The term “fictional biography” refers to the narration of the life of a historical (or presumed as historical) personage, along with the use of many fictitious elements. This term has been introduced by N. Holzberg in his “The Ancient Novel. An Introduction”, and according to the author, it defines primarily the following four works: the *Vita of Cyrus (Cyropaedia)* by Xenophon, the *Life of Aesop* by an anonymous author, the *Life of Alexander the Great* by Pseudo-Callisthenes, and finally, the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* by Philostratus (Holzberg 1995, 14–19). In the first part of the present study a comparative reading of the *Life of Aesop* and the *Life of Alexander the Great* will explore and justify why these texts are representative literary expressions of the genre of “fictional biography”.¹ I will then compare and contrast these fictional biographies with narratives traditionally listed by literary critics under the so-called category of “romances” or erotic novels.² This category comprises a group of narratives, the earliest of which appeared towards the end of the Hellenistic era, and which revolve around the adventures of a couple of young star-crossed lovers, whose happiness is seriously tested as they suffer separation, undertake subsequent travels, are subjected to

¹ I would like to thank my colleagues Ioannis Konstantakos and Sophia Papaioannou for their helpful comments and suggestions on earlier drafts of this paper, and Lily Niarchos for her assistance with the English version of the text.

² I will refrain from explaining in detail why I believe that the *Life of Aesop* and the *Life of Alexander the Great* should be grouped together, as this topic is amply discussed by C. Jouanno in this volume. Further, I should note that the treatment of all five novels as variant pieces of a single narrative model is no doubt generalizing, yet this reduction is often necessary when an argument with a different scope is developed within the limited space of an article.
violence, are captured by thieves and pirates, and, in short, are faced with a long series of trials, until they finally reunite to live happily ever after.

In recent years critics of ancient biography and the novel have repeatedly debated whether and to what extent the Life of Aesop and the Life of Alexander the Great belong to the “fringe” of the ancient Greek novel.3 Aspiring to address some aspects of this complex problem and by examining the two Lives mentioned above, I propose to look closely at the similarities and differences between the two literary genres (i.e. fictional biography and romance). The conclusions of my study will hopefully entail a more accurate description of the nature of their literary relationship. The ultimate goal of this comparative approach is to define the boundaries that mark off a literary biography (as exemplified in the Lives of Aesop and Alexander the Great) from the novel, and, accordingly, to justify the use of the particular term “novelistic biographies” for these texts.

In order to outline as fully as possible the distinct literary character of these two Lives, I shall attempt a close comparative analysis of their themes against the themes of the erotic novels. I shall focus first on the distinct way in which each of these genres fashions its plotline, and thus differentiates the novelistic biographers from the authors of the erotic novels. Subsequently, I shall move on to particular aspects of narrative technique (e.g. the use of the narrator, the different perception of time and space, the employment of literary motifs to serve different literary goals, the different way in which each genre perceives the ideal novelistic closure) and stylistic organization (the importance attached to the crafting of a distinct linguistic phenotype). The character of the readership that fostered the Lives, as compared with the typical novels, will come next under scrutiny, as I postulate that the former enjoyed popularity among a wider circle of readers (and probably also listeners). I have reserved for last a brief discussion on the employment of the characterizations “open” vs. “closed” text, as these are applied to the Lives vs. the erotic novels.

With respect to the plot, both Lives begin with a nucleus of history or of traditional legend4 and embellish the life of their respective hero

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4 While Alexander’s legend certainly develops around a historical nucleus, the same is hardly the case for the Life of Aesop. It is an open question whether Aesop was truly a historical figure, and not some legendary character. None of the information about