od.* 3.196]<sup>50</sup>

Like Prodromos the panegyrist, Tzetzes the teacher is also a poor benefactor, a benefactor of his young students, and they should treat him with the respect and gratitude that he is showing Homer; repaying his debt to the absent poet in Hades by fighting for his sake among the living and neutralizing the insults of his predecessors' interpretative mistakes is an important reason – we are told – for the project of the *Exegesis* as a whole:

ἡμεῖς δὲ (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀναλησίαν νοσοῦντες ἐσμεν, οὐδὲ περὶ τοὺς εὐεργέτας ἀγνώμονες, τὸν καλὸν Ὀμηρον ἐμπαροινεῖσθαι μὴ ἀνεχόμενοι [...]) τολμηρότερον οὕτω παρακινδυνεύοντες, τὸν μέγαν τοῦτον ὑπεισερχόμεθα ἄεθλον.

For my part I do not suffer from lack of feelings and could never act coldheartedly towards my benefactors, and accordingly I cannot endure these drunk slanderers of

48 *Exegesis on the Iliad*, 19.17–20.6.

49 *Exegesis on the Iliad*, 8.11: οὐνεκα δὴ γενεῆφι νεώτατός εἰμι μεθ' ὑμῖν.

50 *Exegesis on the Iliad*, 7.14–17.

noble Homer [...]. And so I will rather boldly run a high risk and enter into this great competition.<sup>51</sup>

Going back to the repeated allusions to his miserable life in this text I would suggest that these may be understood in connection with his claim to being a son of Homer, a professional intellectual, a teacher and self-sacrificing benefactor of the young. Poverty becomes an involuntary aspect of Tzetzes' personal *imitatio Homeri*, a circumstance that reinforces his position as a Homeric exegete. This is explicitly stated when Tzetzes deals with the poet's miserable death, and adds as a parenthesis that 'I am lucky to be unlucky in the company of such a man and thousands of other such men'.<sup>52</sup> The biography of Homer illustrates that poverty and illness have always been the undeserved lot of the intellectual, and even in this aspect Tzetzes is a model child of Homer.

### 3. The Homeric question and quest for eternal life

We now turn to the relationship between authorship and the written medium. An important aspect of the project Tzetzes outlines in the preface to his *Exegesis* is to avoid the 'scattered and sprinkled form' which characterized much Homeric scholarship as he knew it, i.e. in the form of scholia. Tzetzes' anxieties about textual atomization has been discussed in a section of an excellent chapter on this author by Felix Budelmann,<sup>53</sup> and as a continuation of this I would like to address problems with the written medium in general and how this relates to his representation of the 'Homeric question', if I am allowed to use this anachronistic term for the general notion of textual instability in the early transmission of the Homeric epics. Let us begin by examining yet another striking passage in Tzetzes' introduction to his *Exegesis* where he deals with Homer's intention when writing the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*:

Τοιοῦτος δὲ ὁ θειότατος ἀνὴρ γεγονώς, οἷον ἤδη αὐτὸν ὑπεθέμεθα, [...] ἠθέλησεν, ἵνα μὴ τῷ αὐτοῦ σώματι συναποθάνῃ καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ, μνήμᾳ τι τῆς ἐαυτοῦ ἀρετῆς καταλιπεῖν τοῖς μετέπειτα. εἰδὼς δὲ ὡς σπάνιον τῷ βίῳ πέφυκε τὸ σοφόν, πολλῶ δὲ πλείους οἱ ἄσοφοι [...] εὐλογιστίᾳ δὲ ἀρίστου σκοποῦ ἔκρινεν τὰ περὶ τὸν Τρωϊκὸν συγγράψασθαι πόλεμον, ὡς πᾶσιν ἐπίσης ἐντευκτὰ γίγνοιτο τὰ τούτου ποιήματα.

Since this most divine man was such as I have just now presented him [...] he wished to leave some monument of his goodness for future generations, in order that his soul should not perish together with his body. Since he moreover knew that wisdom by nature is scarce in human life, whereas the number of unwise is much

51 *Exegesis on the Iliad*, 7.2–8.

52 *Exegesis on the Iliad*, 56.18–19: Τοιοῦτῳ γὰρ ἀνδρὶ καὶ ἑτέροις μυρίοις τοιοῦτοις συνατυχῶν, εὐτυχῶ.

53 F. Budelmann, 'Classical commentary in Byzantium: John Tzetzes on ancient Greek literature', in R. K. Gibson and C. S. Kraus (eds.), *The classical commentary: histories, practices, theory* (Leiden 2002) 141–69: 153–7.

greater, [...] in his search for the best topic he wisely chose to write about the Trojan War, so that his poems would be equally accessible to all.<sup>54</sup>

Unlike Orpheus and his predecessors who had written on nature, astrology and magic, Homer decided to leave behind his wisdom in a form that would be agreeable to all. This concept of universality may be compared to what has been said in the previous section on the children of Homer being his readers all over the world, but also to the exoteric aim of Tzetzes' *Allegories of the Iliad*. In the prologue (32–4) to this text Tzetzes compares his task to that of Moses when parting the Red Sea: he will make the *Iliad* traversable to everybody and lay bare the secrets on the bottom of the Homeric ocean 'to all', i.e. fulfilling and sustaining Homeric ideas of universality.

But more importantly for our purposes here: in directing his work to everyone, Homer's overall objective was to obtain, as it were, eternal life, and he succeeded. For Tzetzes, longevity constitutes one of the most admirable aspects of Homer's authorship, and any failure to maintain his status is thus a particularly galling affront, as we can see in a note at the end of Tzetzes' scholia to his *Chiliades*. The scribe he had commissioned to copy out this work seems to have accidentally missed using red ink to mark the beginning of Homer's biography, and now Tzetzes addresses him "ass of a pig and sewer" and furiously blames him for not paying proper honour to the poet who is most useful in life and "living dead, speaking although he has passed away".<sup>55</sup> At the end of the scholium Homer is invoked to finish off the admonishment:

Ἦσχυνας μὲν ἐμήν ἀρετὴν, βλάβας δέ μοι ἵππους.  
 Τῶ οἱ ἀπεμνήσαντο καὶ ἐν θανάτοιο περ αἴση·  
 τοῦτό σοι ἀντὶ ποδὸς ξεινήϊον, ὃν ποτ' ἔδωκας·  
 οὐ γάρ τίς μ' ὑπὲρ αἴσαν ἀνήρ ἄϊδος προιάψει.

You have disgraced my goodness, fouled my horses. [*Il.* 23.571] | They remember him although he is dead. [*Il.* 24.428] | This is a guest-gift for the foot you once gave me. [*Od.* 22.290] | For no man will hurl me to the house of Hades before it is fated [*Il.* 6.487].

Speaking in a string of Homeric quotations, Homer steps forward and censors the scribe for debasing his immortal name. The reaction seems harsh, but the fact that even Homer so easily can be stripped of his glory represents a frightening *memento mori* for Tzetzes, who like Homer strives for eternal life through his writing. This anxiety runs through many of Tzetzes' works; in a scholium on the *Exegesis on the Iliad* we learn that one of his students had taken diligent notes in class and was planning to publish it all under his own name. When Tzetzes found out about this he quickly compiled the text from his lecture notes.<sup>56</sup> He also supposedly ran into similar problems with his

54 *Exegesis on the Iliad*, 42.1–5.

55 *Chiliades*, ed. P. A. M. Leone, *Ioannis Tzetzæ Historiæ* (Naples 1968) scholium on 13.620a.

56 Scholium on *Exegesis on the Iliad*, 8.3, p. 423.10–16; cf. Budelmann, 'Classical commentary in Byzantium', 150–1; Conley, 'Byzantine criticism and the uses of literature' 684–5.

commentary on Lycophron, as we learn from a reference in a letter (42 Leone), which is further explained in the *Chiliades*:

Ταύτην δὲ τὴν ἐξηγήσιν ἐσφετερίζετό τις,  
οὐχὶ τὴν βίβλον παρ' αὐτοῦ λέγων ἐξηγηθῆναι. 480  
ἀλλ' ἐρμηνεύων τὰ ῥητὰ σύμπαντα τὰ τῆς βίβλου,  
τὴν βίβλον ἐπικρύπτων δε καὶ τοῖς φοιτῶσι λέγων,  
οἰκείου τέκνα λογισμοῦ ἅπερ ἐφερμηνέουσι,  
ἀπόντα καὶ τὸν Τζέτζην δε καὶ λοιδορῶν καὶ τύπτων,  
ἕως πολλοὶ τῶν φοιτητῶν τῇ κέλλῃ τῇ ἐκείνου 485  
λαθραίως παρεισφρήσαντες ἐφεῦρον τὸ βιβλίον,  
καὶ τὸν ἐξηγησάμενον οὕτως ἐξυβρισμένον,  
ἠλγύνοντο καὶ μάλιστα τοῖς εὐηργετημένοις,  
ἀνθ' οὐπερ ἐκληρώσατο μοῖραν τῶν παλαμναίων,  
ὥστε καὶ καθυβρίζεσθαι τοῖς εὐηργετημένοις. 490

A certain someone expropriated this exegesis, | but did not say that the exegesis was written by Tzetzes. | He explained all phrases in the book, | keeping the book itself hidden, lecturing to his students, | claiming that his explanations were children of his own mind, | while railing at Tzetzes and striking him being absent, | until one day when some of his students in secret | entered the cellar of this man and found the book, | and that their exegete had been treated with such insolence. | And they suffered, especially for the sake of the kindness done to them: | as a reward [their exegete] had been allotted an abominable fate, | treated despitely even by his beneficiaries.<sup>57</sup>

By now we recognize the terms in which Tzetzes formulates his ethical principles of authorship: the idea of kinship is invoked, but this time not between author and reader but author and text. This natural family bond has been broken and an illegitimate father has claimed Tzetzes' words to be the 'children of his own mind'. Moreover, he has not only suppressed Tzetzes' name but even abused him verbally in his absence; thus, rather than repaying his debt to the author by contributing to the immortalization of his name he has done the opposite. We know that the much more successful Eustathios of Thessalonike frequently stole from Tzetzes without ever crediting him,<sup>58</sup> and perhaps these complaints scattered throughout Tzetzes' works should be seen as desperate pleas to be quoted by name from an author operating according to the increasingly competitive economy of Comnenian patronage but in a grammatical and exegetical textual tradition where anonymous recycling was the norm.

57 *Chiliades*, 8.204.479–88.

58 For particularly incriminating examples see Conley, 'Byzantine criticism', 684 and add *Parekbolai on the Odyssey*, 1410.25–7 (Tzetzes, *Letters*, 14, p. 25, 5–6 Leone and *Chiliades*, 7.106–9).

Let us at last examine how these themes relate to Homer's death in the *Exegesis*:

Τοσαύτη δὲ ὁ ἀνὴρ συνέζη πενία, ὡς, τὸ δὴ λεγόμενον, μηδὲ κῦνα δύνασθαι τρέφειν· τοῦτο δὲ δῆλον ἐξ ὧν τε τὰ τούτου ποιήματα σποράδην πρώην ἐλέγετο, ἐν σαπροῖς τισι χάρταις φερόμενα, ἃ καὶ συνήθροισεν ὕστερον ὁ Ἀθηναῖος Πεισίστρατος, ἔκ τε τοῦ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀλιέων ἐν τῷ αἰνίγματι ἀπατηθῆναι αὐτόν, μηδὲ ἀκόλουθον ἔχοντα, ὅφ' οὐδ' ἂν ἐμεμαθήκει, ὅ τι δρώντες ἦσαν οἱ ἀλιεῖς.

The man lived in poverty to such an extent that he – as the saying goes – could not even nurture a dog. This is evident both from that his poems at first were recited in a scattered manner, preserved on some putrid sheets [of parchment or paper] and later collected by Peisistratus the Athenian, and also from that he was deceived by the fishermen with the riddle, since he did not have an attendant from whom he would have learned what the fishermen were doing.<sup>59</sup>

The subject in this section of the biographical account is Homer's poverty, and in order to prove it Tzetzes invokes not only the story of the poet's miserable death but also the ancient tradition about the Peisistratean recension of the Homeric epics in sixth century Athens. A more detailed account follows later on in the treatise, which I would like to quote in full:

τὰ τοῦ Ὀμήρου ποιήματα σποράδην πρώην ἐλέγετο, κατὰ τινὰς μὲν διὰ τὸ συγκεχύσθαι χρόνῳ τὰς βίβλους αὐτοῦ, κατ' ἐμὲ δὲ διὰ τὸ μηδὲ ὅλως εἶναι πρώην αὐτὰ συγγραμμένα βιβλίοις, ἀλλὰ διὰ πενίαν τοῦ ποιητοῦ ἐν χάρταις ἀπλῶς φέρεσθαι. Πεισίστρατος δὲ ὁ φιλολογώτατος, ἐν χρόνοις τοῦ Σόλωνος τυραννήσας ἐν ταῖς Ἀθήναις, κήρυγμα ἐξεκέρυξε τὸν ἔχοντα ἔπη Ὀμήρου ἀποκομίζειν αὐτὰ πρὸς αὐτόν καὶ ἐκάστου ἔπους χρυσοῦν ἀντιφορτίζεσθαι νόμισμα. οὕτω δὲ συναγείρας αὐτά, ἑβδομήκοντα καὶ δύο γραμματικοῖς ἐνὶ ἐκάστῳ ἐπέδωκε κατ' ἰδίαν ἀναθεωρηκέναί καὶ συνθεῖναι αὐτά· ἐκεῖνος δὲ τὴν ἐνὸς ἐκάστου αὐτῶν σύνθεσιν ἀπεγράφετο. Ὑστερον δὲ ὁμοῦ πάντας συναγαγὼν παρακλήσεσι μεγάλαις τε δωρεαῖς ἐκείνους δεξιωσάμενος, ὑπέδειξε τὴν ἀπογραφὴν τῆς ἐνὸς ἐκάστου συνθήκης καὶ ἠξίωσεν αὐτοὺς φιλαλήθως καὶ ἀφιλέχθως εἰπεῖν ὅτου ἄρα εἶη κρείττων ἢ σύνθεσις, καὶ πάντες τὴν Ἀριστάρχου καὶ Ζηνοδότου ὑπερέκριναν· ἐκ δευτέρου δὲ πάλιν, τὴν Ἀριστάρχειον, κατ' ἣν νῦν τὸ παρὸν τοῦ Ὀμήρου βιβλίον συντέθειται. Ὡς γοῦν ἐκ διαφόρων οὕτω συμφορηθέντων εἰς ἓν τεύχος ἐγράφησαν, ῥαμφῶδαι καλοῦνται· ῥαμφῶδαι γὰρ κυρίως τὰ νῦν Ὀμηρόκεντρα λέγονται, ὡς ἐκλεγέντα ἢ ἀπὸ διαφόρων βιβλίων εἴτε ἀπὸ διαφόρων τόπων βιβλίου ἐνὸς καὶ ἰδίαν ἀπαρτίσαντα ἔννοιαν.

The poems of Homer were at first recited in a scattered manner; some say because his books were thrown in disorder with time, but I hold that it was because they were not even at first written down in books in their entirety by the poet but only on sheets [of parchment or paper] because of the poverty of the poet. But

<sup>59</sup> *Exegesis on the Iliad*, 56.11–17.

Peisistratus, a great lover of literature, proclaimed a proclamation in the time of Solon's tyranny in Athens, saying that he who had verses of Homer should bring them to him and that he would give in exchange a golden coin for each verse. Having thus collected them he gave it 72 grammarians for each and everyone to examine and assemble after his own judgment. He then had a copy made of each and everyone's composition. When he later brought them all together in one place, thanking them with great words of exhortation and gifts, he displayed the copy of each and every grammarian's combination and asked them to say honestly and without animosity what composition was the best. And all held the compositions of Aristarchus and of Zenodotus to be the best, and out of the two they preferred that of Aristarchus, according to which our book of Homer today is composed. And so with various pieces gathered together in this way they stitched them together in one scroll, and for this reason they are called *rhapsôidiai*. For in its proper sense *rhapsôidiai* denotes what we today call Homerokentra, since gathered together from different books or from different places in one single book they produce a sense of their own.<sup>60</sup>

There are many things to note here. First of all it is striking that Tzetzes and his source for this story (*Scholia on Dionysius Thrax*, p. 29.16–30.24 Hilgard) accept that the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are essentially centos produced by grammarians approximating a lost original. The narrative seems to legitimize or at least be compatible with a literary culture in which these texts were constantly exploited, reinterpreted and rewritten in all sorts of ways. It blurs any sharp distinction between an original voice of Homer and the reshuffled verses through which he speaks in Prodromos' *Sale of poetical and political lives*, as we have seen, or scolds the scribe in Tzetzes' *Chiliades*. It fits a textual landscape of allegories, historical rephrasings (such as Tzetzes' *Little Big Iliad*) and an infinite number of Troy stories. Admittedly, Tzetzes would later in life regret his mistake in following the source and placing the Alexandrian grammarians in sixth century Athens, but he was not alone in doing so: Eustathios gives the same account in his *Parekbolai on the Iliad*,<sup>61</sup> and this philological and ecclesiastical superstar may be one of the 'aether-walkers' that Tzetzes at one instance Aristophanically ridicules for making the same mistake as he did in his youth.<sup>62</sup>

We should also pay attention to the notion of the Homeric epics as an inherently dismembered text and the paramount importance given to the grammarians in its early history. It reinforces the grammarian Tzetzes' position as a devoted and legitimate son of Homer, and the assertion that the poems 'used to be recited scatteredly' (σποράδην πρώην ἐλέγετο) even correspond to the way in which he envisions his hermeneutic contribution to Homeric scholarship. In the preface to the *Exegesis* Tzetzes complains that all of his predecessors 'have produced exegeses on these topics in a scattered and

60 *Exegesis on the Iliad*, 68.8–69.8.

61 Eustathios, *Parekbolai on the Iliad*, 5.32–36 and 6.42.

62 Cf. Tzetzes, *Prolegomena on comedy*, 2.38–9: ὡς καὶ ἕτεροὶ τινες κομψοὶ καὶ αἰθεροβάμονες.

sprinkled form, not by summarizing and distinguishing';<sup>63</sup> Tzetzes, however, will keep the individual parts and the whole in order.

More important for our purposes is the main aspect in which Tzetzes explicitly disagrees with his source. In the *Scholia on Dionysius Thrax* the reasons given why the Homeric epics were thrown into disorder are fires, floods and earthquakes (p. 29.17–18), but Tzetzes modifies this explanation and turns the story into evidence for the poet's poverty. This puts Homer in a position very close to that of Tzetzes' self-representation; the lack of a proper library and sufficient funds for writing material is by far the most common motif in his rhetoric of poverty. In the *Exegesis* (21–3) he tells us that the personal disaster in Berroia forced him to sell off all his books and therefore he apologizes for debasing the exact phrasing when delivering quotations from memory. In the *Allegories of the Iliad* (15.87) he exclaims 'my head is my library'. In the *Chiliades* he gives himself the epithet ἀβιβλής (8.173) and often complains about his lack of writing material (10. 452–53) and books (12.4). There is always a hint of his desperate situation; the students who frequent his classroom and the patrons who commission his poems better keep on supporting him financially or else his intellectual activities may come to a standstill. But when emplotting the life of Homer, Tzetzes finds no patrons, no devoted students and not even a servant to guide the blind bard in his final days. We have seen that in Prodromos' dialogue the gods and heroes eulogized in the epics are made a symbol for the beneficiaries of poetry, but the Narcissus we are dealing with here finds his looking glass in the early history of the Homeric text. It would have been lost forever were it not for the financial intervention of Peisistratus and the hard and competitive work of the 72 grammarians. Peisistratus is thus described as the ideal patron, as a Maecenas, as it were: He rewarded all who brought verses of Homer to him and generously compensated the grammarians for their efforts. And above all, he kept Homer's immortal name from being erased. In case this characterization of the passage seems unconvincing I wish to direct your attention to the epithet given to Peisistratus, φιλολογώτατος, here translated (rather unsatisfactorily) 'a great lover of literature'. This unusual title in the feminine case, φιλολογωτάτη, is used five times by Prodromos in his grammar dedicated to the *sebastokratorissa* Eirene (80.3; 91.2; 92.7; 143.27; 146.23) and in a poem to her (*Historical Poems*, 46). It is also found in Manasses' *Chronicle* (3) and in Tzetzes' *Theogony* (2).<sup>64</sup> It almost seems to have been reserved for her: Tzetzes does not, for instance, use it for his patron empress Eirene (Bertha of Sulzbach) in his *Allegories of the Iliad*. However, a much clearer allusion to Peisistratus occurs at the beginning of book 16 of this poem where Tzetzes had to change patron in 1147 and now addresses Konstantinos Kotertzes:<sup>65</sup>

63 *Exegesis on the Iliad*, 5.6–7: παρασποράδην δὲ καὶ περιπετάδην περὶ τούτων, ἀλλ' οὐ καταμήδην καὶ συλλήβδην ἐξηγήσαντο.

64 On this patron see now A. Rhoby, 'Verschiedene Bemerkungen zur Sebastokratorissa Eirene und zu Autoren in ihrem Umfeld', *Nea Rhome* 6 (2009) 305–36.

65 See A. Rhoby, 'Ioannes Tzetzes als Auftragsdichter', *Graeco-Latina Brunensia* 15 (2010) 155–70: 163–4.

Μέχρι τῆς ΟΥ τὸ σύνταγμα ἐγράφη τῇ Ἀνάσσει·  
ἐντεῦθεν ἦν δὲ κίνδυνος λοιπὸν παρεαθῆναι  
ἐν δυστροπία περισσῇ τῶν χρηματοδοτούντων.  
Ὁ δ' εὐγενῆς Πεισίστρατος Κοτέρτζης Κωνσταντῖνος  
χρήμασι σοφῶς ἐπέσπευσεν εἰς τέλος προαχθῆναι  
ὄθεν ἐντεῦθεν ἅπανσα τούτῳ προκείσθω χάρις.

Until rhapsody *omicron* this work was written for the empress | from that point there was a danger that the rest should remain uncompleted | due to the excessive peevishness of the financiers. | But noble Peisistratus Kotertzes Konstantinos | through his money hurried on its completion, and so from this point may all thanks be to this man.<sup>66</sup>

The message is clear: I am Homer, my work a new *Iliad*, but it would be lost, were it not for my patron, a new Peisistratus.<sup>67</sup>

66 *Allegories on the Iliad*, 16.1–6.

67 I wish to express my gratitude to Ingela Nilsson for valuable comments at various stages of this paper and to Przemysław Marciniak for helpful discussions about Prodromos' *Sale of poetical and political lives*. I would also like to thank the anonymous referee for very helpful comments.